

Australia commits \$55.8 Mn to intensify fight against illegal fishing and biosecurity threats

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The Australian Government has unveiled a significant new investment of \$55.8 million to strengthen enforcement against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, underscoring growing concerns over maritime security, biosecurity risks, and the long-term sustainability of marine resources.

Announced in conjunction with the International Day for the Fight Against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing, the funding package forms part of the 2026-27 Federal Budget and is aimed at enhancing surveillance, compliance, and operational capabilities across Australia's northern maritime borders. The package includes dedicated support for the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) as part of a broader effort to safeguard fisheries, coastal ecosystems, and national sovereignty.

The move comes amid mounting global concern over IUU fishing, which is estimated to account for nearly 20 per cent of the world's fish catch, resulting in annual economic losses exceeding \$32 billion. Beyond economic damage, illegal fishing is increasingly viewed as a catalyst for environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and the spread of transboundary pests and diseases.

Australian authorities have intensified efforts in recent years to deter foreign fishing incursions, particularly in remote northern waters. Enforcement operations conducted over the past financial year resulted in dozens of vessel forfeitures and the seizure of substantial quantities of illegally harvested marine resources, reflecting the scale and persistence of the challenge.

The latest investment seeks to strengthen Australia's layered defence strategy, which combines maritime patrols, intelligence-sharing, port-state controls, and regional cooperation to prevent illegally harvested seafood from entering supply chains. The approach also aims to curb the growing biosecurity risks associated with unauthorised vessel movements and unregulated harvesting activities.

The announcement carries significant implications for Australia's seafood industry, which supports approximately 14,000 jobs, generates an annual production value of around A\$3.7 billion, and contributes roughly A\$1.5 billion in exports. At the same time, Australia remains a major seafood importer, bringing in more than 227,000 tonnes of edible seafood annually, valued at approximately A\$2.4 billion, making supply-chain integrity an increasingly important policy priority.

Government officials emphasised that the additional funding is designed not only to strengthen enforcement but also to reinforce Australia's broader commitment to sustainable fisheries management, environmental stewardship, and regional maritime cooperation. The initiative reflects a growing recognition that illegal fishing is no longer solely a fisheries issue, but a complex challenge intersecting with food security, trade integrity, ecological conservation, and national security.

As pressure on global fish stocks intensifies and geopolitical competition expands across maritime regions, Australia's latest investment signals a more assertive approach to protecting its marine resources while supporting the resilience of legitimate seafood industries and coastal communities.