

FAO Committee on Fisheries, 7-11 September 2026

Agenda Item 8. Progress in Addressing Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing through International, Regional and National Actions

Beneficial ownership transparency: an indispensable condition in the fight against IUU fishing

We welcome the progress made at international, regional and national levels to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, including stronger monitoring, control and surveillance systems and wider implementation of the Port State Measures Agreement.

Still, the fight against IUU fishing must also address governance failures on land that allow those who ultimately own and control fishing operations to remain hidden and to continue benefitting from the illegal exploitation of fisheries resources.

IUU fishing directly affects small-scale fishing communities' livelihoods, food security and the sustainability of fisheries resources. It reduces catches available to artisanal fishers, distorts competition and undermines trust in fisheries governance. It also deprives communities of vital resources and exacerbates the fish deficit in Africa.

One important reason why these problems persist is that the individuals who ultimately own, control and profit from fishing operations often remain hidden behind opaque corporate structures, shell companies and complex ownership arrangements. Beneficial ownership transparency is particularly important where fisheries access arrangements, chartering or joint ventures may obscure who ultimately controls fishing operations and benefits from access to African fisheries resources.

Greater transparency on beneficial ownership can help identify links between vessels, companies and fishing licences, detect repeat offenders, and reduce corruption and conflicts of interest in fisheries governance.

Beyond enforcement, beneficial ownership transparency is also a matter of equity and democratic fisheries governance. Transparency enables fishing communities, civil society and citizens to better understand who benefits from fisheries resources and to participate more meaningfully in decisions affecting their livelihoods, food systems and coastal economies.

We welcome the commitment made by the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) in 2022, and reaffirmed in 2024, to implement national legislation requiring reporting of ultimate beneficial owners of fishing vessels and to strengthen the investigation and sanctioning of non-disclosure.



We commend OACPS member states that are already taking steps to strengthen vessel and company transparency, improve fisheries registries and explore mechanisms to disclose beneficial ownership information. These efforts demonstrate growing political recognition that transparency reforms are both feasible and necessary.

We also welcome the inclusion of beneficial ownership transparency in the updated Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI) Standard 2.0., which provides countries with a practical framework to improve public disclosure and accountability in fisheries governance, particularly regarding beneficial ownership. We encourage more countries to engage with the FiTI process as a concrete pathway towards stronger transparency, better governance and more effective action against IUU fishing.

To translate these transparency commitments into concrete progress, stronger action is needed at national, regional and international levels.

Transparency confined to administrations alone cannot deliver full accountability, particularly in fisheries where ownership structures frequently span multiple jurisdictions and illegal operators use shell companies, reflagging and other complex arrangements to avoid scrutiny. Public access to beneficial ownership information is therefore essential to strengthen oversight, builds public trust and enables fishing communities, civil society organisations, researchers and journalists to identify hidden ownership links and conflicts of interest that might otherwise remain hidden.

To strengthen accountability, no industrial fishing licence should be issued or renewed without full disclosure of beneficial ownership information. This information should be verified, regularly updated and made publicly accessible, while respecting legitimate data protection safeguards.

Public disclosure also creates a powerful deterrent effect, making it harder for operators involved in illegal fishing or corruption to remain hidden.

To defeat IUU fishing, we must not only track vessels and catches, we must also trace ownership, control and financial benefit.