



INPUTS FOR CONCEPT PANEL ON FISHERIES CRIMES AND MARINE POLLUTION

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1. INTRODUCTION

When it comes to oceans and seas, geography has its say: 70% of planet Earth's surface is covered by oceans and 90% of the world's trade is carried out by sea through strategic routes and straits. Oceans are vital for our planet, regulating climate, supporting economies, ensuring food security, and preserving marine biodiversity, representing an essential nexus for sustaining life on Earth. However, these spaces are facing unprecedented challenges, such as climate change, marine pollution, and overfishing.

As such, the international community must come together to accelerate action and mobilize resources towards the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean. In line with Sustainable Development Goal 14 and Action 10 of the Pact for the Future, a concerted global effort is needed to restore, protect, conserve, and sustainably use the environment. Achieving ocean conservation and sustainability is a long-term quest that requires a strong adaptation of existing legal frameworks, a reinforcement of cross-border collaboration, and innovative solutions to the complexity of marine protection and preservation.

Against this backdrop, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) hereby submits this position paper as a contribution to the ten dedicated Concept Papers, as per OP24 of UNGA resolution 78/128.

2. INTERPOL'S MANDATE

As the world's largest police organisation, home to 196 member countries, INTERPOL aims at facilitating cross-border law enforcement cooperation across all ordinary law crimes, to ensure a safer world. As an impartial, neutral Organisation, INTERPOL's work falls within the limits of existing laws in the country and comply with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As the world evolves, INTERPOL aims at being one step ahead of crimes: for 100 years, we have evolved our tools and services to become the unique global mechanism for the exchange of information and requests for international police cooperation. Its secure communication system, I-24/7, facilitates real time information exchange, including through its notices and diffusions system. Within I-24/7, INTERPOL hosts 19 police databases with more than 141 million records related to wanted people, weapons, stolen properties, forensics evidence, etc., with police searches exceeding 7.4 billion globally. Further, INTERPOL provides Member States with technical assistance in the form of investigative and analytical support, field operations, and capacity building and training.

Beyond support to law enforcement, INTERPOL plays a leading role within the multilateral system. The complementary and mutually reinforcing partnership between INTERPOL and the UN system is a natural alliance, advancing our common membership's objectives to strengthen international security and development, directly contributing to Agenda 2030.

In this regard, in 2018, INTERPOL officially launched the Global Policing Goals (GPGs), aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to coordinate and rally the international law enforcement community to contribute to the achievement of Agenda 2030.

- **GPG 1: Counterterrorism:** INTERPOL continues to play a crucial role in the global fight against terrorism. It does this by sharing intelligence, coordinating operations, and providing training to member countries to help them counter terrorist threats.
- **GPG 2: Border Security:** INTERPOL works to support member countries in managing their borders effectively, providing tools and training to help identify and disrupt human trafficking and migrant smuggling networks.
- **GPG 3: Vulnerable Communities:** INTERPOL continues to enhance the law enforcement response to protecting vulnerable communities, by pursuing perpetrators, and supporting the rights, needs, safety and wellbeing of victims and survivors of crime.
- **GPG 4: Cybercrime:** With the rapid increase in cybercrime, INTERPOL has been working to enhance its capabilities in this area. This includes providing training and support to member countries to combat cyber threats, as well as coordinating international operations to disrupt and dismantle cybercrime networks.
- **GPG 5: Corruption and Financial Crime:** By strengthening the capacities of law enforcement globally to investigate and respond to financial crime, INTERPOL facilitates multi-agency and multi-disciplinary cooperation among relevant agencies, whether domestic or international.
- **GPG 6: Organized Crime:** INTERPOL focuses on combating organized and emerging crime, including the criminal networks involved in drug trafficking, human trafficking, and firearms trafficking.

- **GPG 7: Environmental Security:** INTERPOL strengthens environmental security and supports the promotion of sustainable livelihoods by countering crimes that affect the environment and climate.

3. INTERPOL ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY PROGRAMME (ENS)

In 2010, the 79th INTERPOL General Assembly adopted a resolution acknowledging the need for a strong international environmental enforcement response. This resolution identified a criminal convergence around environment, biodiversity and natural resources sectors maintained by organized crime. The Resolution AG-2010-RES-03 entitled “Sustainable Environmental Crime Programme”, set the stage for the establishment of INTERPOL’s Environmental Security Programme (ENS) with the aim of building law enforcement synergies, connecting various governmental authorities and reinforcing coordinated transboundary actions.

In 2014, INTERPOL’s 83rd General Assembly passed a resolution that highlighted the necessity for governments to create a national coordination model known as the National Environmental Security Task Force (NEST), as well as a comparable regional platform. INTERPOL was tasked with coordinating and collaborating with international partners, like-minded officials, organizations, and member countries to make a collective impact.

INTERPOL ENS is unique as it facilitates international law enforcement cooperation, and capacity building of professional investigative responses through mentorship and support. It is adapted to the unique needs of each member country, through the strategic insight of the INTERPOL Environmental Compliance and Enforcement Committee (ECEC). In addition, it provides operational and analytical support to countries via specialised working groups, on areas such as fisheries and pollution.

a. Addressing Marine Pollution

INTERPOL ENS defines “marine pollution” as the illegal discharge or emission of contaminants directly at sea or indirectly by leaking from land-based contamination, including land, soil, and air pollution. INTERPOL’s response to marine pollution can be divided into the 3 main offences: pollution offences at sea, land and river-based pollution offences, and waste trafficking through ports.

1- Illegal discharge or disposal of waste on land

Instances of improper waste discharge or disposal often involve businesses not managing or disposing of their waste responsibly. INTERPOL has reported various crimes, including illegal activities at mining sites, factories, tourism businesses, and waste management facilities. These facilities illegally release waste into waterways or dump it in unauthorized landfills. A growing crime trend, especially in Southeast Asia, is the illegal trafficking and mismanagement of plastic waste which leads to waste fires. These actions cause extensive harm to local ecosystems and biodiversity, as pollutants persist for decades.

Law enforcement aim to identify sites of illegal waste management, halt the pollution, and repair the damage. An example is INTERPOL’s taskforce deployment to assist Philippine authorities in investigating illegal sewage discharge by a company involved in intensive agriculture, directly impacting local livelihoods and marine resources. Another recent example includes Operation *30DaS 3.0* with its target 2 on “land-based and river pollution impacting the marine environment”, which resulted in 19,388 inspections and 1,002 offences concerning land-based and river pollution, reported by 21 participating countries.

2- Illegal discharge or disposal of waste and oil at sea

Law enforcement aim to identify vessels, offshore installations, and coastal facilities involved in oil spills, illegal discharges, emissions violations, and shipbreaking, which harm marine ecosystems and fisheries. Maritime Police or Coast Guards typically lead these efforts with support from environmental and transport authorities who inspect ports and docked vessels. Since 2018, INTERPOL has coordinated the “30 Days at Sea” operations, with the latest being *30DaS 3.0* with 67 participating countries. This kind of operation has resulted in over 15,000 inspections globally in 2018 and more than 17,000 in 2019, detecting nearly 5,000 offenses. Eleven Asia Pacific countries reported over 822 pollution-related offenses during the 2018 and 2019 operations. Operation *30DaS* is the largest series of operations orchestrated by Law Enforcement Agencies to fight against marine pollution crime committed on land, in in-land waters and at sea.

3- Illegal trafficking in waste and chemicals

INTERPOL has highlighted several major waste and pollutant streams of concern, based on trade value or volume, health impacts, or organized crime involvement. These include plastic waste, electronic waste, mercury, end-of-life vehicles and tires, pesticides, and fertilizers. Several countries have become inundated with illicit waste shipments and lack the facilities and enforcement capacity to manage them. In response, in October 2019, INTERPOL initiated a targeted operation, using criminal intelligence to develop an INTERPOL Strategic Threat

Assessment. This assessment helped these countries create updated enforcement strategies to address plastic waste.

b. Addressing Fisheries Crimes

“Fisheries crime” is an umbrella term used by INTERPOL ENS to describe crime across the fisheries sector, from harvest to processing, through the supply chain, including food fraud at consumer levels. The terminology also refers to well established criminal offences facilitating the activity, such as money laundering, document fraud, corruption, human trafficking, or modern slavery in the fisheries sector.

INTERPOL is supporting small scale fishers and is encouraging sustainable fisheries management through a law enforcement approach. ENS supports the fight against Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing by providing intelligence and investigative support to local authorities, and by facilitating international cooperation to track and prosecute IUU fishing vessels.

Combating IUU fishing is a critical element of protecting small-scale fishers. Long distant-water fleets often operate illegally, depleting fish stocks and marginalizing local fishers. Strengthening law enforcement mechanisms by improving surveillance systems, and enhancing international cooperation are key to reducing IUU fishing and safeguarding the marine resources that small-scale fishers depend on.

Ultimately, the sustainable management of fisheries must consider both environmental conservation and the socioeconomic needs of small-scale fishers to ensure the long-term viability of fisheries and the coastal communities that rely on them. This requires not only stronger regulatory frameworks but also targeted investments in technology, capacity-building, and collaborative governance.

In the scope of Fisheries crimes, INTERPOL’s Project ALIOS offered investigative and analytical support to enhance cooperation between Latin American countries, promoting regional cooperation and the exchange of information. INTERPOL’s Project LATAM supports law enforcement to identify, investigate and prosecute transnational organized crime groups involved in fisheries crimes, through what is called a “week of action”, with the aim of enhancing policing capabilities and promoting inter-agency. The Fisheries Team recently offered online workshops on Krill and Toothfish trade, paving the way for future interventions related to the protection of Krill and Toothfish in the Arctic Region.

4. CHALLENGES FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

As the environmental landscape is witnessing ongoing shifts, many challenges remain:

Challenges related to IUU-Fishing:

1. **Jurisdictional frameworks:** Fisheries crimes often occur in international waters, making it difficult to enforce laws and prosecute offenders. The lack of clear jurisdiction can lead to legal loopholes that criminals exploit. To date, there is no 'umbrella' institution with jurisdiction or responsibility (Ban et al., 2014) for the high seas living resources, resulting in the proposals for a global agreement. In that scope, it is highly important to refer to the Agreement on Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction, known as the BBNJ Agreement, which is a landmark international treaty.
2. **Transnational Nature:** These crimes are often carried out by organized criminal networks that operate across multiple countries, complicating efforts to track and dismantle them.
3. **Limited Resources:** Many countries lack the resources and technologies needed to effectively monitor and enforce fisheries laws, leading to underreporting and insufficient action against illegal activities.
4. **Corruption:** Corruption within the fishing industry and among enforcement agencies can undermine efforts to combat fisheries crimes, allowing illegal activities to continue unchecked.
5. **Economic Pressures:** High demand for fish and seafood can drive overfishing and illegal practices, as individuals and companies seek to maximize profits.

Challenges Related to Marine Pollution

- a. **Plastic Pollution:** Plastic waste dumping is a significant criminal activity that enables networks to earn substantial profits. With eight million metric tons of plastic waste entering our oceans every year, plastic pollution is a major global challenge and a profitable criminal business. Plastic debris generated by illegal

activities can persist in the marine environment for hundreds of years, entangle and suffocate animals, and eventually photodegrade into microplastics which enter and negatively affect the food chain. INTERPOL analysis has revealed that plastic waste crime has risen at an alarming rate since 2018. In export countries, difficulties in managing the waste surplus have translated into a surge in illegal waste disposal and fires. Illegal plastic waste imports are also affecting a growing number of emerging destination countries in South and Southeast Asia, where illegal waste dumping and illegal recycling businesses are on the rise. In addition, as more countries introduce restrictions to limit the production of single-use plastics, businesses trafficking illegal plastic items are also emerging.

- b. **Emerging Pollutants:** New pollutants, such as pharmaceuticals and personal care products, are increasingly being detected in marine environments, with unknown long-term effects. These pollutants originate from various sources, including industrial discharges, agricultural runoff, and household waste. Once dumped in the marine environment, they can have detrimental effects on marine life, disrupting ecosystems and entering the food chain, posing risks to both marine species and human health. Improved waste management practices, and stricter regulations to prevent further contamination and protect our oceans for future generations are needed to deal with such pollution cases.
- c. **Climate Change:** Rising sea temperatures and increased frequency of extreme weather events, such as hurricanes and heavy rainfall, lead to greater runoff from land. This runoff carries pollutants, including plastics, chemicals, and nutrients, into the ocean, increasing the levels of contamination. Additionally, warmer ocean temperatures can amplify the toxicity of pollutants and reduce the ocean's ability to absorb and break down these substances. Melting ice caps and glaciers also contribute to sea level rise,

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

In a continuously evolving environment, Law Enforcement Agencies face numerous and diverse challenges to effective investigations, including restrictions imposed on investigative powers, a low-level priority given to pollution control and illegal and unregulated fishing, an insufficient knowledge of pollution-related or fisheries-related crimes, a lack of specialized training, and other legal barriers.

Such challenges can hinder international law enforcement cooperation, lead to poor networking between specialist investigators, more legal restrictions on the exchange of information, and a limited visibility of new regulations adopted by countries. With INTERPOL's mandate aimed at connecting police around the world for a safer world, the Organization offers the following recommendations:

- **Prioritize investigating different forms of environmental crime**, going from a reactive/passive approach to a proactive approach.
- **Integrate tools and techniques**, providing multidisciplinary training for multi-agency investigators/working groups.
- **Collect and analyze data in a more systematic and accurate way related to criminal enterprises and networks**, adopting an intelligence-led approach in environmental crime enforcement.
- **Strengthen environmental security frameworks by incorporating the voice of global law enforcement**, whose insights are essential in shaping security policies that meet real-world challenges.

a. Marine pollution

Marine pollution highly affects marine life and ecosystems, endangering more than 1000 species of marine animals. As such, the concentrated efforts to address such an issue should align with the needs and available resources, supported by technological advancements, such as artificial intelligence.

- **Satellite Remote Sensing:** This advanced technology enables us to observe inaccessible areas and understand how atmospheric warmth causes polar ice caps to melt and raise sea levels. Remote sensing allows us to monitor changes in sea surface temperatures over time. This data is vital for understanding the impacts of climate change on marine ecosystems. Additionally, remote sensing is useful for studying chlorophyll, the green pigment in plants. Chlorophyll absorbs sunlight at a specific wavelength, and by measuring the sunlight reflected at different wavelengths, scientists can estimate the concentration of chlorophyll in plant cells.
- **Underwater drones and ROVs:** Drones equipped with high-quality cameras can access remote areas that are difficult to reach with traditional methods. They cause less disturbance to wildlife compared to submarines or divers, allowing scientists to study species in their natural habitats without causing stress.
- **Sensor Networks:** By deploying these sensors across various ocean regions, we can monitor water conditions in real-time (water quality, salinity, temperature, and pH levels), enabling marine scientists to accurately assess the health of the ocean through precise readings with remote access to data.

- **AI and Big Data:** The rise of artificial intelligence is proving advantageous for marine conservation. Companies are using AI to process and analyze data, such as underwater sensor readings, satellite images, and acoustic recordings of marine life, which are essential for understanding and protecting ocean health. AI can also examine satellite images of coastlines and waterways to identify areas that need extensive clean-up efforts and help implement measures to prevent plastic from entering the oceans. Additionally, AI can analyze satellite imagery and vessel tracking data to detect illegal fishing activities, aiding in patrolling these areas and preventing poaching of endangered species.

b. Fisheries crimes

- Fostering sustainable fisheries management, with a strong focus on supporting small-scale fishers, requires an inclusive and balanced approach that integrates both environmental sustainability and socioeconomic considerations.
- Effective fisheries policies must recognize the unique challenges faced by small-scale fishers, who rely heavily on marine resources for their livelihoods and food security.
- Supporting small-scale fishers through the adoption of low-impact, sustainable fishing techniques is essential. For instance, equipping vessels under 12 meters with low-cost Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) can significantly improve compliance with regulations, enhance safety at sea, and prevent illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, which threatens marine biodiversity and the livelihoods of these fishers. VMS can help ensure the safety of small-scale fishermen by providing real-time tracking and monitoring of their vessels, allowing for quick response in case of threats and emergencies.
- Innovations such as mobile applications and community-based monitoring systems are becoming increasingly accessible, empowering small-scale fishers to record their catches, report illegal fishing activities, and access market information in real-time. The entry into force of the European Union amended IUU regulation, including the introduction of the IT system CATCH will contribute to a better protection of the EU market and its consumers from products issued from Illegal fishing activities. The reporting system will also prevent small scale fisheries from the major overfishing operations which are reducing fish stocks and impacting resource's availability for local populations.

6. CONCLUSION

The ocean is considered a vast and limitless expanse of water, that was and will always remain a fascinating and largely unexplored aquatic desert. "Ecology is the long-term economy" says David Brower, and if we analyze these words, we cannot but reflect on today's reality: 90% of the world's trade is carried out by sea, through strategic routes and straits, whether it be Bab Al Mandeb or the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Gibraltar or the Suez Canal. Oceans are pivotal in today's world, their role extend from economy to climate regulation, global food safety, and marine biodiversity, a nexus of elements that form the essence of life on Earth.

INTERPOL's Environmental Security Programme's key focus areas include biodiversity, natural resources, waste management, and air quality, alongside other environmental crimes linked to climate change and quality degradation. Tackling criminal activities related to the environment, biodiversity, and natural resources is crucial for national security and good governance. Addressing these complex threats requires a comprehensive, multidisciplinary, whole-of-government approach. As nations adopt various legislative and regulatory measures to protect their environments, it is essential for international organizations like INTERPOL to be fully leveraged to address shared environmental vulnerabilities through enhanced, coherent law enforcement responses.

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