

# Illegal fishing thrives out of sight. Transparency brings it into view

*Global Fishing Watch CEO Tony Long unveils IUU Fishing Risk Insights — a new dataset designed to reveal the “digital fingerprints” of vessels at sea*

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, June 5, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The global ocean remains one of the last great blind spots on our shared planet — vast stretches of open water, far from land and hidden from view, where clandestine activity and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing can flourish undisturbed.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), each year an estimated 11 to 26 million metric tonnes of fish are caught illegally, amounting to roughly one in every five wild-caught fish entering global markets. The impact on regional economies and communities can be devastating. In the Gulf of Guinea alone, some estimates suggest that IUU fishing strips more than USD \$2 billion from the regional economy every year. Worldwide, the losses climb as high as USD \$50 billion annually.

But the consequences of IUU fishing extend far beyond economics. Indeed, it accelerates pressure on marine ecosystems. It threatens food security in coastal nations. And it has been repeatedly linked to broader transnational crimes including forced labor, human trafficking and the smuggling of drugs and weapons.

That’s why to mark this year’s International Day for the Fight against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing, we are introducing [IUU Fishing Risk Insights](#) — a new experimental [dataset](#) designed to help authorities identify and prioritize vessels that may warrant closer scrutiny for their suspicious activity at sea.

Rather than attempting to determine guilt, IUU Fishing Risk Insights maps risk. Developed through expert consultation and a scientific [literature review](#), the framework identifies 11 behavioral indicators derived from automatic identification system (AIS) data that signal heightened exposure to potential illegal fishing activity. These indicators examine factors such as vessel encounters, network proximity to IUU-listed vessels, voyage duration, time spent away from port, suspected AIS disabling and possible identity spoofing.

The dataset captures what we call the “digital fingerprints” of risk — observable behaviors that, when viewed together, can help authorities distinguish routine activity from patterns that

warrant further investigation.

Importantly, these indicators are not evidence of wrongdoing and do not constitute legal determinations. They are designed as a decision-support tool to help governments and enforcement agencies prioritize inspections, strengthen implementation of international agreements such as the Port State Measures Agreement and direct finite resources where they can have the greatest impact.

At Global Fishing Watch, we know that transparency is one of the most powerful tools available to confront this challenge. Increasingly, governments are reaching the same conclusion. At their upcoming meeting in Evian, France, the G7 will recognize transparency as a key lever in tackling IUU fishing. And that momentum is expected to continue at this month's Our Ocean Conference in Mombasa, Kenya, where improving visibility at sea will remain central to discussions on sustainable ocean governance. That growing consensus must now translate into impact at sea.

Illegal fishing depends on blind spots. By making activity at sea more visible and turning data into actionable intelligence, we can help build a future where sustainable fisheries, thriving coastal communities and healthy ocean ecosystems are not the exception, but the expectation.

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