

New FAO Project to Tackle Illegal Fishing

[UN Integrated Regional Information Networks](#)

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A programme to combat fish poaching implemented by the Food and Agriculture Programme, is to target illegal trawling in West African countries including Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Senegal and Sierra Leone, the United Nations agency reported on Friday.

The Management for Responsible Fisheries programme is to focus on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and implement a code of conduct under the FAO FishCode Programme, that was adopted by member countries to regulate the industry in 1995. The programme is also being implemented in other parts of Africa and Asia.

Vessels from Europe, FAO said, trawl off the coasts of West African countries taking advantage of lack of surveillance aircraft. In Guinea and Sierra Leone, 31 illegal trawling vessels were spotted within one week in September 2001. Two had no visible name, two displayed two names while 27 showed no country or port of registry.

"Theft of the fish hurts the largest number of people. Poachers work with industrial-scale vessels, enabling them to catch vast numbers of fish. The fish is sold in supermarkets in wealthy countries to consumers who do not realize that they are buying food stolen from the poor, in regions such as West Africa where fish is the most common source of protein," FAO said.

According to the UN agency, abusive fishing practices take 30 percent of the catch in some important fisheries. "In some high-seas fisheries, even larger proportions of the catch may be going unreported," said Eric Reynolds, coordinator of the FishCode Programme.

Meanwhile, thousands of tons of fish were being dumped overboard by large EU fishing vessels trawling off the West African coast, the EastAfrican newspaper, reported on Monday. The unwanted fish some of which is too small is caught using industrialised trawling techniques, it added.