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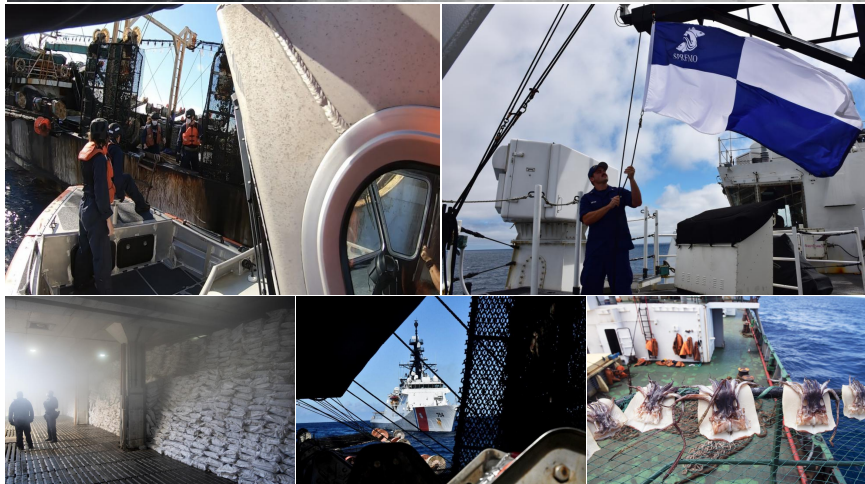
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News Release

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U.S. Coast Guard conducts high seas boarding for first time in the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization Convention Area



Editor's Note: Click on images above to download full-resolution version.

ALAMEDA, Calif. -- The Coast Guard recently completed an operation to counter illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, within the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization (SPRFMO) Convention area.

The SPRFMO Convention area covers nearly a fourth of the Earth’s high seas. The SPRFMO Commission consists of 16 members from Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Oceania as well as three cooperating non-contracting parties. In 2015, the members adopted a high seas boarding and inspection measure, which allowed the United States and all SPRFMO Members to board and inspect other SPRFMO Members fishing vessels, and record any suspected violations of SPRFMO conservation measures. The results of any such boarding by the U.S. Coast Guard, including any suspected infractions, are submitted to the SPRFMO Secretariat and the flag state of the boarded vessel for further investigation and action, as appropriate.

The Coast Guard has carried out counter-IUU fishing operations in other regional fisheries management organization areas for years. IUU Fishing has replaced piracy as the leading global maritime security threat. The recent operation against IUU fishing in the Eastern Pacific Ocean marked the first time in which the Coast Guard conducted high seas boardings and inspections under SPRFMO.

This effort also demonstrated the successful use by the United States of the high seas boarding and inspection procedures outlined in the 1995 United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement – which SPRFMO adopted in 2015 – to ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use of straddling fish stocks.

“U.S. Coast Guard presence south of the Galapagos Islands beyond Ecuador’s EEZ provided an effective presence in a difficult to reach region,” said Capt. Jim O’Mara, chief of enforcement, Coast Guard Eleventh District. “The planning and execution of the mission represented a whole-of-government approach to countering IUU fishing. Moving forward, we will build on the success of this operation and continue expanding cooperation with all our partners.”

The areas beyond any country’s exclusive economic zone are areas often exploited by fishermen engaged in IUU fishing, as they fish beyond the reach of most law enforcement entities. The Coast Guard’s operation directly supported Central and South American partnerships and their desires to monitor and enforce sustainable fishing activity near their exclusive economic zones, and expanded maritime domain awareness and information sharing throughout the newly expanded Eastern Tropical Pacific Marine Corridor.

The Coast Guard’s actions ensured law enforcement presence among a substantial fleet of more than 400 fishing and transshipment vessels. Much of the fishing in the Eastern Pacific is accomplished by distant water fishing vessels, in many cases supported by transshipment vessels. These large-scale operations traverse the world’s oceans, and can involve forced labor, human trafficking, and other human rights abuses, as well as maritime pollution. With their vast numbers operating in close proximity to one another, these distant water-fishing fleets may also have a significant impact on such environmentally sensitive waters as those of the Galapagos Islands, home to a vulnerable ecosystem.

Enforcing the rules of regional fisheries management organizations is about sharing the responsibility for protecting vulnerable fish stocks, the economic stability of coastal nations, the livelihoods of small-scale and artisanal fishermen, and protecting our ocean resources that feed global populations and fuel economies.

“Deploying our most capable national security cutters to the Eastern Pacific to detect and deter IUU fishing in the SPRFMO Convention Area for the second time this year is a clear signal of the U.S. commitment to support what is truly a global mission,” said Rear Adm. Andrew Sugimoto, commander, Coast Guard Eleventh District. We will continue to build on these partnerships, and leverage our unique authorities and capabilities to advance stability, security, and order in the maritime domain.”

-USCG-



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