



Mediterranean Driftnets: A History of (In)Action

“Driftnet”: [noun] any gill net held on the sea surface or at a certain distance below it by floating devices, drifting with the current, either independently or with the boat to which it may be attached. It may be equipped with devices aiming to stabilise the net or to limit its drift.

— **European Union Council Regulation (EC) No 809/2007**

Background

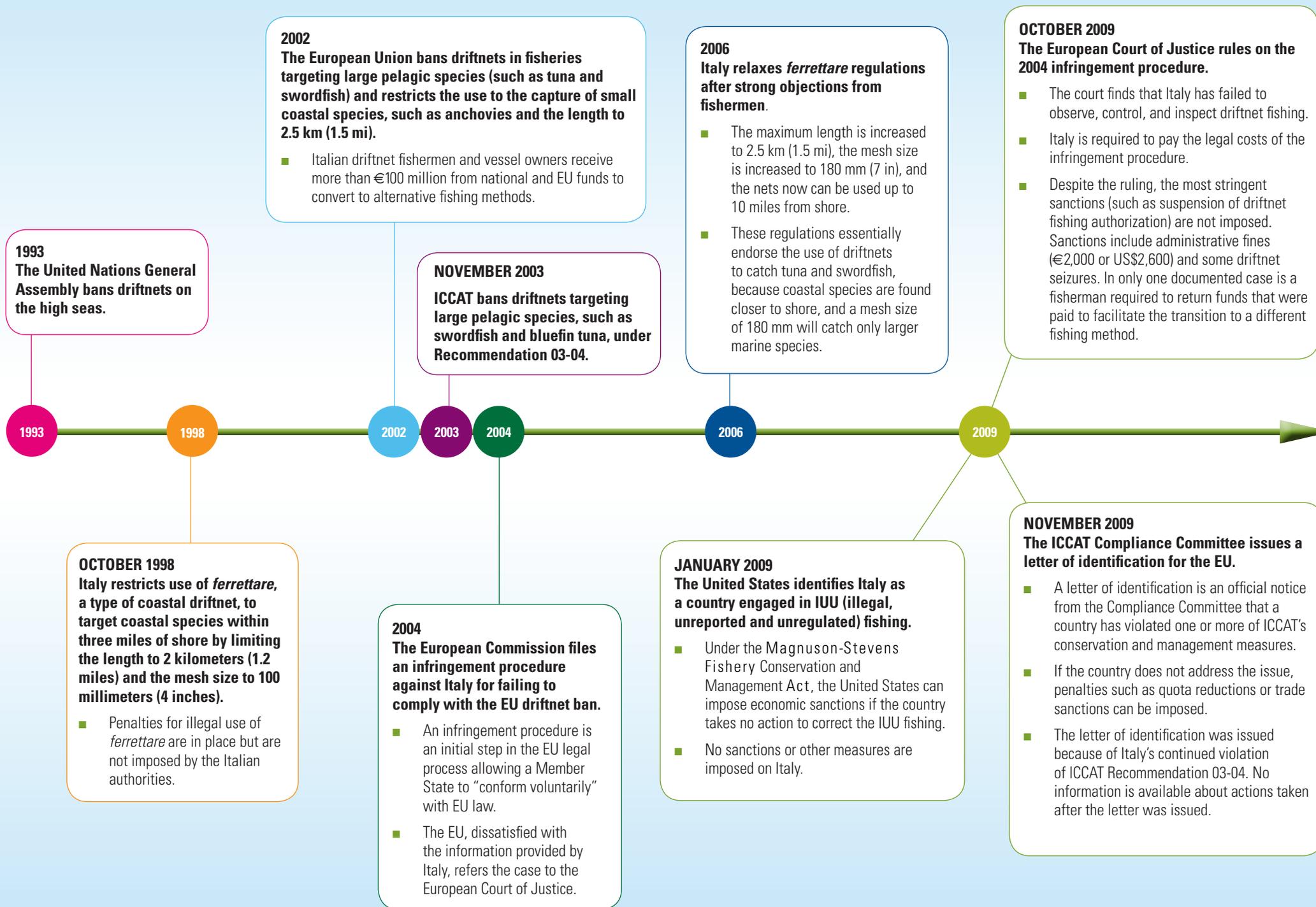
Driftnets have been banned within national waters by many countries and on the high seas by international bodies, including the United Nations, in large part because of the sheer waste associated with this fishing method. In addition to the species they target, driftnets kill large numbers of animals as bycatch—marine species not intended for capture—including whales, sea turtles, dolphins, and sharks.

However, an active—and often illegal—driftnet fleet continues to operate from Italy. Vessels with driftnets are targeting Atlantic bluefin tuna and swordfish, even though the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), the body responsible for management of these vulnerable species, has banned the use of driftnets to capture them. The European Union is a member of ICCAT, so Italy is required to comply with all ICCAT decisions. Recent investigations in Italy have revealed that authorities are taking no action to enforce the driftnet ban. In July 2011, a widespread illegal trafficking ring was uncovered, along with evidence that bluefin catch documents were regularly being falsified or withheld, allowing tuna caught by driftnets to enter the market illegally.

Action Needed

The Pew Environment Group urges the EU and ICCAT to take firm action to address Italy’s continuous flouting of the driftnet ban. As an immediate first step, any Italian operators known to have engaged in prohibited driftnet activities should be placed on ICCAT’s vessel blacklist. This would prohibit them from landing bluefin tuna or swordfish and would discourage importers and other sectors from purchasing fish from these vessels. ICCAT countries also should implement an electronic catch documentation system to address the fraud, misinformation, and delays associated with the current paper-based tracking system.

A History of (In)Action



2011

JANUARY 2011

The U.S. again names Italy as one of six countries engaged in IUU fishing.

- Specific violations include Italy's failure to observe the 2003 ICCAT driftnet ban.
- Sanctions or other measures have not been imposed.

MAY-JULY 2011

EU inspectors visit the Italian island of Ponza and nine ports in the Campania and Calabria regions of Italy.

- The inspections are intended to determine whether a second referral to the European Court of Justice is necessary, given Italy's failure to effectively enforce the EU legislation on driftnets.
- In all locations inspected, driftnets are observed on fishing vessels, most appearing longer than the 2.5 km permitted length.
- In Ponza, local authorities tell the inspectors that they have not conducted any onboard investigations since the start of the driftnet season, even though the vessels—with illegal driftnets in plain sight—are moored just 100 meters (328 feet) from the Italian Coast Guard's offices.

SEPT. 21, 2011

Under pressure from the EU, Italy revises its *ferrettare* regulations.

- Use is limited to three miles from shore and the mesh size to 100 mm (4 in), but the permitted length of 2.5 km is unchanged.
- This is the latest attempt by the Italian ministry to take minimal steps to address identified problems and avoid heavy EU sanctions.

APRIL 2011

EU inspectors are sent unannounced to three Italian ports in Sicily: Lipari, Porticello, and Cefalu.

- Inspectors find 35 vessels with driftnets or gear typical of driftnet fishing. They also find nets and mesh sizes larger than permitted by Italian law.
- The inspectors conclude that fishermen are using illegal driftnets with "full tolerance of the Italian authorities."

JULY 2011

The Italian Coast Guard in Sardinia reveals a widespread, well-organized operation of falsifying and avoiding bluefin catch documents (BCDs).

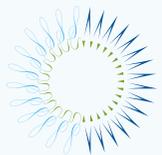
- The BCD is meant to accompany legally caught bluefin tuna to market.
- Violations worth €3.6 million (US\$5 million) are identified, and 70 wholesale and retail operators are under investigation.
- Authorities and conservation groups believe that much of the tuna uncovered during this investigation was caught by driftnets.

SEPT. 29, 2011

The EU announces a second infringement procedure against Italy.

- Italy has two months to take meaningful action indicating to the EU that it is addressing the driftnet problem.
- If the EU is not satisfied after reviewing Italy's actions over the next months, the country could be fined up to €120 million (US\$160 million).

COVER PHOTO: CARLOS SUÁREZ/OCEANA, BACKGROUND PHOTO: JUAN CUETOS/OCEANA



THE
PEW
ENVIRONMENT GROUP

For more information, please contact:

Lee Crockett | Director of Federal Fisheries Policy | Pew Environment Group | 202-552-2065 | lcrockett@pewtrusts.org

For additional resources, visit us at www.PewEnvironment.org/Tuna.

Philadelphia, Pa. 19103
Tel. +1 215-575-2000

Washington, D.C. 20004
Tel. +1 202-552-2000

1050 Brussels, Belgium
Tel. +32 (0) 2 274 1620