



Article Operational strategies of the Colombian Navy against IUU fishing: Comparison with international models (2005-2024)

Estrategias Operacionales de la Armada de Colombia contra la pesca INDNR: comparación con modelos internacionales (2005-2024)

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Abstract: Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing is a significant threat to marine biodiversity, as well as the economic growth of coastal countries such as Colombia. The impacts are observable through depleted fishery resources, ecosystem breakdowns, and growing concerns over food insecurity. The Colombian Navy has committed to a major part comparative enforcement and has implemented roads for IUU/illegal fishing including; patrolling, satellite monitoring, and international collaboration. This literature review seeks to analyze the strategies, capabilities, and barriers for the Colombian Navy to combat IUU fishing, and how effective the Colombian Navy is at achieving goals in environmental protection and economic development. A systematic analysis was conducted based on strict inclusion and exclusion criteria, utilizing databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, online databases such as Google Scholar, in addition to official documents and international regulations, and technical reports from AUNAP and the FAO. The review covers the period of 2005 to 2024. The results highlight clear operational advances; however, logistics, technology, and inter-institutional coordination remain barriers. The study also offers a series of recommendations based on successful international experiences to enhance control and management of IUU fishing in a Colombian context.

Keywords: Illegal fishing; Marine resources; IUU fishing; Maritime interdiction strategies; Maritime security.

Resumen: La pesca ilegal, no reportada y no regulada (IUU, por sus siglas en inglés) es una amenaza significativa para la biodiversidad marina, así como para el crecimiento económico de países costeros como Colombia. Los impactos son observables a través de la disminución de los recursos pesqueros, el colapso de los ecosistemas y las crecientes preocupaciones sobre la inseguridad alimentaria. La Armada Nacional de Colombia ha asumido un papel importante en la ejecución de acciones comparativas y ha implementado estrategias para la pesca IUU/ilegal, incluyendo patrullajes, monitoreo satelital y colaboración internacional. Esta revisión bibliográfica tiene como objetivo analizar las estrategias, capacidades y barreras para que la Armada Nacional de Colombia combata la pesca IUU, así como la efectividad de la Armada Nacional en el logro de objetivos en protección ambiental y desarrollo económico. Se realizó un análisis sistemático basado en estrictos



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Copyright: © 2025 by authors. Licensed by Escuela Naval de Cadetes "Almirante Padilla", COL. This article is freely accessible distributed in the terms and conditions of *Creative Commons Attribution* (CC BY) license (https:// creativecommons.org/licenses/by/ 4.0/). criterios de inclusión y exclusión, utilizando bases de datos como Scopus, Web of Science, bases de datos en línea como Google Scholar, además de documentos oficiales, regulaciones internacionales e informes técnicos de AUNAP y la FAO. La revisión cubre el período de 2005 a 2024. Los resultados destacan avances operacionales claros; sin embargo, la logística, la tecnología y la coordinación interinstitucional siguen siendo barreras. El estudio también ofrece una serie de recomendaciones basadas en experiencias internacionales exitosas para mejorar el control y la gestión de la pesca IUU en el contexto colombiano.

Palabras clave: Pesca ilegal; Recursos marinos; Pesca INDNR; Estrategias de interdicción marítima; Seguridad marítima.

1. Introdution

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (de las Naciones Unidas para la Alimentación y la Agricultura FAO 2025), the main categories of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing include:

- 1. Illegal fishing: activities conducted by national or foreign vessels in waters under the jurisdiction of a State, without the required authorization or in violation of national laws.
- 2. Unreported fishing: operations where vessels fail to report or misreport their catches, in breach of national regulations.
- 3. Unregulated fishing: fishing activities carried out by stateless vessels or those flying the flag of a State not party to regional fisheries management organizations, thus violating established conservation measures.
- Fishing in areas without applicable regulations: activities in regions lacking explicit conservation rules, without fulfilling the State's responsibility for marine resource protection.

IUU fishing poses a serious threat to marine biodiversity by contributing to the over exploitation of species, destruction of sensitive habitats, and disruption of ecological balance. It undermines the sustainability of legal fisheries, endangers food security, and causes significant economic losses for coastal States (de las Naciones Unidas para la Alimentación y la Agricultura FAO 2021). In Colombia, this problem is compounded by the vast extent of its jurisdictional waters—covering 48.86% of the national territory (del Océano 2024) and the persistent activity of illegal fishing fleets, both domestic and foreign. In response, the Colombian Navy has played a pivotal role in maritime surveillance and control through patrol operations, satellite monitoring, and international cooperation (Siglo 2024). However, there remains a gap in systematically assessing the actual effectiveness of these strategies, making it difficult to determine their concrete impact on environmental preservation and economic development.

This review aims to address the following research question: What have been examples of effective operational and technological strategies by the Colombian Navy and others from 2005-2024 to combat IUU fishing? From this, the review seeks to evaluate what strategies, capabilities, and challenges the Navy has faced in addressing IUU fishing, assess whether these strategies are effective in terms of sustainability and maritime security, and understand how that could be addressed in the future. This information is important to understand in order to enhance marine conservation policy and improve institutional effort regarding our marine heritage.

Colombia must address this issue in ecologically and economically important areas like the Seaflower Biosphere Reserve of the San Andrés archipelago and the Malpelo Fauna and Flora Sanctuary in the Pacific (del Océano 2024). These include diverse biodiversity but are at risk from IUU fishing. Likewise, the detection and control of these illicit acts

have several operational challenges including logistics, whether the Navy has surveillance technologies, and coordination with fisheries and marine security authorities.

Additionally, obligations under international instruments, such as the FAO Port State Measures Agreement, obligate Colombia to augment its inspection and enforcement capacities. Representative cases, such as dynamite fishing off Santa Marta (Informador 2019), the illegal capture of parrotfish (Corrales Oyola 2023; Tiempo 2022), the presence of industrial vessels in protected areas (de Colombia 2016), and shark finning (Guzmán 2023), illustrate the scope and seriousness of the issue and the need for prompt, dynamic, and comprehensive responses.

The article consists of several sections. Section 1 introduces the problem of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing, the importance of the issue for Colombia, and the mission of the Colombian Navy regarding IUU Fishing. Section 2 sets out the Contributions of the research, explaining the overall plan which includes full coverage of the operational impact of the Colombian Navy, describing the interventions, promoting changes in technology, and proposing comparisons with international monitors and models. Section 3 describes the approach taken to gather and analyse the data. It describes how the sources and databases were selected, the criteria that determined the validity of the information, and the methods used to analyze the qualitative data. Section 4 provides the main discussion about the Colombian Navy's operational impact against IUU fishing, the Colombian Navy's technological capabilities, the legal frameworks to which the Navy holds itself accountable, and the coordination between institutions in Colombia and Internationally. Section 4.1 looks at the operational impact of the Colombian Navy fighting IUU fishing. Section 4.2 looks at the Colombian Navy's strategies and technological capabilities in the fight against IUU fishing through surveillance and control. Section 4.3 allows a comparison of the Colombian Navy's strategies to International Monitoring and Control models, and whether these models can be applied in a Colombian context. Section 4.4 explains the challenges and opportunities to strengthen the current strategy, identifying main challenges providing suggestions for overcoming them. Section 4.4 offers Proposals to Optimize the Navy's Response, including ideas for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the Colombian Navy to combat IUU fishing. Section 5 sets out the Conclusions and reviews the main findings, and then recommends strategies to develop the Colombian Navy's role in addressing IUU fishing. Finally, Section 6 proposes possible paths for Future Work, and the need for further research related to maritime security and fisheries management.

2. Contributions

The study also gives an in-depth analysis of the Colombian Navy's strategies and capabilities in terms of the illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) from 2005-2024. The contributions of this research to the existing literature are multiple:

- 1. **Systematic Assessment of Colombian Maritime Strategies:** Unlike the previous efforts that traditionally focused on individual operational or technological components of the marine environment, this study systematically analyzed the Colombian Navy strategies, operations, and challenges for IUU fishing; evaluated the implications of these strategies in terms of effective protection of the marine environment and development of the economy, and presents an analysis of the complexity of impact.
- 2. Comparison with International Models: The study not only reflects particularly the Colombian case but also tries to make a comparison with international models and systems of control and monitoring of fisheries. The use of international models and best practices, such as those in France, Panama, and Ecuador, can assist to suggest ways in which new opportunities can be integrated into the Colombian context and provide suggestions for a valuable recruitment of international experiences to inform global maritime security and IUU fishing management.
- 3. **Technological Innovations:** The work considers some of the most valuable technologies that have been incorporated into the colombian navy's fight against IUU,

notably satellite platforms and technological integration (like AI), and real-time data application monitoring systems.

- 4. **Policy and Institutional Recommendations:** The article provides practical policy recommendations to strengthen inter-institutional and international coordination in the fight against IUU fishing. It also emphasizes the importance of improving legal frameworks and enforcement measures, which are often neglected in existing literature. This work proposes the creation of more robust protocols for coordination between national and international agencies, aiming to enhance operational response and enforcement.
- 5. **Identification of Operational Limitations and Strategic Opportunities:** The study also identifies critical limitations in current operations, such as logistical constraints, technological gaps, and coordination challenges. In doing so, it offers strategic opportunities for institutional strengthening, suggesting pathways for optimizing resource allocation and improving the efficiency of patrols and surveillance operations.

By addressing both operational and technological aspects of IUU fishing management, this research significantly advances knowledge in the field of maritime security, offering both theoretical insights and practical solutions to improve the effectiveness of anti-IUU fishing strategies in Colombia and beyond.

3. Methodology

This review was conducted through a systematic and structured analysis of academic and technical literature published between 2005 and 2024. The objective was to identify, analyze, and synthesize relevant information regarding operational and technological strategies implemented to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, with a focus on the Colombian case and internationally applicable models.

Types of sources and selection criteria

The review included official documents, national and international regulations, peerreviewed scientific articles, postgraduate theses, and reports from specialized organizations in marine conservation and maritime security. Journalistic sources, outreach publications, and institutional documents directly produced by the Colombian Navy were excluded to avoid bias and ensure a critical and independent approach.

The consulted entities were grouped as follows:

- 1. **National**, including the National Authority for Aquaculture and Fisheries (AUNAP), the Colombian Ocean Commission (CCO), and the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development.
- 2. **International**, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), regional fisheries management organizations, and environmental agencies from Latin America, Europe, and Asia that have developed successful strategies against IUU fishing.

Databases and search strategy

Searches were conducted in Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, as well as in institutional repositories from universities and international organizations. Keywords were combined using Boolean operators (AND, OR), including: "illegal fishing", "marine resource protection", "IUU", "Colombia", "maritime control strategies", "maritime security", "fishing regulations", "international experiences", and "lessons learned". The 19-year time range was defined to capture the evolution of policies and strategic approaches.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria:

- Studies addressing IUU fishing that affects living marine resources, especially fish.
- Research focused on Colombia or comparable geostrategic contexts.

- Documents analyzing monitoring, control, and regulatory efforts.
- International experiences offering applicable insights to the Colombian context. **Exclusion criteria:**
- Studies focusing on non-living infrastructure or unrelated ecological impacts.
- Literature with a purely foreign scope and no comparative elements.
- Documents lacking operational strategy analysis or relevance to biodiversity.
- Sources based on internal Navy reports without external validation.

Analytical variables

The analysis was based on the following variables:

- Type of control strategy (operational, technological, legal, cooperative).
- Implementing institution or agency.
- Estimated impact on IUU fishing reduction.
- Scalability and sustainability of the strategy.
- Identified obstacles and required resources.

Final corpus

Out of an initial pool of 71 documents, 28 met all inclusion criteria, resulting in a robust, representative, and critical dataset. This corpus served as the foundation for the comparative analysis between the measures implemented by the Colombian Navy and those adopted in similar international contexts.

4. Discussion

4.1. Operational Impact of the Colombian Navy in the Fight Against Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing

Based on data provided by the Statistics Division of the Naval Operations Directorate of the Colombian Navy, Figure 1 shows the annual volume of IUU fishing seized between 2005 and 2024, expressed in kilograms. In most years, seizures did not exceed 39 tons. However, there were notable spikes in 2006 and 2016, with recorded volumes surpassing 60 and 90 tons, respectively.

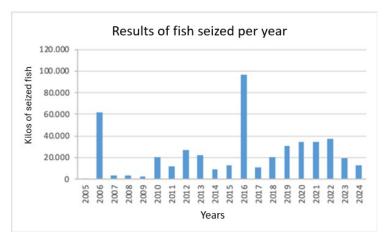


Figure 1. Results of illegal fishing seized per year (Period 2005 to 2024).

Note: The amount of illegal fishing seized per year is quantified in kilograms according to the operational results of the Colombian Navy Units between the years 2005 and 2024. Figure created by the author.

The significant increase observed in 2016 is directly associated with the seizure of 70 tons of illegally caught yellowfin tuna from an industrial fishing vessel. This event marked a turning point in the institutional perception of IUU fishing in Colombia. It occurred as part of a joint operation between the Colombian Navy and the National Authority of Aquaculture and Fisheries (AUNAP), which resulted in the immobilization of the vessel

Cabo de Hornos. The vessel was intercepted within 12 nautical miles of a zone where industrial fishing is strictly prohibited, in accordance with AUNAP Resolution 00899 issued on July 29, 2013. This area belongs to the Utría National Natural Park, an environmentally sensitive protected zone.

Figure 2 displays the geographic distribution of total seizures recorded during the study period. The jurisdiction of the Pacific Naval Force accounts for over 50% of the total volume of IUU fishing seized. This finding highlights the high vulnerability of the Pacific region to illegal fishing activities and underscores the need for differentiated monitoring and enforcement strategies.

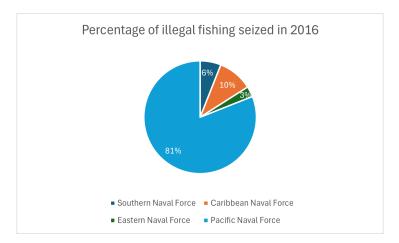


Figure 2. Proportion of illegal fishing seized by the Naval Force for the year 2016. **Note:** The amount of illegal fishing seized by the Naval Force in 2016 is quantified as a percentage. Figure created by the author.

Figure 3 presents a comparative analysis of the number of seizure events per region between 2005 and 2024. The data confirm that the Pacific region reports the highest incidence, with more than half of all documented cases. Among the most commonly seized species are sharks—whose illegal trade poses a critical threat to marine ecosystems—and the parrotfish, a keystone species essential to coral reef conservation, particularly in the Seaflower Biosphere Reserve.

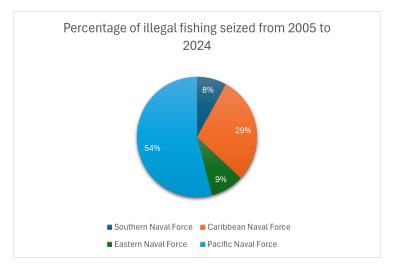


Figure 3. Percentage of illegal fishing seized from 2005 to 2024.

Note: All kilos of illegal fish seized by the Navy from 2005 to 2024 are referenced as a percentage. Figure created by the author.

4.2. Strategies of the Colombian Navy

4.2.1. Technological Capabilities of the Colombian Navy in the Surveillance and Control of Illegal Fishing

The Colombian Navy has developed and strengthened its technological capabilities for the surveillance and control of maritime and riverine spaces, integrating various units and systems that effectively contribute to the detection and prevention of illegal activities, including Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing.

The Coast Guard Component

The Coast Guard Corps of the Colombian Navy is a key player in safeguarding national waters and tackling illicit activities at sea. As evidenced by many of the cases evaluated in this study, coastal patrols, as performed by this component, have been one of the most important operational characteristics to be used effectively in raising awareness of IUU fishing. Their ongoing presence in the areas of sea allows for constant surveillance of fishing activities, assisting in the conservation of marine resources and adherence to national and international laws and regulations.

Amongst its tasking, the Coast Guard Corps maintains and operates Traffic Control and Surveillance Stations (ECTVM), which have radars that are able to detect vessels out to between 12 and 24 nautical miles (NM). These stations further coordinate with the Colombian Maritime Authority and (DIMAR), to keep detailed records of vessels arriving into and departing coastal areas and assist in identifying irregular patterns of navigation. The sensors and radars used in these stations include:

- **TERMA SCANTER 5000 Series Radar:** Designed for coastal and maritime surveillance, it provides accurate detection in adverse conditions and can identify large vessels up to 24 NM and smaller crafts within approximately 10 NM, depending on weather and sea conditions.
- FURUNO 3000 Series Radar: These 250-watt solid-state radars enable continuous monitoring of vessels operating within designated surveillance zones.
- Kelvin Hughes SharpEye Radar: Used in coastal monitoring stations, this radar system enhances the detection of small vessels and objects of interest in complex maritime environments.

In addition to these surveillance systems, the Coast Guard also has Rapid Reaction Units (URR), which are vessels designed to make real-time interceptions of suspicious ships. The Rapid Reaction Units are marked for maritime inspections and while also applying fisheries policy, applying coordinated and swift response is crucial for IUUrelated incidents. The use of Rapid Reaction Units increases the state response capacity but does not eliminate illegal fishing, issues with IUU fishing persist and require ongoing inter-institutional coordination.

Offshore and Coastal Surface Units

The Colombian Navy also operates Surface Units with enhanced detection and surveillance capabilities that significantly bolster maritime control operations. These include:

- Platforms equipped for helicopter landings during surveillance and enforcement missions.
- Long-range 3D surveillance radars, enabling the detection and tracking of vessels over wide operational areas.
- Combat management systems for real-time processing and analysis of maritime data.

Focusing on detection capabilities, these units also incorporate high-performance Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for maritime surveillance operations:

 V-BAT BLOCK-A M5.1-INT: This Vertical Take-Off and Landing (VTOL) drone is designed to be used in reconnaissance and surveillance missions in strategic areas. The ability to operate in confined spaces makes it a very useful platform for deploying on naval assets. It features a flight endurance of more than eight hours and high definition electro-optic sensors, allowing it to identify and track suspicious vessels even in low visibility conditions.

• ScanEagle Block E: This UAV was developed for long-range surveillance operations. It has an autonomy of more than 20 hours and high resolution multispectral camera systems to obtain high quality images of targets. Its ability to fly at higher altitudes, allows for analyzing navigation patterns and the presence of vessels performing Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing within Colombian jurisdictional waters.

The combination of these advanced technologies, along with coordinated operations between Coast Guard Units and Surveillance Stations, enhances the Colombian Navy's ability to detect and respond to IUU fishing activities, aiding in the preservation and sustainable management of the country's oceanic resources.

4.2.2. Enforcement of National and International Regulations

The Colombian Navy aids in upholding laws and regulations that protect fisheries resources. In 2021, Presidential Decree 1835 (Pública 2021) which has measures for to manage, regulate and promote fisheries and aquaculture in Colombia. The decree emphasizes that the National Authority of Aquaculture and Fisheries (AUNAP) has a vital role in sustainably managing these resources. Also in 2022, Law 2268 was passed with targeted social benefits for artisanal fishers as recognition for their contribution to the national economy and food security (de la República de Colombia 2022).

4.2.3. Use of Technology for Monitoring

Monitoring and control of IUU fishing have been strengthened through the implementation of advanced technologies. The Colombian Navy utilizes satellite surveillance systems, such as the Vessel Monitoring System (VMS), which enables real-time tracking of fishing fleet activities and the detection of suspicious movements in protected maritime zones (de Acuicultura y Pesca (AUNAP) 2022).

4.2.4. Interinstitutional and International Coordination

The fight against illegal fishing requires effective collaboration among various national and international entities. Within the framework of the Joint External Circular—a legal and administrative tool that outlines coordinated action protocols—the Navy works interagency with the Office of the Attorney General, the Special Administrative Unit of Migration Colombia, the National Authority of Aquaculture and Fisheries (AUNAP), and the National Natural Parks of Colombia to prosecute offenders and manage seized assets (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores and de Colombia 2015). This circular seeks to improve coordination in monitoring IUU fishing and other illicit maritime activities.

To address cross-border challenges, the Colombian Navy also maintains cooperation with naval forces from neighboring countries to counter transboundary IUU fishing, thereby enhancing regional maritime security (Siglo 2023). At the international level, Colombia is a signatory to the FAO Port State Measures Agreement, which facilitates cooperation with other states for the inspection and control of vessels suspected of engaging in IUU fishing (de las Naciones Unidas para la Alimentación y la Agricultura FAO 2021).

In addition, the Colombian Navy actively participates in the multinational Operation Orion, an international maritime campaign originally focused on combating narcotrafficking. Since 2024, IUU fishing has been incorporated as one of the key illicit economies addressed by the campaign. As part of this integration, IUU fishing has also been included in the scope of the International Center for Research and Analysis Against Maritime Drug Trafficking (CIMCOM), thus contributing to a more comprehensive approach to combating maritime criminal activities (de Investigación y Análisis contra el Narcotráfico Marítimo Armada de Colombia 2025).

4.2.5. Identified Limitations in Enforcement

Despite the efforts of the Colombian Navy in combating IUU fishing, several challenges persist that limit the effectiveness of existing strategies. One of the primary limitations relates to logistical and financial resources, which hinder the ability to maintain continuous surveillance across all national maritime zones—particularly in remote areas such as the Colombian Pacific (de Acuicultura y Pesca (AUNAP) 2022). Furthermore, limited cooperation from certain neighboring states complicates the interdiction of foreign vessels engaged in illegal fishing in Colombian waters that later seek refuge in other jurisdictions (Siglo 2023).

Judicial prosecution of offenders also remains a significant challenge. The persistence of impunity and the lack of exemplary sanctions undermine control and deterrence efforts. The aforementioned Joint External Circular highlights institutional coordination gaps that constrain the national response capacity. As García Morrillo and Villavicencio Mendoza (2023) points out, the implementation of integrated policies in countries like Ecuador—where improved interagency collaboration has led to more efficient enforcement processes—has helped reduce recidivism in IUU fishing. This suggests that a more robust institutional cooperation framework in Colombia could yield more effective outcomes in the fight against IUU fishing.

4.3. Comparison with International Strategies

4.3.1. Implementation of International Fisheries Monitoring and Control Models: Applicability for the Colombian Navy

Colombia has adopted strategies aligned with global efforts to combat Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, particularly in line with principles outlined in international frameworks such as the Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing Strategic Outlook of the United States Coast Guard (Guard 2020). These strategies revolve around improved maritime control, international collaboration, and a more robust regulatory framework. The Colombian Navy has made tremendous progress in detecting and sanctioning illegal acts in their jurisdictional waters – through maritime patrols, interdiction operations and interinstitutional cooperation.

In the United States, the United States Coast Guard (USCG) assumes a role somewhat similar to that of the Colombian Navy, primarily in monitoring and enforcing against illegal fishing. The USCG has achieved success in regard to illegal fishing, understandably in great part due to how advanced their technologies land-based, vessel-based and satellite-based have become for use in the monitoring and detection of vessels. Colombia has some room to advance its use of satellite monitoring systems, reconnaissance drones and aerial patrol missions in areas which are remote or difficult to access. By launching into the use of technology, Colombia could improve early detection of IUU fishing vessels, enhance operational response to violations, reduce total sailing hours for vessels used in policing or no longer rely solely on traditional patrols - adding to overall efficiencies (Guard 2020).

Additionally, partnerships with countries and international organizations that are already employing these technologies will potentially provide access to the advanced surveillance systems that involve the ability to share real-time information. Enhancing Colombia's maritime control system would not only address the issue of IUU fishing, but also enhance maritime safety and ultimately conserve the fisheries resources for the future.

Use of Artificial Intelligence and Satellite Monitoring in the Fight Against IUU Fishing

Satellite monitoring and artificial intelligence (AI) has become key in the fight against IUU fishing. The use of satellites and AI allows for proactive advance warning of illegal activities, allows us to better utilize patrol resources, and allows for automated analysis of data and subsequent better management of marine resources. Internationally, several countries (e.g. France—for the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, CCAMLR; Nigeria; Ecuador; Panama, etc.) have initiated and implemented

platforms that incorporate satellite imagery, Automatic Identification System (AIS), Vessel Monitoring System (VMS), evidence and AI to better improve surveillance at sea.

CCAMLR's Experience in the Use of Satellite Imagery

An important example of satellite monitoring implementation is the initiative developed by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). In 2014, France and the CCAMLR Secretariat initiated a pilot project for the purpose of using new technology to enhance fisheries surveillance in the Convention area. The project amalgamated satellite imagery with the information derived from the Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) and the Automatic Identification System (AIS) to improve upon the function of identifying and tracking suspicious vessels in the Convention Area (for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) 2014).

In the 2016 pilot, nearly 500 satellite images of approximately 10 million km² were evaluated. Of the 500 instances, 19 were identified as demonstrating early signs of illegal fishing activity, where five vessels had a very high probability of being engaged in IUU fishing (Jacobs 2020). Due to the overall success of the program, the program was extended in 2018, and with continuous technological improvement for the surveillance of IUU fishing. In 2019, the program had also investigated the ability of using GPS units fitted to albatrosses, to multiply the "reach" of the satellite surveillance in areas that are inaccessible (for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) 2019; Jacobs 2020).

CCAMLR's experience shows that joint use of satellite technology with real-time monitoring systems and/ or operations is an effective method for addressing illegal fishing. These or similar types of models in Colombia may strengthen national surveilling and enforcement abilities in national jurisdictional waters and provide effective operational performance by the Colombian Navy or other entities responsible for marine management or resource protection.

THEMIS Platform by CLS

THEMIS is a sophisticated web-platform developed by the French multinational company Collecte Localisation Satellites (CLS) for fisheries management and development. As a web-platform connected to institutional databases, it allows efficient processing and analysis of vast amounts of data. The interface can utilize one or more map windows allowing vessel position tracking in real time along with spatial analysis.

Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) data (vessel positions, region of fisheries, and catch reports) are entered via a Graphical User Interface (GUI) web application (i.e., modifications of vessels positional data or deletion of information stored at a database). THEMIS WEB: user the ability to track fishing vessels in real-time, visualize location trajectories, and model fishing probabilities. Further, THEMIS WEB allows the combination of other data sources to support and aid decisions in maritime monitoring (Vinueza Burgos and Gaibor Castro 2024).

THEMIS Platform in Panama

Panama has initiated the national version of the THEMIS platform developed by the Aquatic Resources Authority of Panama (ARAP) and the Ministry of Environment. The satellite monitoring system aids management and administration of the country's aquatic resources, analyzing the enormous amounts of data through artificial intelligence processing. The system automatically generates alerts to authorities when suspicious fishing activity is detected, thus significantly enhancing maritime surveillance capacity in Panamanian waters.

The deployment of THEMIS has streamlined patrol costings, specifically reducing patrol inspections and maximizing enforcement on higher risk targets. The implementation of this program is a significant step forward in the continuing battle against illegal fishing in the region (Logan 2024).

SKYLIGHT Platform

The SKYLIGHT platform has been implemented in a number of fisheries monitoring projects. This system utilizes artificial intelligence and satellite monitoring to identify questionable vessels based on past data and transportation analysis, which has allowed authorities to capture illicit values in the fishing industry. By using SKYLIGHT, in combination with the THEMIS system, Panama has increased detecting illegal fishing enforcement and is thereby increasing surveillance and control of marine resources (Skylight 2024).

Table 1 provides a comparative overview of the THEMIS and SKYLIGHT platforms, both used internationally to improve fisheries oversight. In Panama, ARAP has adopted THEMIS for resource management, while SKYLIGHT is implemented in other international contexts as a complementary maritime surveillance system.

Platform	Country/Institution Responsible	Technology Used	Benefits
THEMIS	Panama's Authority of Aquatic Resources (ARAP)	AI, Satellite Monitoring, AIS, VMS	Optimization of patrols, automated alerts
SKYLIGHT	Various countries, used by NGOs and surveillance agencies	AI, Historical Data Analysis, Satellite Monitoring	Identification of illegal fishing patterns, integration with other platforms

Table 1. Comparison between THEMIS and SKYLIGHT platforms.

4.3.2. Impact of These Technologies in Combating IUU Fishing

Satellite monitoring technologies have proven to be essential tools in combating Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, significantly improving control and surveillance in protected areas. A clear example of their impact is observed in the Galápagos Marine Reserve (GMR), where unauthorized vessel incursions have markedly decreased over the past five years. While 28 irregular vessels were reported in the 2017–2018 period, by 2022 this number had dropped to just five. This sharp reduction underscores the effectiveness of satellite-based systems in detecting and deterring illicit fishing activities (International 2023; Vinueza Burgos and Gaibor Castro 2024).

These tools have also been broadly adopted by maritime enforcement authorities. According to recent studies, 100% of surveyed officers indicated familiarity with satellite monitoring technologies and confirmed their regular use in planning surveillance operations—demonstrating successful integration into modern fisheries management frameworks (Food and of the United Nations FAO 2022; Vinueza Burgos and Gaibor Castro 2024).

Another significant benefit is the optimization of operational resources. Unlike traditional patrol systems, which require substantial investment in personnel and vessel maintenance, satellite-based platforms offer a more sustainable and cost-effective alternative. Their implementation has reduced operational costs without compromising detection capabilities, while also enabling real-time monitoring and automated analysis of suspicious fishing patterns (Skylight 2024; Trusts 2021).

The combined use of satellite monitoring and artificial intelligence has become a cornerstone in strengthening maritime enforcement capacity and incident response. As summarized in Table 2, international strategies implemented by agencies such as the United States Coast Guard (USCG), the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), and advanced platforms like THEMIS and SKYLIGHT have significantly enhanced the identification of suspicious vessels and the efficient allocation of patrol resources.

Strategy / Platform	Description	International Application	Potential for Implementation in Colombia
USCG's IUU Fishing Strategy	Aligned with the "Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing Strategic Outlook" of the U.S. Coast Guard. Strengthens maritime control, international cooperation, and the regulatory framework.	Implemented in the U.S. with patrols and interdiction operations.	Colombia has adopted patrols and interinstitutional coordination but needs to improve the use of advanced technologies.
Satellite	Use of satellite imagery, AIS,	Various countries	Colombia needs increased
Monitoring	VMS systems with AI	have implemented	investment in monitoring
and AI	algorithms to detect illegal	advanced platforms	systems and drones for
Technologies	fishing.	for maritime surveillance.	surveillance in remote areas.
CCAMLR	Integration of satellite	In 2016, France and	Implementing similar
Experience	imagery with VMS and AIS	CCAMLR analyzed	strategies could optimize
1	to identify suspicious vessels	500 satellite images,	surveillance and control in
	in the Convention Area.	detecting 19 signs of	Colombian waters.
		IUU fishing and 5	
		suspicious vessels.	
THEMIS	A web application for	Used in various	Its integration in Colombia
Platform by	fisheries management with	countries to integrate	could improve information
CLS	institutional databases and	VMS, AIS data, and	management and
	real-time vessel mapping.	catch reports.	decision-making in fisheries
		-	surveillance.
THEMIS	Version developed by ARAP	Issues automated	Implementation could
Platform in	and the Ministry of	alerts to strengthen	improve the detection of
Panama	Environment of Panama,	maritime	suspicious patterns in
	with AI to process data in	surveillance.	Colombian waters.
	real time.		
SKYLIGHT	AI-based system and	In Panama, its	Colombia could benefit from
Platform	satellite monitoring to	combination with	integrating SKYLIGHT with
	identify suspicious vessels	THEMIS has	its current systems to
	by analyzing historical data	improved the	strengthen surveillance.
	and movement patterns.	detection of illicit	
Immost - f	Enchlos offectives control and	activities.	Colombia april
Impact of Satellite	Enables effective control and	In the Galápagos Marina Reserva	Colombia could reduce operational costs and
Technologies	reduces illegal incursions in protected areas.	Marine Reserve, illegal vessel	optimize patrols through
rectitiologies	protected areas.	incursions decreased	satellite systems.
		from 28 in 2017-2018	satemite systems.
		to 5 in 2022.	
Resource	Reduces dependence on	Successfully adopted	It would strengthen
Optimization	traditional patrols and	in several countries.	operational intelligence and
1	lowers operational costs.		planning for fisheries
	1		surveillance.

Table 2. Comparison of international strategies in the fight against IUU fishing.

A comparative analysis of these systems suggests that SKYLIGHT, with its real-time AI analytics and pattern recognition capabilities, could be particularly suitable for Colombia's Pacific coast, where vast and remote areas hinder conventional surveillance efforts. Additionally, THEMIS—already adapted to national contexts such as Panama—offers strong integration with existing Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS), making it an ideal candidate for enhancing Colombia's centralized maritime control infrastructure.

Integrating such technologies in Colombia would represent a critical advancement in the protection of marine resources. By reducing pressure on conventional patrol assets and

enabling early detection of IUU fishing, these systems can strengthen national prevention and enforcement strategies, while promoting the long-term sustainability of the country's maritime ecosystems.

4.4. Challenges and Opportunities to Strengthen the Strategy 4.4.1. Obstacles in Surveillance and Control

Surveillance and control of Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing face several critical challenges. One of the main obstacles is the vast extension of Colombia's maritime territory, which poses significant difficulties for comprehensive monitoring. According to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982), coastal states have rights and responsibilities over their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), which requires adequate supervision mechanisms. However, in practice, patrol capabilities are limited, and the Colombian Navy must optimize the use of its available resources.

Moreover, underreporting and informality in the fishing sector hinder the detection of illegal activities. The Food and Agriculture Organization (de las Naciones Unidas para la Alimentación y la Agricultura FAO 2021) highlights that in many countries, the lack of vessel and catch records facilitates IUU fishing by preventing effective oversight. This challenge is particularly pronounced in artisanal fisheries, which, due to their dispersed and informal nature, are often difficult to regulate and monitor.

In Colombia, artisanal fishing is subject to various restrictions, such as seasonal bans on specific species, area closures, gear limitations, and the mandatory use of exclusion devices. Additionally, certain practices are explicitly banned, including the use of explosives (e.g., dynamite). These measures demonstrate that IUU fishing is not limited to industrial operations, but also encompasses artisanal activities, making the enforcement of regulations more complex and urgent in remote coastal communities (de Acuicultura y Pesca (AUNAP) 2022; Oceana 2021).

4.4.2. Lack of Investment in Technology

Combating IUU fishing requires the deployment of advanced technologies for vessel detection and tracking. However, the availability of satellite monitoring systems and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) remains limited in many regions. The de las Naciones Unidas para la Alimentación y la Agricultura FAO (2021) notes that effective monitoring depends on tools such as the Automatic Identification System (AIS) and the Vessel Monitoring System (VMS), whose coverage in Latin America is still insufficient. Without expanded technological infrastructure, maritime control agencies remain reactive rather than preventive in addressing illicit fishing operations.

4.5. Proposals to Optimize the Navy's Response 4.5.1. Integration of New Technologies

The incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI), drones, and satellite monitoring can significantly enhance maritime surveillance capacity. According to the United States Coast Guard (USCG, 2020), advanced technologies have improved the early detection of suspicious vessels and reduced response times to incidents.

While the Colombian Navy has made important strides in maritime interdiction operations, the experiences of international bodies such as CCAMLR and the implementation of platforms like THEMIS and SKYLIGHT in neighboring countries demonstrate the potential of satellite imagery, predictive algorithms, and real-time data analysis to detect illegal fishing vessels—without the need for immediate on-site presence.

Since 2024, Colombia's CIMCOM (International Center for Research and Analysis Against Maritime Drug Trafficking) has facilitated the use of the SKYLIGHT platform in Traffic Control and Maritime Surveillance Stations (ECTVM) as a consultation tool for verifying the activity of fishing vessels within their respective jurisdictions. While ECTVM personnel have incorporated the platform into monitoring and reporting workflows, operational limitations remain regarding decision-making protocols, communication chains, and

command strategies during events of interest. These gaps impact information flow and reduce the effectiveness and responsiveness of maritime enforcement operations.

The deployment of SKYLIGHT in Colombia represents a crucial milestone, as it improves suspicious vessel identification, optimizes resource usage, and enhances operational readiness. However, to guarantee its utmost functionality, a formal national protocol should be adopted to identify the central authority for managing the platform, set standard operation procedures, and define horizontal flows of communication across all operational units.

Increasing collaboration with international organizations that are already using these technologies would also grant us access to strategic intelligence and would enable us to carry out more efficient joint operations. Modernizing Colombia's maritime control system in conjunction with a regional cooperation approach would not only strengthen the sovereignty and security of our maritime territory but would also contribute significantly to the sustainability of fisheries resources to find the right balance between economic development and environmental conservation (Food and of the United Nations (FAO) 2023; Oceana 2021; (WWF) 2022).

4.5.2. Strengthening Legislation and Sanctions

The continuous issue of IUU fishing in Colombian maritime territory has made authorities understand the need for a coordinated and effective response. Currently, authorities are being faced with an increase of vessels engaging in IUU fishing and illegal fishing activities, which poses a significant threat to Earth's resources. The Joint External Circular (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores and de Colombia 2015) was signed with the intention to provide a framework for the improvement of management and control for illegal fishing in this context.

The fundamental objectives of this circular were stop and dissuade illegal fishing, enhance both control and surveillance protocols, and guarantee an efficient chain of custody. It attempted to complement objectives that were to support timely communications between the actors involved; and also to support the goal of deterring and eliminating offences of related activities as well.

In addition, the Circular allows for a better comprehension of the procedures and functions of the role of each authority that is part of the struggle against illegal fishing. This is a coordinated working framework and functions to be carried out by each of the authorities when identifying and reporting to the transgressors; it deals with the coordination between the Colombian Navy, the national authority of aquaculture and fishing, and other agencies to be able to carry out timely and appropriate actions in cases of illegal fishing. And let 's hope that with the Circular, we will be able to see the powers of each of the agencies in fighting the illegal fishing.

In conclusion, the Joint External Circular is a very important part of improving fisheries management in Colombia. We hope it can assist in strengthening the fight against illegal fishing and thus contribute to the conservation of the natural resources of the Colombian nation, and all of this will be possible as it addresses the needs identified, established objectives and identified duties.

4.5.3. Strategies for Cooperation with Neighboring Countries and International Organizations

The fight against IUU fishing requires an integrated and coordinated international response. In this regard, the Colombian Navy has strengthened its cooperation with multilateral organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Permanent Commission for the South Pacific (CPPS), and the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol), to improve information exchange, harmonize regulations, and carry out joint maritime surveillance and control operations (del Pacífico Sur (CPPS) 2023; Food and of the United Nations FAO 2020).

A key example of this cooperation is the Colombian Navy's participation in multinational exercises like Operation Orion, a joint effort involving multiple nations to combat various transnational threats, including drug trafficking and IUU fishing (Siglo 2024). These operations have strengthened interoperability with naval forces and security agencies of neighboring countries, optimizing detection, interdiction, and prosecution of illicit activities in international waters and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) (Nacional 2023).

Additionally, Colombia has collaborated with the CPPS on projects aimed at protecting marine resources and implementing the AMERP (Regional Monitoring and Enforcement Program), which has enhanced its ability to control vessels suspected of engaging in illegal fishing activities (Food and of the United Nations FAO 2022). The strengthening of these alliances is crucial for addressing the challenges of IUU fishing, as many of these vessels operate in cross-border zones and use tactics to evade detection. In this context, international cooperation not only facilitates more effective operational responses but also contributes to the development of regional policies and agreements that ensure greater protection of marine ecosystems (Borg 2007).

The neighboring countries bordering Colombia's maritime territory that play an essential role in regional cooperation include Panama, Ecuador, and Venezuela. Strengthening relationships with these nations is critical, as many IUU vessels operate in shared waters, further complicating detection and enforcement efforts.

5. Conclusions

The issue of Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing in Colombia poses a significant threat to marine biodiversity, ecosystems, and fishery resources. While it may not represent a more immediate threat compared to other maritime crimes such as drug trafficking, IUU fishing remains a critical challenge for the Colombian Navy, which considers it an essential factor in its surveillance operations. Despite the progress made in operational and technological capacities, the lack of a more centralized and strategic policy framework limits the effectiveness of the measures implemented.

A key challenge identified in this study is the absence of a specific procedure manual for illegal fishing activities in Colombia, which would integrate the efforts of all competent authorities. While the Joint External Circular represented a step forward in interinstitutional coordination, regulatory gaps and insufficient articulation with key agencies continue to hinder effective action. For 2025, under the leadership of the Colombian Navy's Command (CCO), it is expected that the regulatory framework will be strengthened, and specialized protocols will be developed to improve response times and align with international standards.

The Colombian Navy's operational capacities are solid, with the Maritime Surveillance and Control System providing a foundation for intervention. However, the integration of advanced technological platforms, such as those implemented in Ecuador and Panama, could significantly enhance space management and surveillance efficiency. Experiences like the implementation of THEMIS have proven highly effective in reducing IUU fishing through the automated analysis of data and improving operational decision-making processes.

While the Colombian Navy's interdiction capacities have improved, they can be made more effective through stronger detection and monitoring systems, which would allow for more targeted operations against vessels likely involved in illegal activities. This approach would reduce operational costs, increase successful outcomes, and guarantee more efficient and precise control of maritime spaces.

The SKYLIGHT platform, implemented by the CIMCOM Directorate against Drugs since 2024, has shown promising results in supporting Traffic Control and Maritime Surveillance Stations (ECTVM). However, operational limitations, communication difficulties, and challenges in command and control remain, which affect the potential of this tool. With better structuring and clearer communication protocols, SKYLIGHT could significantly improve operational outcomes and bolster the Navy's response to IUU fishing incidents. Satellite monitoring technologies have proven to be a key tool in strengthening operational intelligence and enhancing response times to incidents. The use of AI-driven systems for detecting suspicious vessels and illegal activity patterns can optimize resource allocation and improve the precision of interdiction operations.

The Colombian regulatory framework provides a solid legal base for maritime interdiction, reinforcing the legitimacy of the Colombian Navy's actions against illicit maritime activities. The combination of advanced technologies and a well-established legal framework would not only improve control over IUU fishing but also strengthen maritime security and contribute to the sustainability of marine resources.

6. Future Work

While this study provides a comprehensive analysis of the Colombian Navy's strategies against Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, there are several areas that warrant further investigation to enhance the effectiveness of maritime security and fisheries management. Future research could explore the following avenues:

- 1. **Expansion of Technological Integration:** While this study highlights the use of satellite monitoring systems, AI, and real-time data analysis, further research is needed to evaluate the integration of newer technologies, such as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and blockchain for traceability in the fishing supply chain. Investigating the potential of these technologies to improve real-time monitoring and operational response could provide valuable insights into how technology can further optimize anti-IUU fishing efforts.
- 2. **Long-Term Impact of International Cooperation:** Future studies could explore the long-term effectiveness of international cooperation frameworks and agreements, such as the FAO Port State Measures Agreement and multinational operations like Operation Orion. Research could focus on assessing how these international efforts contribute to the reduction of IUU fishing and how they can be strengthened through enhanced data-sharing and collaborative enforcement measures.
- 3. **Socioeconomic Impact Analysis:** There is a need for deeper analysis into the socioeconomic consequences of IUU fishing control measures on local communities. Future work could explore the impact of strengthened enforcement on artisanal fisheries, examining both the benefits and challenges of regulation for small-scale fishermen. This could include studying the trade-offs between environmental protection, economic development, and the livelihoods of coastal communities.
- 4. **Evaluation of Policy Implementation:** While this study provides recommendations for improving legal frameworks, a future research direction could involve evaluating the actual implementation and enforcement of these policies. A comparative study between regions with varying levels of policy enforcement could provide a clearer picture of what works best for IUU fishing management and which factors influence successful policy outcomes.
- 5. Regional Maritime Security Collaboration: As IUU fishing is often transnational, future work could focus on enhancing regional maritime security collaborations. Research could investigate models for regional coordination, particularly among countries sharing maritime borders, to improve the collective capacity for detecting and responding to IUU fishing. Examining existing regional frameworks and identifying gaps in coordination could inform future efforts to develop more robust security mechanisms in maritime spaces.
- 6. **Climate Change and IUU Fishing:** The effects of climate change on marine ecosystems are likely to exacerbate the issue of IUU fishing. Future research could explore the intersection of climate change and IUU fishing, examining how shifting fish populations and changing ocean conditions may influence illegal fishing patterns. Understanding these dynamics would be crucial for adapting existing strategies to emerging environmental challenges.

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By pursuing these areas of research, future work can further contribute to the development of more effective, sustainable, and technologically advanced solutions for combating IUU fishing, strengthening international collaboration, and ensuring the protection of marine resources for future generations.

Author Contributions: The authors' contributions to this work are detailed in Table 3.

Table 3. Author contributions.

Contribution	Umaña, A.	Carranza, R.	Calderón, A.
Conceptualization/Methodology	Х		
Software/Visualization			Х
Validation/Formal analysis	Х		
Investigation/Resources		Х	
Data curation			Х
Writing - original draft	Х		
Writing - review / Editing			Х
Supervision/Project administration		Х	
Funding acquisition		Х	

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