

Why GAO Did This Study

Many illicit activities, such as using prohibited fishing gear, constitute IUU fishing. Such fishing undermines the economic and environmental sustainability of the fishing industry. The illicit nature of IUU fishing means that the size of the problem can be estimated only roughly. However, the U.S. International Trade Commission estimated that about 11 percent of the value of the nation's approximately \$22 billion in seafood imports in 2019 were derived from IUU fishing.

GAO was asked to review federal efforts to combat imports of seafood caught through IUU fishing. This report (1) describes NMFS and CBP efforts to combat such imports; and (2) examines the mechanisms these agencies use to share information on such imports, and related challenges they have identified.

GAO reviewed documents on NMFS and CBP efforts to combat imports of seafood caught through IUU fishing, as well as other relevant agency documents. GAO also interviewed officials from CBP and NMFS at the headquarters and port levels about these efforts and how officials share relevant information on seafood imports.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that CBP work with NMFS to ensure that NMFS has timely access to information that it needs to combat imports of seafood caught through IUU fishing. The Department of Homeland Security concurred with our recommendation.

View [GAO-23-105643](#). For more information, contact Cardell D. Johnson at (202) 512-3841 or johnsoncd1@gao.gov

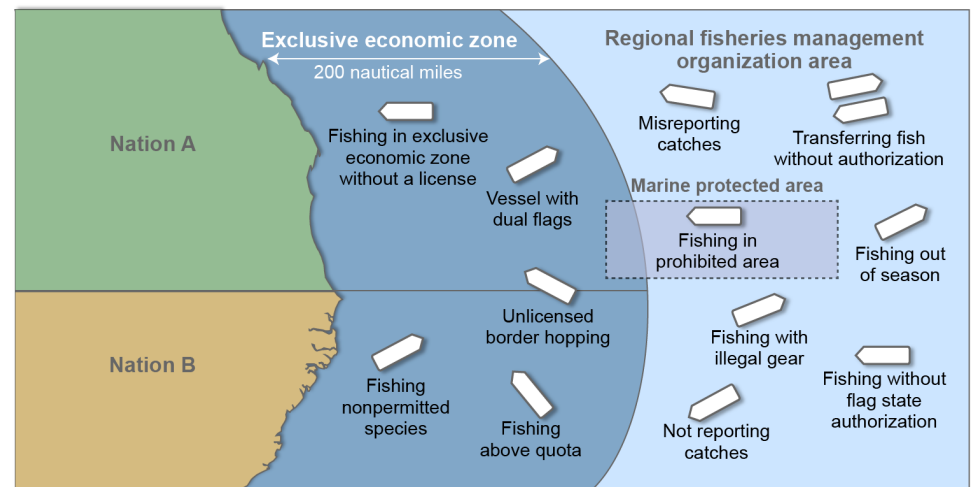
COMBATING ILLEGAL FISHING

Better Information Sharing Could Enhance U.S. Efforts to Target Seafood Imports for Investigation

What GAO Found

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) work to combat imports of seafood caught through illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, which comprises many illicit activities (see fig.). For example, NMFS administers four trade monitoring programs that, by regulation, require documentation for imports of specific species. In addition, both agencies manage efforts to identify or "target" seafood imports potentially caught through IUU fishing so that such imports can be investigated or held for further inspection. Targeting efforts can include monitoring incoming seafood imports that fit a pattern of concern, such as importers with past trade violations.

Common Types of Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing



Source: GAO analysis of agency information. | GAO-23-105643

CBP and NMFS share information with each other through several mechanisms, including a data analysis tool and a CBP interagency coordination center. However, NMFS officials report difficulties obtaining timely information from CBP. In particular, NMFS officials told GAO that having to request information through CBP's interagency coordination center limits their ability to get the timely information they need. NMFS officials told us that if they want to inspect an incoming shipment, they need sufficient advance notice to coordinate with CBP. In addition, they said that receiving the information they need from CBP's interagency coordination center, in some cases, could take as long as a week. CBP officials told us that coordinating information requests through its coordination center is important to ensure that such requests do not jeopardize or duplicate ongoing CBP operations, among other reasons. Until CBP works with NMFS to ensure timely access to needed information, both NMFS and CBP may miss opportunities to combat imports of seafood caught through IUU fishing.