The West Africa Task Force

WHO IS IN THE WEST AFRICA TASK FORCE?

The Fishery Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea (FCWG) member States – Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Togo – are the founding members of the West Africa Task Force and are at the core of all activities. These countries provide political and operational championing of the Task Force, actively cooperate on fisheries controls and share information between countries, and establish the National Working Groups (NWGs). The NWGs form the nucleus of national level fisheries intelligence gathering and analysis, and cooperate on MCS planning and operations. 

HOW WILL THE WEST AFRICA TASK FORCE DEVELOP?

Global levels of illegal activities in the fisheries sector present major challenges to law enforcement, food and nutrition security and for economic development. Tackling the established, organized transnational criminal groups responsible will take time and will require a sustained, long term effort. By establishing mechanisms for sharing information and intelligence, by building partnerships and by harnessing the resources of many government departments and agencies, the WATF is building a regional infrastructure that will help prevent illegal fishing and deter illicit activity.

The Task Force approach to fighting illegal fishing is a proven model. The FISH-i Africa Task Force has been in operation in the Western Indian Ocean region since 2012 and provides a good example of how much can be achieved with intelligence and information sharing, combined with the will to challenge illegal practices.

The West Africa Task Force has the opportunity to expand both within the Western African region to include more coastal countries and regional organizations, and to grow their international network to connect with more partners globally. Expansion would provide an even stronger network of information and support and greater opportunities to stop illegal fishing.

The West Africa Task Force

Working together to stop illegal fishing

Fishing enforcement officers are central in the fight against illegal fishing, ensuring that fish are caught, offloaded, transshipped and imported in a legal manner. As awareness of the range of violations being committed in the fisheries sector grows, so too does the recognition of the need for fisheries officers to work alongside, and in close cooperation with a range of agencies at the national, regional and international level.

The West Africa Task Force (WATF) has been established within the Fishery Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea (FCWG) member States to achieve the multi-agency, inter-regional and international approach to fighting illegal fishing.
What powers do we have in stopping illegal fishing?

Fisheries Ministry and MCS Departments ensure the catching, offloading, transshipment, import and trade in fish and fisheries products are undertaken legally. Developing national inter-agency cooperation is vital to increase compliance and to stop illegal fishing.

### AT SEA
- **Concerns**
  - Is the vessel being operated legally in my EEZ?
  - Have any laws been broken?
  - Are maritime standards being met (e.g., pollution, safety and security)?
  - Is there any reason why I should deny access to this vessel?
  - Are the vessel's compliance and safety standards met?

- **Actions**
  - Inspect for compliance at sea.
  - Detect and photograph any illegal activity at sea.
  - Make sure vessels are subject to inspection and that illegal practices are stopped.

### IN PORT
- **Concerns**
  - Have the correct taxes been paid?
  - Are the correct laws in place to deter and prevent illegal fishing?
  - Are they sufficient to prosecute fisheries crime?

- **Actions**
  - Investigate and enforce national laws in accordance with respective mandates.
  - Enforce denial of use of port.
  - Inspect and provide customs clearance as appropriate for fish, fish products landed or transhipped in port.

### ON LAND
- **Concerns**
  - Is there any reason why I should deny access to this vessel?
  - Are the products correctly labelled? Are they eligible for trade and are the correct duties being paid?

- **Actions**
  - Ensure national laws are adequate, review outcomes of investigations and support legal or administrative proceedings in cases of suspected non-compliance or violations.