



FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF SOMALIA
MINISTRY OF FISHERIES AND BLUE ECONOMY

29 March 2026

SUBJECT: REGISTRATION AND FLAGGING OF FISHING VESSELS IN SOMALIA

1. The Ministry of Fisheries and Blue Economy is mandated under Somalia Law of Fisheries Management and Development (law No 008 of 2023) to manage all fishing vessels in the Federal Republic. This includes registration, licensing, and controls in their operations within and outside Somalia, and enforcement of international fishing conventions which Somalia is Party.
2. MFBE recognizes that Ministry of Ports and Marine Transport is mandated by law to maintain Somalia ship register in terms of International Maritime Organization (IMO), including flagging of all vessels, safety at sea, and other maritime /shipping aspects.
3. In terms of Somalia fisheries Law (No 008 of 2023), fishing vessels are categorised as follows:
 - a. Artisanal fishing vessels: this includes all vessels up to 12 meters in length, and less than 20 GT (gross tonnage);
 - b. Semi-industrial fishing vessels: Vessels between 12 and 24 meters in length;
 - c. Industrial fishing vessels: vessels above 24 meters in length.
4. In terms of Article 79 of Somalia Fisheries Law and IMO conventions, the cut-off points for enforcement of international fishing vessel registration and flagging is 24 meters. Somalia is a member of IMO since 1978, hence is bound by IMO rules.
5. This implies that artisanal fishing vessels and semi-industrial fishing vessels below 24 meters operating exclusively in Somalia EEZ are not required to be on international ship register (IMO number) or flagged in terms of international conventions. Only industrial fishing vessels are required to be registered and flagged in terms of IMO rules.
6. In terms of Somalia fisheries law, all fishing vessels, regardless of size, are supposed to be registered, and licensed to fish, only after they have passed suitability

assessment for safe fishing operations. While conducting these suitability assessments, MFBE is required to enforce the Torremolinos and Cape Town agreements on fishing vessels, and Somalia fisheries competent authority regulations on seafood safety.

- 7.** In considering registration of industrial fishing vessels, article 80 of Somalia Fisheries Law provides ‘standards for endorsement of fishing vessels’.
- 8.** Article 80(1) states that: ‘(1) Any application for registration made by a vessel that is equipped or is likely to carry out fishing or related activities in Somali waters, including foreign vessels, charter vessels and joint venture vessels, shall not be granted by the Ministry of Ports and Marine Transport unless the Director General (MFBE) first endorses such registration.’
- 9.** This article of Somalia law provides a link for obligated cooperation between MFBE and MPMT in registration, and eventual flagging of fishing vessels.
- 10.** First, a fishing vessel applies for registration as a fishing vessel to MFBE, which is evaluated according to a set of criteria outlined in article 80 of the fisheries law. This criteria is fisheries-specific, such as international standing of the vessel in terms of regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) such as IOTC, IUU background checks, among others.
- 11.** Once the vessel passes the fisheries criteria for registration, it is then endorsed by the DG (MFBE) in terms of the law, for consideration for registration and flagging by MPMT as a Somalia ship, and hence entered into Somalia ship register in terms of IMO requirements.
- 12.** It is important to note that fishing vessels, just like all other ships, are registered in only one country. A foreign flagged fishing vessel seeking to license for one year to fish in Somalia waters may choose to do so whilst flying the flag of country of registration, without re-flagging to Somalia.
- 13.** Such a foreign vessel does not need to be registered or flagged to Somalia, and only needs a fishing license. This is also the case for other foreign cargo vessels calling Somalia ports for business, and this is acceptable in terms of international law.
- 14.** Even though artisanal and semi-industrial fishing vessels do not require IMO registration and flagging, both MFBE and MPMT need to collaborate to ensure that they are locally registered by both ministries, and they are seaworthy. This will be important to improve safety at sea, which is a challenge currently, as we have unacceptable high numbers of Somali citizens who lose their lives at sea annually, whilst fishing.

15. Both Ministries (MFBE and MPMT) have responsibilities on this matter within their legal mandates, and MFBE welcomes an opportunity to discuss this matter with MPMT at the earliest convenience.

Kind Regards,

Abdi Dirshe
DIRECTOR GENERAL