

BUILDING MULTI-AGENCY MECHANISMS AGAINST FISHERIES CRIME

THE CASE OF JAMAICA

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ABSTRACT

The Jamaican multi-agency mechanism is seen as a successful model to enhance efforts to end fisheries crime. This briefing paper presents the advantages of this mechanism, the problems encountered when establishing it, and strategies to avoid these problems when establishing similar mechanisms in other countries and international organizations.

Jamaica is a small island State of a mere 2.839 million inhabitants. Compared to other states, the country is a lower-middle-income country with [a GDP per capita of 42% of the world's average GDP per capita.](#) Jamaica's territorial waters are approximately 5,255 square nautical miles. Jamaica also has a contiguous zone of 6,139 square nautical miles. Its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is 52,826 square nautical miles of ocean space, more than eighteen times the size of Jamaica's land territory (25-26 times when including contested and joint regime waters). This fact, together with the existence of a joint regime zone with Colombia, contributes to Jamaica's status as a maritime power and its successes in developing and enhancing Caribbean cooperation.

This briefing paper presents the key strategies that explain Jamaica's success in creating cooperative mechanisms to address fisheries crime and prevent Illegal, Unauthorised, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing, based on an interview with the CEO of the National Fisheries Authority of Jamaica, and includes comments from other experts on these strategies. It also uses these experiences to sketch more general lessons learned for international cooperation to address fisheries crime.

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THE MULTI-AGENCY MECHANISM

Jamaica has a large maritime zone compared to the size of its landmass and the resources available to it. The country nevertheless suffered extensively from fisheries crime and IUU fishing by foreign vessels.

This required the most efficient use of Jamaican resources, which again prompted the development of a joint response. Jamaica formed the multi-agency mechanism (MAM) in 2023, with twelve different departments participating.¹ This was, in one sense, a natural development in response to these challenges. Fisheries crime cases and IUU fishing by foreign vessels often had ties to drug crime, gun-smuggling, and document-related fraud. Dr Gavin Bellamy, CEO of the National Fisheries Authority of Jamaica, stresses that the MAM has been a considerable success and that his recommendation for other countries is to develop such a mechanism as fast as possible.²

The Jamaicans found that the mechanism made them *better at reacting fast* to fisheries crime and IUU fishing by foreign vessels and better at getting *different perspectives* on how to solve problems related to their investigations. A coordination mechanism also enabled Jamaica to better use its available resources by creating a common forum, enabling the various government institutions to *inform other institutions of the capacities* available to them. Lastly it created a *better understanding of cooperation in general*, an understanding that Jamaica brought with them into international cooperation,

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1 The original participants were the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Mining, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Ministry of National Security, Maritime Authority of Jamaica, Jamaica National Fisheries Authority, Port Authority of Jamaica, Jamaica Customs Agency, Jamaica Constabulary Force, Jamaica Defence Force and the Passport, Immigration and Citizenship Agency.

2 Blue Justice Seminar at Stanford University; 2025

and in their work with the Blue Justice Caribbean hub, the world's first regional Blue Justice Hub, created for intelligence sharing, knowledge adoption, improved awareness, and coordinated law-enforcement efforts in the Caribbean, launched in 2023.

CHALLENGES

Jamaica faced initial resistance from some government agencies when establishing the mechanism. **First**, some institutions did not immediately see the relevance of establishing such a mechanism, holding the view that fisheries crime and IUU fishing by foreign vessels in Jamaican waters did not concern their area of responsibility. In the words of Dr Bellamy:

“ At times, with joint initiatives, persons may not see the value at the beginning. This was the case in this instance. You could sense that persons attended because they were instructed to do so. Some of the partner agencies were not primarily involved in the fisheries sector so they openly questioned their involvement as they did not realize the value they would be able to add or the impact that we would have as a collective body.”

Second, variations in organisational culture and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) created some challenges in the cooperation. Organisations simply had different perspectives and solutions to problems. As noted above, these differences created advantages. Different actors created awareness of aspects of diverse types of data and different

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An aerial photograph of the ocean showing white, frothy waves crashing against a dark, deep blue sea. The perspective is from directly above, looking down at the water's surface. The waves are concentrated in the lower half of the frame, creating a stark contrast with the dark water. A white rectangular text box is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the image.

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uses of this data. The ties between IUU fishing by foreign fishing vessels and fisheries crimes with organised crime, including drug and human smuggling, enabled the Mechanism to play a role in hindering other forms of crime as well. Yet, the various perspectives also created some challenges.

It should be noted that other forms of problems might be faced by other actors attempting to set up mechanisms like Jamaica. For instance, strong personalities, interagency rivalries, and competition might contribute to *lowering the trust level*. USA scholars have also observed that, in some circumstances, where some government agencies have an elevated level of corruption, cooperation can enable what Stanford Professor Harold Trinkunas calls a **corruption flow**, that is, corruption from one agency flowing over to other agencies. In some circumstances, as Professor Trinkunas observes, some agencies may have internal weaknesses that may also influence other agencies.

HOW CAN SUCH PROBLEMS BE SOLVED?

Key words here are **trust** and **familiarity**. The Jamaican effort focuses a lot on generating trust. First, the **establishment of trust** through informal contacts who agree with the idea of creating a multi-agency mechanism. Informal contacts between members of various agencies that are potential participants in a multi-agency mechanism should take place long before the formal establishment of such a multi-agency mechanism. Such contacts will enable the parties to hammer out a form of agreement through interaction in informal settings and increase the understanding of each other's agencies in a pre-mechanism phase. The frequency of interaction

will also contribute to trust-building after the mechanism is created.

As suggested by LT-Col Ryan Gladding, another way of creating trust, especially in a setting of large-scale organisational rivalries, could be to rotate the leadership of interagency coordination mechanisms after they are created.³ An additional way could be to create a multi-agency group that together hire a leader for a limited period of time.

The gains and benefits of the various institutions participating in such mechanisms will also, over time, make participants more positive about participation. Dr Bellamy describes how partners who expressed initial doubt about the mechanism became more positive over time, even as early as the first meeting:

“ Remarkably, by the midpoint of the meeting, there was great enthusiasm as partners were able to see firsthand the significance of their expertise and the benefits of knowledge sharing. This collaborative spirit and knowledge exchange is now integral to what we do.”

Although not a factor in Jamaica, it should be noted that cooperation might hinder corruption by introducing an institution to the role expectations of ‘cleaner institutions’ and, in a worst-case scenario, put the agency with the greatest capacity in the lead. Corruption will be dealt with more thoroughly in a later paper. Professor Trinkunas also highlights the importance of ensuring cooperation and interaction at the lower level of the various institutions in

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3 Blue Justice Seminar at Stanford University; 2025

order to facilitate ownership of interagency cooperation through the participating institutions and tactical relevance. As expressed by Trinkunas,

“ there is no replacement for working in the same room, the cooperation will also be enhanced over time”⁴

CONCLUSIONS

The Jamaican multi-agency mechanism has been extraordinarily successful and illustrates the benefits of cooperation and coordination. The mechanism enhances speed, efficient use of resources, data, and technology sharing. There is a high likelihood that it will be a model for other countries, for international cooperation, as well as for public-private partnerships.

⁴ Ibid.

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The Blue Justice Policy Brief is a cooperative project between the Norwegian University of Life Sciences and the Norwegian Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries