

Question For the Record: **What specific resources do you believe are needed to make the U.S. Coast Guard more effective in meeting Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing interdiction goals?**

The views expressed in this response are my own and do not represent the official position of the U.S. Government or the U.S. Coast Guard.

Over the past four years, Congress has provided the Coast Guard with additional resources dedicated to counter-IUU fishing. These funds have been applied toward additional positions and the establishment of an IUU Center of Excellence in Hawaii. My understanding is that these investments have significantly strengthened the Service's ability to combat IUU fishing. As Congress revisits the IUU challenge with renewed interest and focus—and given that these resources were allocated several years ago—this is an appropriate time for the Coast Guard to reassess its level of both capabilities and capacity employed in this mission area, and more specifically to report whether the resources provided in 2020 remain adequate today for a mission that has, and continues to, expand in both geographic scope and strategic importance.

As noted in my testimony, persistent at-sea presence remains the single most important factor in the Coast Guard's ability to counter IUU fishing, and therefore the **Offshore Patrol Cutter (OPC)** acquisition program is essential. In addition to providing the global reach and capacity required to respond to IUU incursions, to support partner nations, and to increase persistent presence on the high seas, OPCs are urgently needed to replace the aging Medium Endurance Cutter fleet, which is operating decades beyond its intended service life. These legacy cutters face increasing maintenance challenges resulting in reduced operational availability (days on patrol at sea), limiting the Service's ability to sustain patrols in contested or remote regions. The OPCs will be the backbone of the Coast Guard's at-sea capacity and will be the workhorses supporting the Service's efforts to stem IUU fishing.

As IUU fishing activity expands into the Arctic and higher latitudes, the **Arctic Security Cutter (ASC)**, currently under construction, will provide indispensable capability and capacity. Conventional non-icebreaking-capable cutters cannot safely operate in or near ice, and communications and overhead imagery are more challenging in the Arctic due to satellite-orbit geometry. The planned fleet of 11 Arctic Security Cutters (ASCs) will provide the persistent presence required to deter and respond to incursions into U.S. northern waters. Until the ASC fleet is fully operational, the interim high-latitude capabilities provided by **USCGC STORIS**, which was placed into service in August 2025, will remain critical.

The modularization program currently being prototyped on STORIS—and directed by the Executive Order on *Restoring America's Maritime Dominance*—is particularly important for the IUU mission, especially in the Arctic. Modern containerized modularity enables rapid augmentation of capabilities such as additional berthing, enhanced communications, expanded intelligence capabilities, and embarked scientific modules.

Both the ASC and **Polar Security Cutter (PSC)** classes will be designed to embark these modular capabilities, allowing each patrol to be tailored to mission requirements.

Lastly, **Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS)** capabilities will be essential to the IUU mission in a variety of ways. UAS will soon be embarked on most Coast Guard cutters, providing organic surveillance capability that will greatly enhance maritime domain awareness for the IUU mission. In addition, UAS aerial patrols for counter-IUU fisheries missions in the Arctic limit risk to manned aircraft and their embarked crews given the harsh operational conditions found in the northern latitudes. Continued support for the Coast Guard's UAS program will be essential and may present an area that would benefit from increased resourcing.

Thank you for your leadership on this critically important IUU fishing mission, which is vital to U.S. national security, regional stability, and global food security.

Question for the Record: Are there other Coast Guard-related priorities that can help on the IUU fishing front?

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In 2020, the 26th Commandant, Admiral Schultz, in the Service's *IUU Fishing Strategic Outlook*, identified combating IUU fishing as the top operational concern for the majority of America's maritime partner-nation Coast Guards and Navies. Schultz noted, "The Coast Guard's *IUU Fishing Strategic Outlook* outlines the Service's efforts to combat the scourge of IUU fishing over the next decade. We are committed to working with our allies and like-minded partners to strengthen the international fisheries enforcement regime and counter this pervasive threat... As a recognized world leader in maritime safety, security and environmental stewardship, the Coast Guard has a responsibility to help build a coalition of partners willing to identify and address IUU fishing bad actors and model responsible global maritime behavior." Since publishing this *Strategic Outlook*, co-chairing the MSAFE IUU Committee, and expanding the Service's global engagement, the Coast Guard has become an international leader in counter-IUU maritime governance and operations. However, as noted in my testimony, the Coast Guard cannot address this challenge alone. A whole-of-society approach that integrates the work of federal departments and agencies, industry, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society is required.

To support this, IUU fishing should be elevated within national security priorities to a level comparable to narcotics trafficking and piracy. The MSAFE interagency effort should receive increased visibility, provide regular updates to Congress and the Executive Branch, and have its efforts incorporated into periodic, focused National Security Council-level discussions.

The Coast Guard, along with other Departments and Agencies, conducts extensive international capacity-building related to counter-IUU fishing, including law-enforcement instruction, fisheries education, legal and policy development, and broader capacity-building initiatives. A persistent challenge is ensuring that these efforts are coordinated not only across U.S. agencies, but also with foreign partners and nongovernmental organizations, to ensure they are additive and complementary rather than redundant. Additionally, these activities must be more closely aligned with operational objectives and measurable outcomes. Departments and agencies often report activities rather than results and impact, frequently providing only anecdotal examples. A system of macro-level indicators—developed jointly with intelligence and NGO communities—would allow the United States to assess whether global IUU fishing trends are improving.

Improved intelligence collaboration is also essential. The U.S. Government shares information and intelligence with partners and NGOs through collaborative IT platforms and through Information Fusion Centers to improve awareness of vessels engaged in IUU fishing activities. While this effort is important, these mechanisms often remain

cumbersome due to information-sharing policy constraints that prevent broader collaboration. Analytic products from NGOs—such as Global Fishing Watch—can exceed both the quality and timeliness of information available from the U.S. Government. The advantage of the IUU fishing mission is that classified information is not essential to produce quality targeting data. Crowd-sourced efforts to enrich unclassified, commercially available overhead data—enhanced with artificial intelligence—can provide timely information on IUU fishing fleets and fully inform priority patrol areas globally. Greater collaboration in unclassified, publicly releasable platforms would allow U.S. agencies, foreign partners, and NGOs to fully collaborate using the same data, enabling timely shared tactical information without releasability barriers. This would significantly enhance operational awareness for all partner nation patrols.

Coast Guard efforts must also be integrated into broader joint and interagency initiatives outside the Service's traditional mission areas. While the Coast Guard provides the persistent presence, boarding capability, and intelligence support needed to challenge IUU fishing at sea, it does not have the lead role in traceability, import inspections, or supply-chain enforcement. The Coast Guard supports these efforts through intelligence and the Coast Guard Investigative Service, but as noted in my testimony, effective international traceability and inspection regimes—implemented in close partnership with industry—are essential. Reducing the market for IUU-tainted seafood imports would diminish the economic incentives that drive IUU fishing globally. Without this effort, it will be difficult to counter global IUU fishing effectively through at-sea enforcement alone.

The Coast Guard's efforts need to be fully integrated into a broader unified, coordinated, whole-of-society approach—bringing together joint and interagency resources, foreign partners, NGOs, and civil society. This approach would significantly strengthen national efforts to counter IUU fishing. This synergy can be achieved through regular, structured engagement of the MSAFE Committee and its working groups by Congressional and Executive Branch leadership, including periodic discussion and progress monitoring at the National Security Council level.

Thank you for your leadership in addressing the IUU fishing challenge, which is vital to U.S. national security, regional stability, and global food security.