PRESS RELEASE

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Iranian flagged fishing vessels identified operating illegally in Somalian EEZ

Mogadishu, Somalia 24th June 2020. Remote monitoring has revealed evidence of a significant fleet of unauthorized fishing vessels, flagged to Iran, operating illegally in the Somali Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

Between January 2019 to 14 April 2020, approximately 112 Iranian fishing vessels were identified transmitting on automatic identification system (AIS) transponders from within the Somalia EEZ for a total of 2533 days. This is a significant amount of fishing effort and is likely to be conservative due to the poor signal strength of the AIS transponders on these vessels.

In addition to the fishing vessels, 83 AIS net markers were also linked to Iran. 43 could be matched to vessels transmitting on AIS however 17 transmitted a vessel name that was not matched to a vessel, AIS and the remaining 33 were not broadcasting a discernible name. This suggests that the Iranian fleet operating inside the Somalia and Yemen EEZ consists of at least 192 vessels.

While these numbers are large, the AIS analysis of the AIS net markers and data from remote sensing techniques suggests the foreign fleets operating inside the Somalia EEZ is significantly larger than seen from the AIS alone.

Satellite remote sensing imagery, from April 2020, was used to verify the AIS information, confirming the presence of vessels broadcasting on AIS and indicating the presence of additional vessels, not broadcasting on AIS. This finding was further supported by the use of synthetic-aperture radar (SAR) which matched 16 Iranian vessels with their AIS signal and detected an additional 44 vessels.

The vessels appear to be originating from and using a number of different ports in Iran including Port Konarak, Bandar-e Jask, Port Tiyab and Ramin.

A full report developed by Global Fishing Watch and Trygg Mat Tracking, presenting evidence of the presence of the Iranian fleet, has been shared regionally with the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission and through the FISH-i Africa Task Force.

The Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources of the Federal Republic of Somalia, **HE. Abdilahi Bidhan Warsame** calls for cooperation from authorities in Iran, "Illegal fishing will not be tolerated by Somalia. The situation related to presence of the Iranian fleets in Somali waters, remains a longstanding concern of the Federal Republic of Somalia, and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in Somali waters constitutes a significant threat to the food security, economic development, sovereignty and maritime ecology of Somalia."

Since 2018 all fishing activity in Somalia's EEZ has been controlled by the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources of the Federal Republic of Somalia. All licence applications from foreign flagged vessels are processed in a transparent manner and revenue generated from this system is subject to an Interim Agreement on Revenue Sharing that benefits all Somali States. Licensed vessels are monitored to ensure they operate in compliance with our regulatory system. Requirements include the need to broadcast on our vessel monitoring system, this enables oversight of their whereabouts and activity. Catch data is also regularly submitted to enable us to manage our resources sustainably. Licences issued outside of this agreement have no validity meaning that all fishing is considered illegal and in contravention of Somali law.

Notes to editors:

The Federal Government of Somalia licensing process

In February 2018, an Interim Agreement on Revenue Sharing for the issuance of fishing licenses, was signed by Somalia's National Security Council. Under the terms of this public agreement, the MFMR was given responsibility for the issuance and management of offshore fishing licenses (beyond 24 nautical miles from the coast and 0-24nm will be revered for artisanal fishing), with a view to allowing Somalia to raise revenue from offshore fisheries resources in its EEZ, particularly tuna and tuna-like resources.

Under the Memorandum of Understanding, 31 Chinese flagged tuna longline vessels were issued with a licence to fish for tuna and tuna-like species in the EEZ. Due diligence was undertaken to review the applications for these vessels by the Ministry, with the assistance of FISH-i Africa.
The first licences were issued in November 2018 and the issuance of these licenses allowed Somalia to raise over USD 2.5 million in revenue for the country up to now. This MOU marked the first time in more than two decades that licenses were issued legally and transparently by Somalia.
For more information go to https://mfmr.gov.so/en/2019/03/15/somalia-issues-fishing-licenses/#_ftn2

Indian Ocean Tuna Commission

The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) is an intergovernmental organisation responsible for the management of tuna and tuna-like species in the Indian Ocean. For more information go to https://www.iotc.org/

Global Fishing Watch

Global Fishing Watch is an international non-profit organization that harness cutting edge technology to increase transparency in the fisheries and marine sector. . For more information go to https://globalfishingwatch.org/

Trygg Mat Tracking

Trygg Mat Tracking (TMT) provides national fisheries authorities and relevant international institutions with expert fisheries intelligence analysis, in support of enforcement actions and broader improvements in fisheries governance. . For more information go to https://www.tm-tracking.org/

FISH-i Africa Task Force

The FISH-i Africa Task Force is a network of eight countries of the Western Indian Ocean who collaborate to stop illegal fishing. For more information go to www.fish-i-network.org

Automatic identification system (AIS) are Very High Frequency (VHF) radio-based tools that support safe navigation and collision avoidance by automatically transferring information about the ship to other ships and coastal authorities.

Synthetic-aperture radar (SAR) is a form of radar that is used to create two-dimensional images or three-dimensional reconstructions of objects, such as landscapes. SAR uses the motion of the radar antenna over a target region to provide finer spatial resolution than conventional beam-scanning radars.