

Coast Guard Interdicts Illegal Foreign Fishers in Pacific



A Coast Guard HC-130 Hercules aircrew from Air Station Barbers Point returns to Hawaii following a maritime domain awareness patrol in the Pacific Ocean on Feb. 20. The Coast Guard conducts MDA patrols routinely throughout the region. U.S. Coast Guard/Petty Officer 2nd Class Shane Christian HONOLULU – The U.S. Coast Guard interdicted several foreign vessels whose crews were fishing inside the U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) on two separate occasions in the first two months of 2020, according to the Coast Guard’s 14th District.

“While we’ve seen incursions into the EEZs of partners and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing on the high seas, these are the first interdictions we’ve had in the U.S. EEZ since 2012,” said Lt. Jason Holstead of 14th District Response Enforcement. “The combination of partnerships, electronic methods and putting assets on the scene to catch violators in the act is essential to deterring IUU fishing in Oceania.”

In both cases, the Coast Guard was conducting maritime domain awareness flights in the zones off Guam and Hawaii with Coast Guard HC-130 Hercules aircraft crews based at Air Station Barbers Point.

Case packages were forwarded to the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement for further actions. The investigations are pending.

The living marine resources (LMR) mission is one of two Coast Guard missions devoted to protecting fisheries inside and

outside U.S. waters. While LMR focuses on domestic fisheries, other law enforcement focuses on illegal incursions by foreign fishing vessels into the U.S. EEZ. An EEZ is defined as the region extending 200 miles beyond a nation's shores. The Coast Guard leverages partnerships and 13 bilateral agreements between the U.S. and other nations in the Pacific to enforce fisheries regulations and combat IUU fishing.

Fishing within the United States generates more than \$200 billion and employs 1.7 million people annually. IUU fishing represents an estimated monetary loss of \$10 billion to \$23 billion for legitimate fishers. Globally, commercially landed tuna and tuna products have a value of \$10 billion to \$12 billion per year to the fishermen who target these species and more than \$42 billion per year at the final point of sale. These conservative totals do not account for noncommercial tuna activity including sport fishing and tourism.

According to the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Pacific Ocean – also known as the “tuna belt” – represents 65% to 70% percent of globally harvested tuna.

According to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), the international body that manages tuna fishing in the same waters, state fishers caught nearly 2.85 million metric tons of the primary commercial tuna species in 2014. This catch's worth was valued at more than \$5 billion to fishers in the region and more than \$22.68 billion at the final point of sale. Tuna caught in the WCPFC convention area accounts for more than half of the landings, dock value and end value of all commercial tuna fisheries.

While the Coast Guard is not the only agency responsible for protecting fisheries, it plays a significant role. The Coast Guard has enforcement authority over 202 separate commercial fisheries.

“While regulation compliance among U.S. fishers is near 97%,

some of the lowest policed areas, such as the waters in the western and central Pacific, are responsible for the highest percentage of significant violations. This is where the efforts of the Coast Guard 14th District and partners are so important," Holstead said. "In 2019, we conducted numerous routine and analysis-based patrols throughout the region in support of IUU fishing detection and deterrence."