

Recommendation no. 58

Access of fishing vessels flying the flag of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the exclusive economic zone off the coast of the French department of Guiana

The Outermost Regions of the European Union depend heavily on their marine resources as the basis for their economic and social development. Amongst these resources, Red Snapper (*Lutjanus Purpureus*) plays a fundamental role in French Guiana, not only as an economic resource but also as an element of heritage, as it has long contributed to the competitiveness and development of local production, far beyond its commercial role.

French Guiana has an extensive coastline and abundant marine resources, which facilitates fishing activity. Most of the population lives near the coast, benefiting from access to marine resources and a milder climate. However, the presence of foreign fishing fleets, including those operating illegally¹, represents a significant challenge for local fisheries, since these fleets may exploit marine resources in an unsustainable way. Fishing vessels flying the flag of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela have been fishing in European Union waters off the coast of French Guiana for decades, subject to compliance with the legally binding acts of the European Union applicable to the conservation and management of fishery resources^{2,3}.

In 2024, the concentration of fishing licenses in a single operator resulted in an unbalanced situation, with 41 licenses out of 45 held by the same agent. This situation weakens the entire Guyanese value chain, by limiting access to the resource by other companies. This may have long-term repercussions, considering the low probability of an increase in the number of licenses due to the current state of scientific knowledge, regarding Red Snapper stocks in the EEZ of French Guiana.

We would highlight that the products deriving from fishing for Red Snapper serve as an attractive element for other fishing modalities (coastal and shrimp), boosting the economic value and export opportunities. Accordingly, when a single operator holds more

¹ Leforestier, S. (2023). *Estimation de la pêche illégale étrangère en Guyane française*. CRPMEM Guyane.

² Council of the European Union. (2010). *Draft Council Decision on access for fishing vessels flying the flag of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the exclusive economic zone off the coast of the French department of Guiana*. COM (2010) 807 final, 2010/0392 (NLE). Brussels: European Commission.

³ Council of the European Union. (2015). *Council Decision (EU) 2015/1565 of 14 September 2015 on the approval, on behalf of the European Union, of the Declaration on the granting of fishing opportunities in EU waters to fishing vessels flying the flag of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in the exclusive economic zone off the coast of French Guiana* (OJ L 244).

than 90% of the licences allocated, difficulties arise for production from artisanal coastal fishing, such as:

- Difficulty in placing products on the market;
- Increase in payment terms for producers;
- Decrease or even stagnation in purchase prices for producers.

By continuing along this path, there is a real risk that part of the Guyanese artisanal fleet will stop working due to financial difficulties, which will harm the local economy and the diversification of production.

CCRUP also considers that there are risks associated with a quasi-monopoly situation for the entire sector, namely:

- Barriers to entry: If a monopoly dominates the market, this may make it difficult for new competitors to enter, thus limiting options for small shipowners and reducing competition;
- Economic vulnerability: Dependence on a monopoly can make the shipowner vulnerable to price fluctuations and the policy changes of the latter. We are already seeing the effects of this distribution with outfitting that has not been paid for since July;
- Reduction in product diversity: A monopoly can lead to a situation where, instead of diversifying production, the company selects only a limited range of species for processing at its factory. This situation puts pressure on fisheries resources by focusing on one category of fish. Furthermore, there is nothing to force the monopoly operator to diversify its offer, or to rework its economic model, and it may abandon the production of coastal artisanal fishing.

Considering that the community licenses for fishing Red Snapper (*Lutjanus purpureus*) are renewed annually, with the aim of preserving this resource, whilst supporting the value chain, an equitable distribution of fishing licenses is imperative to ensure a sustainable, diversified and competitive activity for local agents.

Hence, the **Outermost Regions' Advisory Council (CCRUP)** recommends to the **European Commission and Member States, particularly France, to promote the equitable allocation of Venezuelan community licenses for the fishing of Red Snapper in 2025, distributed equally amongst the interested processing companies**, in order to

strengthen the resilience and competitiveness of the fishing chain in Guiana. This opinion is based on the need to structure the sector in order to better meet economic and social challenges, whilst preserving local fishery resources.

CCRUP recalls that there are several legislative instruments (in France and in the EU) to prevent monopolistic practices, such as the Commercial Code (articles L420-1 to L420-8), Law no. 86-912 of 6 August 1986 on competition, and Regulation (EU) no. 1/2003, with the latter allowing the European Commission to combat anti-competitive practices within the EU, including in France.

Considering these elements, the **CCRUP recommends that the issue of the distribution of Venezuelan licenses for 2025 should be regarded as a priority** at the next meeting on this aspect, in order to ensure the sustainable, equitable management of French Guiana's fishery resources.

Opinion of the *Comité Régional des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins de La Réunion (CRPMEM de La Réunion)*

The *CRPMEM de La Réunion* is unfavourable to the form, but not to the content, of this recommendation, as they consider that the request by the French Guiana members is legitimate. However, in its opinion, the recommendation pertains more to a "Guyanese-Guyanese" or "French-French" issue and thus does not fall within the scope of intervention of the CC RUP, which should not interfere in national affairs.