

Recommendation 69

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 Guyane

The outermost regions of the European Union (EU) depend heavily on their marine resources as the basis for their economic and social development. Among these resources, the Red Snapper (*Lutjanus Purpureus*) plays a key role in French Guiana, not only as an economic resource, but also as a heritage element, 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. The majority of the population lives close to 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, considering that these fleets can exploit marine resources unsustainably. For decades, fishing vessels flying the flag of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela have been fishing in EU waters off the coast of French Guiana, subject to compliance with legally binding EU acts on the conservation and management of fisheries resources^{2,3}.

In 2024, the concentration of fishing licences in a single operator resulted in an unbalanced situation, with 41 licences out of 45 held by the same agent. This situation weakens the entire French Guianese value chain, particularly by limiting access to the resource for other companies, and could have long-term repercussions, considering the low probability of an increase in the number of licences due to the current state of scientific knowledge about Lucian fish stocks in the EEZ of French Guiana.

We highlight that fishery products derived from Red Snapper serve as an attractive element for other fishing modalities (coastal and shrimp fishing), enhancing economic value and export opportunities.

¹Leforestier, S. (2023). *Estimation of foreign illegal fishing in French Guiana*. CRPMEM Guyane.

²Council of the European Union. (2010). *Proposal for a Council Decision concerning access by 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. ³Council of the European Union. (2015). *Council Decision (EU) 2015/1565 of 14 September 2015 concerning 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).

Consequently, when a single operator holds more than 90% of the licences allocated, difficulties arise for production from artisanal coastal fishing, such as:

- Difficulty in placing products on the market;
- Increased payment deadlines for producers;
- Decrease or even stagnation of purchase prices from producers.

If this path is pursued, there is a real risk that part of the French Guianese artisanal fleet will come to a halt due to financial difficulties, which will jeopardise the local economy and the diversification of production.

The 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 could make it difficult for new competitors to enter, thus limiting the options for small ship-owners and reducing competition;
- Economic vulnerability: Dependence on a monopoly can make a ship-owner vulnerable to price fluctuations and policy changes. We are already seeing the effects of this distribution with operators that have not been paid for since July;
- Reduced product diversity: A monopoly can lead to a situation where, instead of diversifying production, the company selects only a limited range of species for treatment in its factory. This puts pressure on the fish resource by focussing on one category of fish. What's more, there is no obligation on the monopolising operator to diversify its offer, or to reshape its economic model, and it can abandon the production of coastal artisanal fisheries.

Considering that the Community licences for fishing for the Red Snapper are renewed annually, with the aim of preserving this resource while supporting the value chain, a fair distribution of fishing licences is crucial in order to guarantee a sustainable, diversified and competitive activity for local stakeholders.

The CCRUP recalls that there are several legislative instruments (in France and in the European Union) to prevent monopolistic practices, namely the Commercial Code (Articles L420-1 to L420-8). Considering these elements, the **CCRUP recommends that the French Member State address the issue of the distribution of Venezuelan licences as a priority, in order to ensure the sustainable and equitable management of the fishery resources of French Guiana.**

Whereas, in our Recommendation No. 58 on *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 Guyane*, adopted on 18 February 2025, we recommended that the European Commission and the Member States concerned, in particular France, promote a fair allocation of Venezuelan Community licences for the Red Snapper fishery in 2025. Considering also that the European Commission, in its response to this recommendation, indicated that it had no jurisdiction over the matter and suggested transmitting this recommendation directly to the French Member State.

The Outermost Regions Advisory Council (CCRUP) therefore recommends that the French Member State promote an equitable allocation of Venezuelan Community licences for fishing for Red Snapper in 2025, distributed equitably among the interested processing companies, in order to strengthen the resilience and competitiveness of the fishing chain in French Guiana. This opinion is based on the need to structure the sector in order to better respond to economic and social challenges, while preserving local fishery resources.