



**Bay of Bengal
Regional Plan of Action to
Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal,
Unreported and Unregulated Fishing
(BOB RPOA-IUU)**

**AS AGREED BY THE MEMBER-COUNTRIES OF THE
BAY OF BENGAL PROGRAMME INTER-GOVERNMENTAL
ORGANISATION (BOBP-IGO)**

2025



Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO)
91, Saint Mary's Road, Abiramapuram, Chennai - 600 018. INDIA

Bay of Bengal

Regional Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing

(BOB RPOA-IUU)

Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing has been one of the biggest banes of fisheries in recent decades, putting the sustainability of fish stocks in peril. It's a scourge that has affected fisheries in all the continents and is undermining the efforts of nations in bringing back the depleted fish stocks to their original conditions. Its prevalence ranges from national waters to the sea areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ) and from small-scale operators to large industrial-scale fishing vessels. The 2022 edition of the State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA)¹ highlights the fact that the fraction of fish stocks that are within biologically sustainable levels has exhibited a decreasing trend, from 90.0 percent in 1974 to 64.6 percent in 2019.

Expecting global population to cross the 9 billion mark by the middle of the twenty-first century, availability of safe food would continue to remain the biggest challenge before mankind. And in the seafood sector, IUU fishing, if allowed to continue unabated, will act as a major deterrent in the contribution of fisheries to the global food and nutrition security and employment of millions of people. While the global agenda spearheaded by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals provides a strong focus on elimination of IUU fishing within a certain time-frame, the real action lies with the countries to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing. The countries need to first demonstrate action within their own jurisdictions and second through close cooperation and coordination with the neighbouring countries covering a wider seascape.

The 1995 Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of United Nations, with its global scope and aimed at all stakeholders whether government or non-government, has set out principles and international standards of behaviour for responsible practices with a view to ensuring the effective conservation, management and development of living aquatic resources, with due respect for the ecosystem and biodiversity. The CCRF further emphasizes on the role of fisheries as a vital source of food, employment, recreation, trade and economic well-being for people throughout the world, both for the present and the future generations and should, therefore, be conducted in a responsible manner. However, IUU fishing presents a

¹ *A biennial flagship publication of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations that highlights the status of fisheries and aquaculture in the world.*

contrasting picture of actions that are damaging the fisheries and biodiversity in most parts of the world's oceans.

In 2001, the member-states of FAO further agreed to a voluntary document, the International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IPOA-IUU)². Set within the framework of the 1995 CCRF and with the objective to promote sustainable fisheries, the IPOA-IUU is a comprehensive toolbox that provides a full range of tools to combat IUU fishing in different situations. Notwithstanding its voluntary nature, many of the provisions in the IPOA-IUU draw linkages to other binding instruments such as the 1992 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the 1993 FAO Compliance Agreement and the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement (UNFSA).

Apart from biological losses, IUU fishing also offsets the economic gains from fisheries. Based on a study³ carried out in 2015 in the Bay of Bengal region, it is noted that incidences of IUU fishing are high and the estimated economic losses from such fishing are in the range of USD 1,117 – 4,635 million per year.

Bearing in mind the above, the member-countries⁴ of the Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO), hereinafter referred to as 'the region', consciously;

Noting that the BOBP-IGO member-countries encompass an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of about 3.9 million sq. km, with several sub-ecosystems harbouring diverse and valuable plant and animal genetic resources, including several iconic species such as dugongs, dolphins, marine turtles, etc.;

Appreciating that the fisheries sector commands an important position in the region and contributes 1-4 percent of the Gross Domestic Product;

Recognizing that the four member-countries are annually landing approximately 5 million metric tons of marine fin and shellfish species;

Considering that an estimated 2 million active fishers are harvesting the resources in the region and many more millions are productively engaged in ancillary activities that contribute to the vibrancy of the sector;

Knowing that the region is an important player in the global seafood trade with estimated export earnings of about USD 8.0 billion in 2018;

² In 2002, the FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries 9, further strengthened the implementation aspects of the IPOA-IUU.

³ BOBLME, 2015. Review of impacts of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing on developing countries in Asia. BOBLME-2015-Governance-15, 526 p.

⁴ Bangladesh, India, Maldives & Sri Lanka.

Realizing that the marine fisheries resources have threshold exploitation levels and are not in-exhaustive;

Accepting that any over-exploitation through poor management practices, including IUU practices would negatively impact the recruitment of fin and shellfish species, lead to loss of biodiversity and undermine the ecological integrity of the resources;

Observing that the marine fisheries resources in the region are subject to IUU fishing from both the domestic fleets operating within the sovereign waters of the member-countries and also by foreign fishing fleets within the EEZ of the member-countries and also in the adjoining high seas, illegally harvesting the highly migratory fish resources;

Understanding that while regional cooperation involves costs, the benefits expected from regional coordination can outweigh the costs and ensure a sustainable fishery for the region;

Acknowledging that the member-countries are committed to various international agreements and arrangement of both binding and non-binding nature, including implementation of the Targets set under Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 14, Life Below Water; and

Realizing that any further complacency in dealing with the IUU matters would be detrimental to the interests of the region;

Hereby agree to take collective action at the regional level through an agreed Bay of Bengal Regional Plan of Action to Prevent Deter and Eliminate IUU fishing (BOB RPOA-IUU).

Introduction

The BOB RPOA-IUU is a voluntary instrument with the objective to strengthen the prevention, deterrence and elimination of IUU fishing in the region and to ensure sustainable fisheries development.

In this document the meaning of IUU fishing is as defined in the IPOA-IUU.

The BOB RPOA-IUU is applicable to the EEZs of Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka and the ABNJ in the adjacent seas and oceans.

The BOB RPOA-IUU is based on the pillars of national sovereignty, regional cooperation, effective stakeholder participation, and collaboration with other regional and international fisheries entities, including the Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs), non-governmental organisations and non-state actors. It is guided by the 1995 FAO CCRF, IPOA-IUU, Voluntary Guidelines on Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries (VG-SSF) and the international instruments and arrangements to which the BOBP-IGO member-countries have acceded so far, including the UNCLOS.

The BOB RPOA-IUU holds that the full range of stakeholders, including the marginal groups and non-state actors should be involved in development, implementation, monitoring and review of the national and regional plans to curb IUU fishing.

The BOB RPOA-IUU provides guidance for the formulation and implementation of the National Plans of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU (NPOA-IUU) fishing to the member-countries as well as collaborating action by other stakeholders and agencies working in the region to curb IUU fishing.

The BOB RPOA-IUU will have an initial time-frame of 06 years from 2025 to 2030⁵, with periodical reviews to reflect the changes in the sector and meet the capacity development needs of the stakeholders. The BOB RPOA-IUU identifies the following actions to combat IUU fishing in the region.

Actions

Action 1: To review, consider and agree to the BOB RPOA-IUU and its implementation through the BOBP-IGO.

Action 2: To notify a suitable national focal point to coordinate with the BOBP-IGO on implementation of the BOB RPOA-IUU and maintain a formalized and effective inter-agency cooperation at the national, regional and international levels, including cooperation on joint patrols for monitoring of the resources in the ABNJ.

Action 3: To inform the full range of stakeholders as well as the concerned regional and international organizations working with the member-countries about the adoption of the BOB RPOA-IUU to exemplify regional commitment in curbing IUU fishing.

Action 4: To develop/ implement the NPOA-IUU through stakeholder consultations while taking cognizance of the IPOA-IUU, other voluntary and non-voluntary instruments and arrangements such as the Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA), Voluntary Guidelines of Flag State Performance (VGFSP) and coastal States responsibilities and BOB RPOA-IUU. Further, member-countries are urged to accede, ratify and implement the international instruments and arrangements aimed at curbing IUU fishing, to ensure compliance with conservation and management measures of the RFMOs they are party to, and to review the progress of the NPOA-IUU at regular intervals.

Action 5: To review and implement the National Plans of Action on Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (NPOA-MCS) as developed by the member-countries. Further, to strengthen regional cooperation and harmonization of MCS measures as agreed to in the Chittagong Resolution of 2008. While reviewing and implementing NPOA-MCS, the member-countries should also ensure that the MCS adequately addresses the best

⁵Changed from the period (2020-2030) originally proposed during the member country consultations held in 2019 and 2020 to align with the current calendar year and the implementation period of the SDG Goals, especially SDG 14: Life Below Water.

measures to reduce accident at sea and land and the occupational safety and health of fishers.

Action 6: To consider alignment of national policies with a common regional objective to ensure more effective fisheries management, prevent flag-hopping of fishing vessels and facilitate better identification of vessels engaged in IUU fishing and fishing related activities, including illegal and unmonitored trans-shipment at sea.

Action 7: To establish and maintain a Regional Record of Fishing Vessels and ensuring compatibility and information exchange with the FAO Global Record of Fishing Vessels, Refrigerated Transport Vessels and Supply Vessels (Global Record), taking into account the high proportion of small-scale fishing vessels in the region. This may include all vessels involved in catching fish, as well as auxiliary, carrier, supply and support vessels of 12 meters and above and other vessels that are eligible to have an IMO number.

Action 8: To ensure the marking and identification of fishing vessels in the BOBP-IGO area in order to improve transparency and allow better identification of non-compliant vessels. This measure requires that BOBP-IGO member-countries ensure that their flagged motorized fishing vessels, refrigerated transport vessels and supply vessels of 100 gross tonnage (GT) or above, or equal to or greater than 12 meters LOA and authorized to operate in ABNJ and other eligible vessels, obtain an IMO number and use it as a mark for identification.

Action 9: To consider developing national inspection plans, harmonizing these across the region as well as Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) regarding Port State Measures in line with the minimum standards as laid out in the PSMA. It is also proposed that the protocols could provide for different set of directions for vessels from other countries in the Bay of Bengal region.

Action 10: To consider establishment of joint regional MCS and enforcement procedures, such as on inspection schemes, patrols and observer programmes.

Action 11: To comply with international standards on gear marking to address the issue of abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear in line with the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Marking of Fishing Gear.

Action 12: To establish and maintain a list of vessels [presumed (provisional list) and/or] confirmed to have carried out IUU fishing in the region keeping in view that such listing of vessels is done in a fair, transparent, non-discriminatory manner.

Action 13: To adopt international best practices for the classification of fish and fishery products to facilitate a greater understanding and control of trade as well as identification of products. Further, best post-harvest practices should be adopted to stop value loss during post-harvest operations and discourage the discarding of catch at sea.

Action 14: To develop a harmonized catch documentation scheme⁶ consistent with the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes (VGCDS). CDS should be designed and implemented based on risk analysis and be proportionate to the risk that IUU fishing poses on the relevant stocks and markets.

Action 15: To consider developing and utilizing a regional MCS toolbox, based on international guidelines and using regional best practices.

Action 16: To establish a formal collaboration and coordination mechanism among relevant agencies (e.g. fisheries, port, maritime, customs, coast guard, immigration, marine police) for combatting IUU fishing at the regional level to address issues related to flag, port, coastal and market State responsibilities.

Action 17: To consider developing a regional mechanism for effective information sharing and cooperation to combat IUU fishing, including for the purpose of risk assessment and verification of vessel information.

Action 18: To consider regular monitoring of the magnitude and impact of IUU fishing in the BOBP-IGO region guided by the (Draft) “FAO Technical Guidelines on Methodologies and Indicators for the Estimation of the Magnitude and Impact of IUU Fishing.”

Action 19: To call for technical assistance and providing support to member-countries in development and implementation of MCS, flag state and port state measures, information and data collection (including stock assessment), collation, analysis and reporting, documentation, etc.

Action 20: To address any shortcomings and enhancing capacity at the national and regional levels based on the periodic evaluation of performance of NPOAs and RPOA for their progressive implementation.

⁶ *Catch Documentation Scheme (CDS), means a system with the primary purpose of helping determine throughout the supply chain whether fish originate from catches taken consistent with applicable national, regional and international conservation and management measures, established in accordance with relevant international obligations.*