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The Blue Justice Initiative and the Copenhagen Declaration on Transnational Organised Crime in the Global Fishing Industry

Introduction

The 2018 [Copenhagen Declaration on Transnational Organised Crime in the Global Fishing Industry](#) has 61 supporting countries worldwide, many of them African large ocean nations severely affected by fisheries crime. As the only international instrument addressing transnational organised fisheries crime, the aim of the Copenhagen Declaration is to develop a common understanding of what fisheries crime is, its associated challenges, and the measures needed to prevent it. Norway is the initiator and custodian of the Copenhagen Declaration and has also established the [Blue Justice Initiative](#) to assist States reach the declaration's political aspirations. In so doing, the Norwegian government through the Blue Justice Initiative supports States, primarily in the Global South, and government agencies at multiple levels, seeking to build political and institutional awareness and commitment to address fisheries crime, while retaining a core focus on strengthening and supporting practitioners in government agencies. In cooperation with other [Copenhagen Declaration States](#), [the United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\)](#) and other regional partners such as the [Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism \(CRFM\)](#), the Blue Justice Initiative supports the technological, institutional, and technical capability of government agencies to address fisheries crime. This research brief introduces the latest developments in the Blue Justice Initiative and the thinking behind it, including its research agenda.

Technological capability

In September 2023 the Norwegian government will launch the [Blue Justice Ocean Surveillance Programme](#). As part of the programme, Norway will provide Norwegian vessel tracking satellite data and maritime spatial analysis technology to government agencies worldwide addressing fisheries crime in their jurisdictions. The satellite data will be made available through the secure digital platform known as the [Blue Justice Community](#).

Tracking and analysing fishing and reefer vessels' movements in waters under their jurisdiction [is critical](#) to coastal States' ability to monitor and control fishing activities and identify and investigate fisheries crime. Yet, too many coastal States around the world [lack the resources](#) needed to carry out comprehensive sea patrols, nor do they have access to or expertise in comprehensive satellite-based vessel tracking analysis. Over the past decade Norway has developed [microsatellite technology aimed at advanced vessel trafficking monitoring](#) and has shared these data with Norwegian government agencies through a secure digital vessel tracking analysis platform known as [BarentsWatch](#), and administered by the Norwegian Coastal Administration. While in the past the main source of satellite vessel tracking data originated from signals picked up from vessels' Automated Information System (AIS) transponders, [these data are less reliable](#) as the transponders can have technical errors or be manipulated, most commonly by simply switching the AIS transponder off. The most recent Norwegian microsatellite – [NorSAT-3](#) – has overcome this challenge by using an experimental navigation radar detector that collects data from signals sent by vessels' navigation equipment other than AIS transponders. In the Blue Justice Community government agencies from across the world will now be able to access satellite data in a secure bespoke vessel tracking analysis software with features designed by analysts in government agencies to meet their needs when identifying and preventing fisheries crime.

Institutional capability

In addition to the technological vessel tracking tools, the digital Blue Justice Community is also a “community of practice”. The portal provides government agencies the opportunity to communicate directly and securely with other agencies both within a country and between countries. In March 2023, and with the assistance of UNDP, the Caribbean region established a regional [Blue Justice Hub in Kingston](#), Jamaica, and through which Caribbean States will support each other reach the goals of the Copenhagen Declaration.

In the Copenhagen Declaration, States recognise that inter-agency and cross-border cooperation is essential to address transnational organised fisheries crime. Yet, in practice, cooperation between government agencies tends to be challenging. No country is the same and cooperation cannot be forced. Rather, government agency cooperation is often the result of building trust and institutional capability, with practitioners being the experts on their institutional setting. As a community of practice, the Blue Justice Initiative is a partnership of peers. As such, the role of the Blue Justice Initiative is to inspire, encourage and enable government agencies; it does not instruct or demand. A successful engagement between a State and the Blue Justice Initiative is measured by ownership and commitment to the process within the country at political, institutional, and practitioner levels, and where the pace, activities and results are identified by the political leadership, government agencies and practitioners involved. Care is therefore taken to ensure that the Initiative's support to States is designed by the government agencies themselves. Yet the assistance of the Blue Justice Initiative, including capacity building and the development and use of tools such as the Blue Justice Community, can be relied on if needed. To this end, the Blue Justice Initiative also works closely with UNDP. UNDP is a UN agency with a worldwide presence and that is dedicated to supporting governments with achieving structural transformation and resilience at a systemic level through digitalisation and strategic innovation. UNDP is also the administrator of the Blue Justice Community.

Technical capability

Together with government agencies, regional organisations, and UNDP, the Blue Justice Initiative is developing modalities for institutional self-reflection, capacity building, and needs assessments through among others the interactive [Blue Justice Tabletop Exercises](#). Moreover, to assist government

agencies across the world making use of the vessel tracking analysis software in the Blue Justice Community, the Blue Justice Initiative has launched a secondment programme whereby government agencies can forward candidates for a two-week induction into vessel tracking analysis in the Blue Justice Community working alongside experts at the [International Blue Justice Vessel Tracking Centre in Vardø, Norway](#). Starting out in September this year, four secondments will take place from Cape Verde and Jamaica, on the agreement that these practitioners will assist colleagues in their countries and regions gain expertise in vessel tracking analysis in the Blue Justice Community.

Maritime crime in the fishing environment is said to be a [wicked problem](#) meaning that it is inherently difficult to solve. Each situation is unique and changing, and practitioners addressing fisheries crime face institutional, legal, and practical hurdles in their daily work. With the practitioner in focus, the Blue Justice approach to capacity building is one of peer-to-peer learning. The aim is to build on existing strengths and abilities within government agencies and empower practitioners by enhancing and expanding the tools, expertise and knowledge needed to address the challenges they face where they are. To support this aim, the Blue Justice Initiative's research agenda is one of multidisciplinary applied research to enhance knowledge and understanding on how to address fisheries crime. The [Blue Justice Dialogue Forum](#) was established in 2020 to be a meeting place between researchers and practitioners to crosspollinate knowledge of the practical realities of practitioners, the criminology of fisheries crime, and the effective use of measures and tools to address it. The theory of change is that exchanging knowledge and experience from both theory and practice will help identify areas for further study that will both enhance researchers' impact and assist government agencies when addressing fisheries crime.

Further reading:

Bunwaree, P. (2023). The illegality of fishing vessels 'going dark' and methods of deterrence. *International & Comparative Law Quarterly*, 72(1), 179-211, <https://doi:10.1017/S0020589322000525>

Witbooi, E., Ali, K.D., Santosa, M.A. *et al.* (2020). Organized crime in the fisheries sector threatens a sustainable ocean economy. *Nature*, 588, 48–56, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-020-2913-5>

Bueger, C. and Mallin, F. (2023). Blue paradigms: understanding the intellectual revolution in global ocean politics. *International Affairs*, 99(4), 1719-1739, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iia124>

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