

# The Fisheries Import Control Scheme Handbook

## Executive Summary

### EU IUU FISHING COALITION



Our members include:



*Illegal, unreported, and unregulated* (IUU) fishing is a severe threat to food security and marine biodiversity worldwide, with well documented links to human and labour rights abuses, including the trafficking of weapons, drugs, and people. By undermining sustainable fisheries management and creating unfair competition for law-abiding fishers, IUU fishing threatens the integrity of global seafood supply chains and the livelihoods of those who depend on healthy fish populations for food and income. Improved traceability of imported seafood coupled with robust enforcement are crucial means of preventing the sale and consumption of products of IUU fishing.

The Fisheries Import Control Scheme Handbook (FICSH) aims to serve as a guide for governments and decision makers looking to establish or strengthen import controls to prevent, deter, and eliminate the importation of products of IUU fishing. **Given that one fifth of global catches are from IUU fishing**, it is essential that governments worldwide use all available tools in preventing IUU-caught seafood from entering their market.

We build on the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) 's guidance for establishing catch documentation schemes, tailoring advice to individual market States. Drawing from existing systems, international guidelines, best practices, and technical fisheries resources, FICSH offers a roadmap for establishing effective import controls that also help protect marine resources, promote sustainability, and uphold human and labour rights in global seafood supply chains.

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## What is a Fisheries Import Control Scheme?

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Import control schemes (ICS) are regulatory systems implemented by market States that operate by requiring comprehensive catch documentation (e.g. through catch, trade, and other certificates) that trace seafood through the supply chain to ensure it has been caught and traded in accordance with applicable national, regional, and international laws, and management measures. Schemes are implemented by a single government authority, ideally covering all imported seafood species, or alternatively covering fewer but key commercially targeted species.

**When well designed and implemented, fisheries import control schemes are market-based and government-driven tools that close markets to seafood products from IUU fishing.**

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## Why do more States need a Fisheries Import Control Scheme?

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With one in five seafood products caught by IUU fishing, it is highly likely that States are importing products tainted by IUU fishing and its associated crimes, such as forced, bonded, or slave labour. Therefore, ensuring these products do not enter market States is essential to protect food security globally and uphold decent working conditions. **By establishing a fisheries import control scheme, governments send a strong message to flag and exporting States that IUU fishing will no longer be tolerated and that products caught by IUU fishing will not enter their markets.** An import control scheme can help to exclude and deter IUU-caught seafood from entering market States, making it less profitable and, in turn, safeguarding fish stocks, livelihoods, consumers, and marine biodiversity.

# What are the benefits of a Fisheries Import Control Scheme?

1

**Exclusion of products linked to IUU fishing** by increasing the likelihood of detecting illicit seafood before it enters the market.

2

**Sustainable resource management** by using market access as a tool to drive regulatory improvements in fisheries management of exporting States.

3

**Disincentivisation of human and labour rights abuses** that are heavily associated with IUU fishing by incorporating import controls that detect and deter these activities.

4

**Market integrity and growing consumer confidence** by ensuring seafood products are true to their label and have been caught lawfully.

5

**Increased coordination and cooperation** with partner states from the necessary information exchanges for effective import control schemes.

# How to establish a robust Fisheries Import Control Scheme

Building on the FAO's Voluntary Guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes and Understanding and Implementing Catch Documentation Schemes, the Handbook provides technical guidance on the steps involved in developing an import control scheme, detailing lessons learnt from established schemes and best practices that States can aim for.

# 1

## Scoping

A market State needs to understand its seafood trade flows and the potential risks associated with them and the exporting States they trade with. Basic scoping will involve stakeholder engagement, legal assessments, defining the scope and species coverage of the import control scheme, as well as a clear division of responsibilities domestically.

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# 2

## Design

Once the scope of an import control scheme has been decided, market States can design their system. This must include the following essential design elements:

- **Catch documentation** including the key data needed to help authorities detect seafood caught by IUU fishing
- **Trade certification to help track seafood through complex supply chains** beyond the point of catch to the point of sale
- **Certificate validation** by partner States to ensure information is legitimate
- **Digitalisation** of the system to maximise efficiency - Simple, secure, user-friendly, accessible digital systems must be a key priority for all management authorities
- **Simplified documentation** for small-scale fisheries
- **Mutual recognition** of, and where possible, **alignment with** other import control schemes

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# 3

## Implementation

Following the system design phase, market States need to plan their implementation strategies to ensure the effective enforcement of the import control scheme. This includes:

- **Requiring catch documentation to be received before seafood enters the market** (prior notification), allowing time for necessary checks
- **Using risk assessments** to flag imports from sources deemed of high-risk of IUU fishing
- **Implementing additional measures for imports flagged as high-risk or suspicious**, such as seeking to verify the information in the associated certificates
- **Holding imported products** at the border to allow sufficient time for inspections
- **Physically inspecting** high-risk and suspicious imports, and
- **Refusing the entry** of imports linked with IUU fishing and its associated crimes, and **sanctioning** those responsible to deter IUU fishing operator

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## Assessment

The proposed system—with its essential design elements and implementation strategies—should undergo a socio-economic analysis of the investments versus returns alongside an overall consultation with all relevant stakeholder groups.

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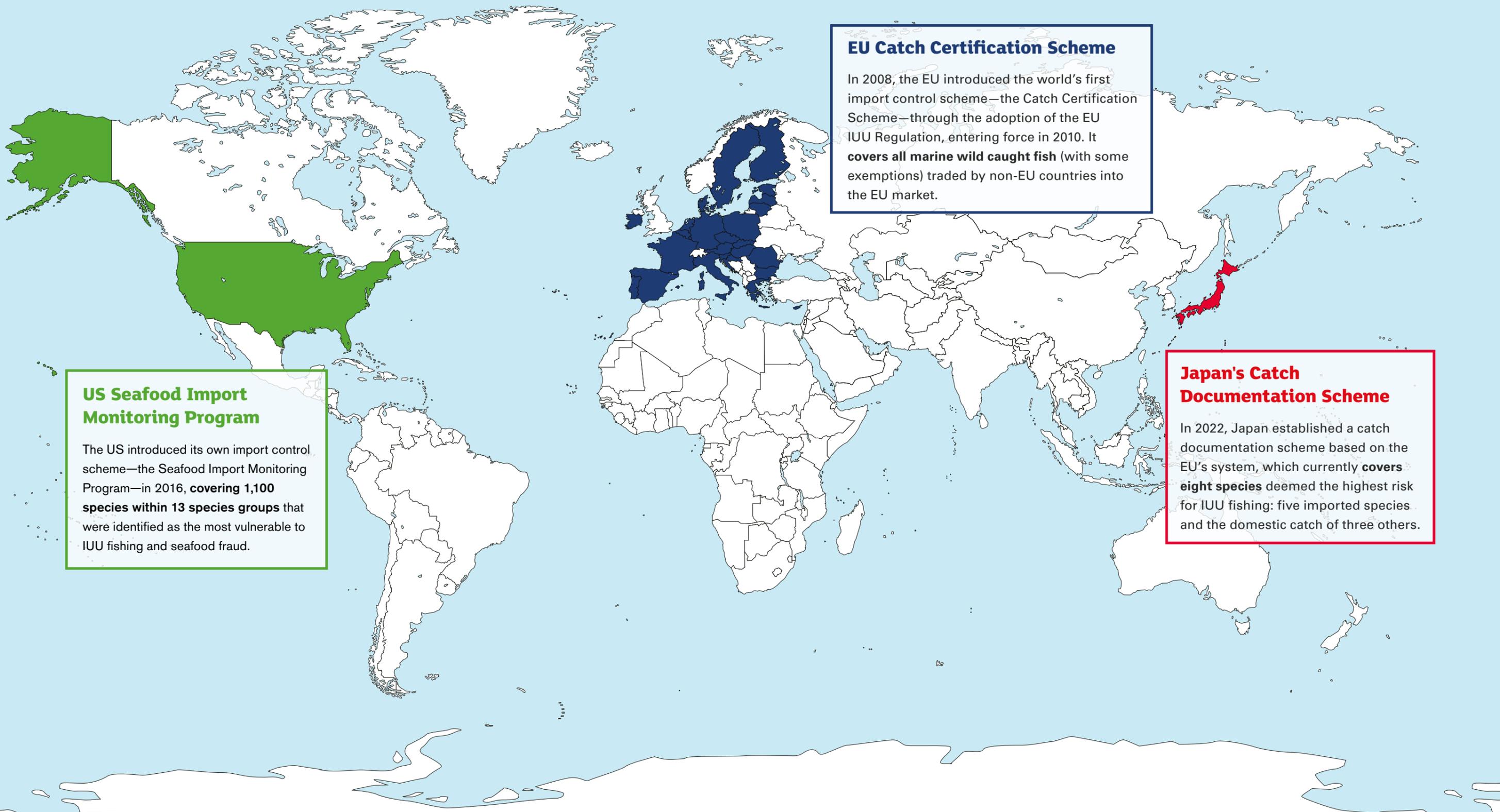
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## Review

Once established in national legislation and in operation, the scheme's performance must be transparently monitored and periodically reviewed, including through stakeholder feedback on its implementation, to improve its performance into the future, address any challenges, and incorporate new tools or technological solutions.

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# Examples of established Import Control Schemes



**US Seafood Import Monitoring Program**

The US introduced its own import control scheme—the Seafood Import Monitoring Program—in 2016, covering **1,100 species within 13 species groups** that were identified as the most vulnerable to IUU fishing and seafood fraud.

**EU Catch Certification Scheme**

In 2008, the EU introduced the world's first import control scheme—the Catch Certification Scheme—through the adoption of the EU IUU Regulation, entering force in 2010. It **covers all marine wild caught fish** (with some exemptions) traded by non-EU countries into the EU market.

**Japan's Catch Documentation Scheme**

In 2022, Japan established a catch documentation scheme based on the EU's system, which currently **covers eight species** deemed the highest risk for IUU fishing: five imported species and the domestic catch of three others.

# The importance of harmonised import control schemes

As more countries develop import control schemes, inconsistent data requirements fragment the global system, leading to confusion and enforcement gaps that can be exploited by unscrupulous actors. Without harmonisation, these systems are at risk of falling short—allowing IUU-caught seafood to slip through the cracks.

Harmonised import control schemes will establish a robust baseline of global seafood traceability, helping market State authorities and making it easier for international supply chain operators to meet aligned requirements. This will, in turn, increase efficiency and drive compliance costs down.

The growing number of countries establishing and improving their own import control scheme is promising. Harmonising systems now can deliver globally aligned and robust import control schemes that remove the incentive for IUU fishing and lock illegal seafood out of markets, for good.

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## To improve global efforts against IUU fishing, we call on all market States to:

- 1 Establish import control schemes in line with recommendations in this handbook to protect global markets and consumers from buying products of IUU fishing.
- 2 Ensure that any future import control scheme is harmonised with existing schemes to close loopholes for those seeking to trade IUU-caught seafood and relieve unnecessary burden on exporters.
- 3 Cooperate and share information with other market States to strengthen efforts in closing the net to IUU fishing globally.

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**This report has been produced by the EU IUU Fishing Coalition, with support from US IUU Fishing and Labor Rights Coalition and the IUU Forum Japan, led by the EU IUU Fishing Coalition's Researcher Eve Croxford.**

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