



U.S. Coast Guard

Benefits of Becoming a Party to the Port State Measures Agreement

Why countries should join their neighbours in the global fight against illegal fishing

Overview

Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing contributes to overexploitation of fisheries, harms the recovery of fish populations, and causes large financial losses, especially for coastal developing countries with economies heavily reliant on fishing.¹ Illicit fishing operations also are often linked to other crimes, such as tax evasion, money laundering, smuggling,² and violation of labour standards,³ each of which takes an additional toll.

The Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA)—formally known as the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) 2009 Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter, and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing⁴—is a cost-effective tool to combat IUU fishing. Port inspections are less expensive and safer than monitoring, pursuing, and inspecting vessels at sea. At the same time, inspections reduce the incentives for this illicit fishing because they make it more difficult to sell illegally caught fish. As more nations agree to abide by the treaty and harmonise their port State measures, IUU fishing will no longer be a low-risk, high-reward business but a high-risk, low-reward enterprise. This is the FAO's ultimate goal for the PSMA.

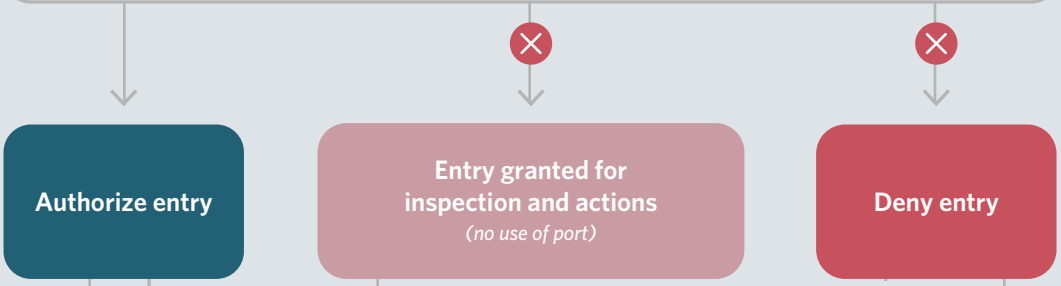
Becoming a party to this international agreement and implementing effective port State measures involves costs, but there are numerous direct and indirect economic benefits as well. At the core of the PSMA is the principle of cooperation; the benefits to individual nations will increase as more States join. Nations have had to make policy changes to implement PSMA requirements, but a review of what has been done so far by States that have ratified the agreement shows clear advantages as well. As the number of ratifications increases regionally and among neighbouring States, the effectiveness and impact of the PSMA will grow.

Economic benefits of the PSMA

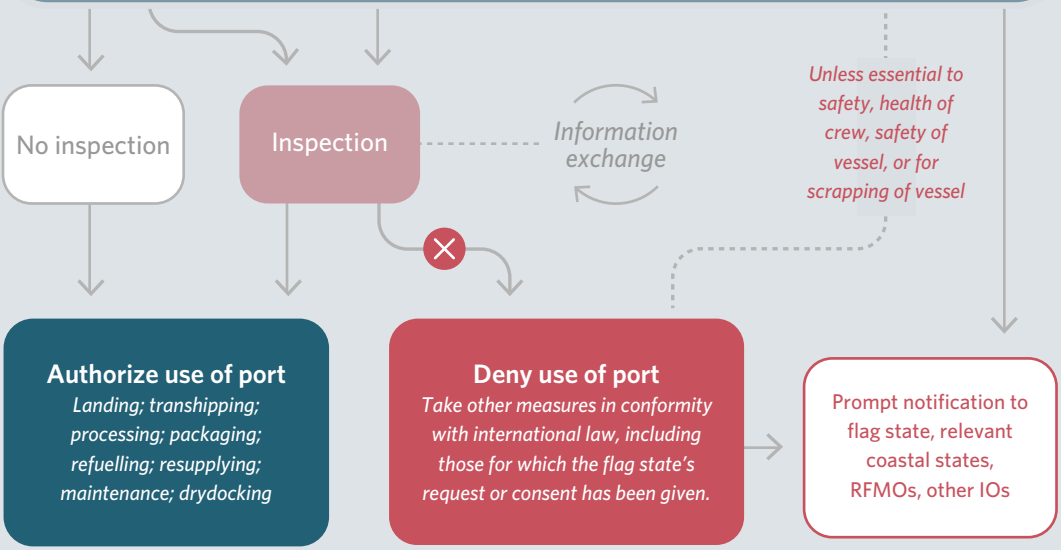
- **Market access.** By ratifying the PSMA, port States demonstrate to the international community that they take their responsibilities seriously. This single action leads to one of the most important economic incentives to join. When they implement the steps required by the PSMA to keep illegally caught fish out of their ports, these States ensure continued access to important markets. Because an increasing number of nations that purchase seafood—and their retailers—are committed to stopping IUU fishing, port States that ratify the agreement have an advantage over those that do not. These market States will prefer to use ports in nations that are parties to the PSMA. That will likely boost demand and generate increased income through port operations, expenditures in port, and development of associated industries.
- **Financial support for developing States to implement the PSMA.** Article 21 of the PSMA⁵ says that developing countries can get support for building the capacity needed to comply with the treaty. Under the agreement, parties to the PSMA will establish an ad hoc working group to set up a fund and mobilise support for capacity development. This financial assistance from parties to the PSMA can be used to set up the system of port State measures; integrate it with national and regional monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS) systems; establish inspection procedures; and provide training for port officials and other authorities.
- **Improved governance of the fisheries sector and more effective inter-agency cooperation.** Implementation of the PSMA will require that government agencies within countries that have ratified the agreement coordinate procedures with one another, in some cases for the first time. The treaty provides a framework for inter-agency efforts, which will help save time and money. It also will foster cooperative efforts among States. Together, these steps should bring additional benefits, such as greater compliance with labour, immigration, health, and sanitary laws. Inter-agency cooperation also can boost transparency, which limits opportunities for corruption.
- **Integrating port State measures improves the national MCS.** Using information gathered systematically in port inspections can reduce the overall costs of the port nation's risk assessment and MCS system. Better integration should reduce the time, effort, and resources spent on monitoring, pursuing, and inspecting vessels at sea. Port inspections are safer and less expensive than conventional air and surface compliance enforcement tools.
- **Regional collaboration.** With its focus on regions and nations working together, the PSMA sets up a framework for information-sharing and cooperation. Parties to the treaty are obligated to strengthen the transparency of their enforcement efforts, by collecting and sharing information across jurisdictions, steps that help all working to close markets to illicitly caught fish. When an entire region implements the PSMA, landing IUU seafood becomes less economical—if not impossible—for vessels fishing illegally. Strengthening regional cooperation also improves the ability of coastal States to effectively enforce access agreements, which allow third-party countries to buy fishing rights from States with underutilized fisheries resources in their exclusive economic zones (EEZs).⁶ This is especially important for highly migratory species and overfished stocks.
- **Sustainable management of fisheries resources.** Management of fisheries resources, especially migratory species, can be improved with better information about the history and activities of IUU fishing vessels, details about what is caught and landed more generally, and greater opportunities to cross-check data with other ports. Information gathered from a fully integrated MCS system will help produce more robust stock assessments and strengthen overall monitoring of both the national waters and adjacent, internationally managed waters.
- **Improved desirability for investment in the fisheries sector.** Building a reputation as a lawful and transparent port State can boost foreign investment by States licensed to fish in a coastal nation's EEZ. This then can help develop the country's domestic fleet, which would boost port operations, such as supplies, repairs, processing, and additional services.

Prior to entry

Foreign vessel requests entry to designated port
Review of information provided by vessel. Other information may be sought, e.g. from RFMO.
▪ Vessel identification ▪ Purpose of visit ▪ Fishing authorizations
▪ Transshipment information ▪ Catch on board



Designated port



✘ Illegal fishing detected

Conclusion

This list highlights the benefits that countries can expect when they join their neighbours to become parties to the PSMA. States that have not already done so should ratify the treaty as soon as feasible to help close their ports to illegal fishing operators. As the number of parties grows, so too will the impact of this important agreement.

Endnotes

- 1 Reg Watson and Daniel Pauly, "Systematic Distortions in World Fisheries Catch Trends," letter, *Nature* 414 (2001): 534-36, <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v414/n6863/full/414534a.html>; Daniel Pauly et al., "The Future for Fisheries," *Science* 302, no. 5649 (2003): 1359-61, <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/302/5649/1359.full>; David J. Agnew et al., "Estimating the Worldwide Extent of Illegal Fishing," *PLOS ONE* 4, no. 2 (2009): e4570, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0004570>; and Boris Worm et al., "Rebuilding Global Fisheries," *Science* 325, no. 5940 (2009): 578-85, <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/325/5940/578.full>.
- 2 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Transnational Organized Crime in the Fishing Industry* (2011), http://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/Issue_Paper_-_TOC_in_the_Fishing_Industry.pdf.
- 3 U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report* (2015), <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2015/index.htm>.
- 4 United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, *Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter, and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing* (2009), <http://www.fao.org/fishery/psm/agreement/en>.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Marcos A. Orellana, *Towards Sustainable Fisheries Access Agreements: Issues and Options at the World Trade Organization*, United Nations Environment Programme (2008), <http://www.unep.ch/etb/publications/FS%20Access%20Agreements/Inside%20FS%20Access%20Agreements.pdf>.

For further information, please visit:

pewtrusts.org/endillegalfishing

Contact: Kimberly Vosburgh, communications officer

Email: kvosburgh@pewtrusts.org

Project website: pewtrusts.org/endillegalfishing

The Pew Charitable Trusts is driven by the power of knowledge to solve today's most challenging problems. Pew applies a rigorous, analytical approach to improve public policy, inform the public, and invigorate civic life.