

**13<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE SPRFMO COMMISSION**

*Santiago, Chile, 17 to 21 February 2025*

**COMM 13 – Obs 11**

**GFW Recommendations for Vessel Tracking at SPRFMO**

*Global Fishing Watch*



## Recommendations for Vessel Tracking Transparency at SPRFMO

---

### Introduction

- The South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO) has a critical mandate to ensure the sustainable management of fisheries resources within its jurisdiction. Vessel tracking transparency is central to ensuring the long-term conservation and suitable use of fisheries resources. By enhancing the visibility of fishing activities, vessel tracking transparency strengthens compliance, deters illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and fosters trust among Member States.
- This paper sets out the case for adopting robust measures to improve vessel tracking transparency within SPRFMO's regulatory framework, in line with a new United Nations call urging greater transparency of fisheries management within regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs).

### Global Fishing Watch

- Global Fishing Watch is an international non-profit organization dedicated to advancing ocean governance through increased transparency. By harnessing satellite technology and machine learning, Global Fishing Watch provides publicly available tools and data that allow governments, researchers, and civil society to monitor fishing activity across the globe. At Global Fishing Watch, we believe that transparency—making information available and accessible to everyone it affects—is crucial to good ocean governance.
- Despite being a global, publicly shared resource, there is little transparency about what takes place across the ocean—especially when it comes to fishing on the high seas. Vessel tracking is a key method to understanding this activity, but Global Fishing Watch has revealed that about 75 percent of industrial fishing vessels do not appear in public monitoring systems.

### The Growing Importance of Vessel Tracking Transparency

- Vessel tracking and vessel tracking transparency are becoming increasingly prominent in global fisheries governance. At the 35th session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI), parties agreed to initiate a process to consider a new international agreement on vessel tracking. This significant step was further recalled in the [2024 United Nations Sustainable Fisheries Resolution](#), highlighting the growing global commitment to vessel tracking as a key element of sustainable fisheries management. The Resolution specifically urges RFMOs to consider ways to better integrate transparent practices into fisheries management and promote data exchange.
- RFMOs like SPRFMO are poised to play a crucial and leading role in implementing and supporting this framework, ensuring alignment with international best practices and enhancing the effectiveness of regional efforts.
- SPRFMO is already at the forefront of vessel tracking through its Vessel Monitoring System (VMS), while Conservation and Management Measure (CMM) 02-2022 already requires the SPRFMO Secretariat to publish aggregated data on fishing activities, reflecting a commitment to openness.



However, there is significant potential to build on these measures to further enhance transparency and accountability.

- According to Global Fishing Watch analysis research, 96% of SPRFMO-registered vessels are visible on the Automatic Identification System (AIS). Additionally, many SPRFMO Member States already share VMS data publicly, demonstrating a commitment to transparency and paving the way for broader regional collaboration.

## The Case for Vessel Tracking Transparency

1. **Enhancing Compliance and Enforcement** Transparency in vessel tracking ensures that fishing activities are conducted in line with SPRFMO's CMMs. Shared and transparent access to tracking data would increase the secretariat's and members' ability to ensure that CMMs are being followed.
2. **Deterrence of Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing** IUU fishing undermines the sustainability of fisheries and the livelihoods of those who depend on them. Transparency in vessel tracking creates a powerful deterrent by identifying IUU fishers as those either not being publicly tracked, or being enabling civil society organizations and researchers to monitor and report suspicious activities. It also encourages industry to be better assured of the fish products in their supply chain.
3. **Promoting Equity and Trust Among Member States** Transparency fosters a level playing field amongst members. It ensures all vessels adhere to the same rules, avoiding competitive advantages gained through non-compliance. It builds trust among SPRFMO members by providing verifiable evidence of compliance and encourages collaboration and information sharing that benefits the entire region.

## Recommendations for SPRFMO

- Vessel tracking transparency is an essential tool for achieving SPRFMO's vision of sustainable and equitable fisheries management. By adopting and promoting transparency measures, SPRFMO can lead by example, setting a global standard for regional fisheries management organizations. As vessel tracking gains momentum globally, including through the work to be undertaken through COFI process, SPRFMO has an opportunity to align itself with this forward-looking agenda.
- To fully realize the benefits of vessel tracking transparency, SPRFMO should consider adopting new measures on public vessel tracking. This could be either through AIS or VMS, and would build upon the already high levels of usage and uptake by fishers and States.