



COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

SUB-COMMITTEE ON FISH TRADE

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UPDATE OF FAO'S WORK ON TRACEABILITY AND THE VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES FOR CATCH DOCUMENTATION SCHEMES

Executive Summary

This document provides an update on the activities undertaken by FAO on traceability in fisheries and aquaculture value chains and the Voluntary Guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes (VGCDS) following the 17th Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade (COFI:FT) in Vigo, Spain, 2019. These activities include normative work, technical assistance and capacity building, as well as relevant partnerships and collaboration with initiatives and organizations.

Suggested action by the Sub-Committee

- Comment on FAO's work on traceability and catch documentation schemes (CDS) during the inter-sessional period;
- Provide guidance for the continuation of FAO's work on traceability and CDS, including technical assistance and capacity building requests from developing countries, particularly those related to the draft guidance on advancing end-to-end traceability and the practical guidance on VGCDS; and
- Suggest actions to FAO and provide recommendations for the establishment of partnerships and collaboration with international initiatives and organizations.

BACKGROUND

1. Transparent, legal and sustainable fish¹ value chains require the establishment and proper implementation of robust traceability systems² and CDS. As today's fish value chains are often extend beyond national boundaries, ensuring the effectiveness of such systems requires the cooperation of multiple partners across both the public and private sectors. There are challenges posed by an increasingly globalized landscape for trade; these are compounded by the inherent fragmentation of associated value chains, especially for small-scale producers. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many underlying vulnerabilities in food systems, making the need for ensuring sustainable, transparent and traceable fish value chains all the more apparent.

2. The 17th Session of COFI:FT expressed support for FAO to produce a practical guidance document on key technical and pragmatic aspects of the VGCDS, compiling guiding information and giving in-depth explanation for Members on establishing trade measures and related CDS to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. In addition, the Sub-Committee requested the continuation of awareness-raising activities on CDS, and emphasized that FAO should continue to provide technical assistance for Member's to implement programmes that combat IUU fishing.

3. The 17th Session of COFI:FT also recommended that FAO develop insights and address gaps in developing and implementing traceability systems for both the private sector and government. The Sub-Committee also reiterated the importance of sharing the associated conclusions with governments, the private sector and other stakeholders. In addition, technical assistance and support were identified as instrumental in enhancing the benefits to small-scale fisheries, particularly through the alignment of certification schemes, traceability and catch documentation requirements within the SSF Guidelines. The Sub-Committee also encouraged FAO to continue to provide technical assistance to Members to develop and implement traceability systems while, recognizing the different applications of these systems, such as food safety, legality, ecolabelling, catch documentation and food fraud.

UPDATE ON NORMATIVE WORK

4. There is a need to establish effective traceability systems that reflect the complexity of modern markets while implementing effective national validation and verification processes of CDS. In this regard, FAO has developed two guidance documents; "Understanding and implementing catch documentation schemes – A guide for national authorities" was published in early 2022, while "Advancing end-to-end traceability: Critical Tracking Events (CTEs) and Key Data Elements (KDEs) along Capture Fisheries and Aquaculture Value Chains" is to be published in July 2022.

Understanding and Implementing Catch Documentation Schemes – A guide for National Authorities

5. The document "Understanding and implementing catch documentation schemes – A guide for national authorities"³ addresses national responsibilities for determining and ensuring legal provenance under existing CDS. The document, published as part of the FAO series on Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries, was developed as a handbook, seeking to provide practical guidance on voluntary practices for providing data, handling CDS documents and related processes, promoting compliance at the national level. It aims to improve and harness monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) and product tracking tools to support more effective CDS implementation, strengthening the integrity of value chains for wild capture fisheries. The document is aligned with the VGCDS framework.

¹ Used as a collective term, fish encompasses finfish, crustaceans, molluscs and other aquatic animals.

² The UN Global Compact, in its "The Ocean Stewardship 2030 roadmap", recognized that ensuring fully traceable seafood is one 1 of 10 ambitions for growing sustainable ocean business, and one of the five tipping points for a healthy and productive ocean by 2030. <https://unglobalcompact.org/library/5742>

³ [fao.org/3/cb8243en/cb8243en.pdf](https://www.fao.org/3/cb8243en/cb8243en.pdf)

6. The first section of the document describes the existing international legal and policy instruments, the operational commitments undertaken by regional fishery bodies, and the assurances provided by subregional or national level competent authorities supporting CDS. The second section addresses the architecture of CDS, describing the various existing designs and shared features in order to identify CTEs in the value chain and the specific KDEs to be collected and validated. The third section deals with KDEs and underlying functional requirements. The concept of functional requirements calls on countries to determine, in advance, how to align and prioritize national information resources with CDS validation requirements most appropriately. It addresses fishing vessels, catches, transshipments, landing and product tracking information, setting a new, dynamic paradigm that moves away from filling in forms. The fourth section identifies opportunities for implementing CDS principles at the national level through three exercises designed to assist countries in understanding and fulfilling the functional requirements that underpin CDS validation, while exploring and quantifying national capacity.

7. A first draft of the document was completed in 2020. This formed the basis for five national virtual workshops in Chile, the Philippines, Thailand, Costa Rica and Ecuador that were held in 2021. These workshops provided the opportunity to evaluate the document against various national conditions, information needs and CDS experiences. Feedback from each workshop was collated and used to revise the document, improving clarity and honing the key messages while improving and standardising the benchmarking exercise materials.

8. Efforts supporting the strengthening of national processes for compiling and sharing legal provenance data within a CDS framework will continue under FAO's Global Programme to support the implementation of the Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA) and Complementary International Instruments, Regional Mechanisms and Tools to Combat Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing.

Advancing end-to-end traceability: Critical Tracking Events and Key Data Elements along Capture Fisheries and Aquaculture Value Chains⁴

9. Between 2020 and 2022, FAO developed a draft guidance document on “Advancing end-to-end traceability: Critical Tracking Events and Key Data Elements along capture fisheries and aquaculture value chains” focusing on the design of traceability systems, specifying what information need to be recorded at each step of the supply chain and by which State along fish value chains, and recognizing the needs for data interoperability⁵ to facilitate any future transition to digital traceability systems. The draft guidance addresses (1) the analysis of traceability interlinkages along value chains based on country-specific traceability mechanisms,⁶ (2) the development of a standardized understanding of CTEs and KDEs, and (3) the establishment of authoritative sources and supporting verification mechanisms.

10. Between March and April 2021 the document underwent an online public consultation, which enjoyed the participation of a wide range of stakeholders from 42 Member Nations, and three virtual regional consultations,^{7,8} with the participation of more than 120 delegates from 34 Member Nations and 6 international and regional fishery and aquaculture organizations⁹.

11. The regional consultations confirmed the relevance and comprehensiveness of the proposed CTEs and KDEs in aquaculture and capture fisheries. It was highlighted that due consideration should

⁴ The draft guidance corresponds to information document: COFI:FT/XVIII/2022/Inf.10.

⁵ Data interoperability is defined as the ability to join-up and merge data without losing meaning

⁶ These are often essential for verifying and corroborating submitted data.

⁷ A summary report of the 3 consultations corresponds to information document: COFI:FT/XVIII/2022/Inf.9.

⁸ Asia (25–27 January 2022), Near East and North Africa (27–29 September 2021), Latin America (14–16 September 2021).

⁹ Commission for Inland Fisheries of Latin America and the Caribbean (COPESCAL), International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), International Regional Organisation for Plant and Animal Health (OIRSA), Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA), World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), and the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC).

be paid to small-scale producers, while the importance of recognizing equivalency of data and flexibility in data needs, particularly for developing countries, was reiterated.

12. During the regional consultation process, delegates identified country-level gaps in awareness and commitment to compliance with market requirement, a lack of harmonized traceability requirements, high implementation costs and a lack of technical capacity when developing traceability systems for capture fisheries and aquaculture value chains.

UPDATE ON CAPACITY BUILDING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR MEMBERS

FAO's Global Programme to support the implementation of the Agreement on Port State Measures and Complementary International Instruments, Regional Mechanisms and Tools to Combat IUU Fishing

13. FAO has continued to provide capacity building and technical assistance to developing countries to combat IUU fishing through its Global Programme to support the implementation of the PSMA and Complementary International Instruments, Regional Mechanisms and Tools to Combat IUU Fishing (PGM/MUL/2016-2021/PSMA).¹⁰ Since its inception in 2017, the programme has provided technical assistance and capacity building activities to 49 developing countries, five of which have received support linked to the effective implementation of catch documentation schemes.

CDS related work in Tuna Regional Fishery Management Organizations (t-RFMOs)

14. The chapter on model conservation and management measure for a harmonized tuna CDS¹¹ is currently being considered by the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) CDS Working Group.¹² The technical papers¹³ developed under the FAO-GEF project “Sustainable management of tuna fisheries and biodiversity conservation in the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction”¹⁴ have become a reference for capacity-building tools and technical guidance for t-RFMOs¹⁵.

Workshop on National and Regional Good Practices on Fish Traceability in the Caribbean

15. From 30 June to 2 July 2021, FAO organised a virtual workshop for the Caribbean on national and regional good practices for fish traceability to combat IUU fishing.^{16,17} The workshop was attended by more than 20 fishery officials and representatives from 8 Caribbean countries, including the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago, as well as the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM).

¹⁰ [fao.org/port-state-measures/capacity-development/ongoing-capacity-building-efforts/en/](https://www.fao.org/port-state-measures/capacity-development/ongoing-capacity-building-efforts/en/)

¹¹ Pages 121–131 of the Design Options for the Development of Tuna Catch Documentation Schemes. [fao.org/3/i5684e/i5684e.pdf](https://www.fao.org/3/i5684e/i5684e.pdf)

¹² The Working Group was constituted, in 2019, to guide the development of a CDS.

¹³ [fao.org/3/ca2401en/ca2401en.pdf](https://www.fao.org/3/ca2401en/ca2401en.pdf), [fao.org/3/i5684e/i5684e.pdf](https://www.fao.org/3/i5684e/i5684e.pdf)

¹⁴ [fao.org/in-action/commonoceans/projects/tuna-biodiversity/en/](https://www.fao.org/in-action/commonoceans/projects/tuna-biodiversity/en/)

¹⁵ Chapter 13 of the publication [fao.org/3/i5684e/i5684e.pdf](https://www.fao.org/3/i5684e/i5684e.pdf) is currently being considered by the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) CDS Working Group to guide the development of a CDS.

¹⁶ Similar workshops were organized for Asia (from 22 to 24 June 2016, Kochi, India) and Africa (from 8 to 10 May 2018, Casablanca, Morocco).

¹⁷ [fao.org/americas/noticias/ver/en/c/1414037/](https://www.fao.org/americas/noticias/ver/en/c/1414037/)

16. During the workshop, common challenges faced in the region to meet traceability requirements were identified.¹⁸ Delegates clearly expressed the need for further assistance from FAO. Due to budgetary constraints, currently only Barbados is being supported for improved traceability.

Traceability within FAO's Blue Ports Initiative

17. Various multi-stakeholder consultations¹⁹ within FAO's Blue Ports Initiative (BPI)²⁰ identified traceability as one of the main challenges that fishing ports will need to urgently address in the coming years. The workshop "Blue Ports Initiative: Stepping forward" highlighted the need to reinforce collaboration among stakeholders along fish value chains and the strategic role ports play in this regard.²¹

18. FAO is designing and implementing regional training programmes in collaboration with international and regional organizations to reinforce the role of ports in traceability.

Development of traceability systems in Asia, the Caribbean, the Near East and North Africa

19. Between 2019 and 2020 FAO supported Indonesia in implementing traceability for its farmed shrimp industry through FAO's Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP).

20. Since 2021 FAO has collected requests for assistance to support Members with traceability development, with minimal seed funding mobilized from its Regular Programme. In this context, FAO is providing assistance to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security of Barbados to support the implementation of a traceability system. Similarly, Mauritania officially expressed interest in technical assistance to develop a traceability action plan to meet import market requirements. There may be the possibility of support for countries in Asia, subject to the availability of funding.

UPDATE ON FAO PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION WITH INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES AND ORGANIZATIONS

Presentation of FAO work on traceability and CDS in select workshops

21. FAO has been invited to participate in various events on traceability and CDS. These include:
- The European Union and Japan's "Joint Workshop with Industry on Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported Fishing" on 9 October 2019.
 - The Indonesian Food Safety Institute's webinar on "Seafood Trade Corridor: Integrated Traceability and systems for Trade and Export to the European Union"²² from 1 to 13 July 2020.

¹⁸ The specific needs and challenges expressed by participants are as follow: a) further capacity building on traceability for fisheries compliance; b) updating of national legislations; c) need to improve cooperation with customs for imports and exports of fish to better align with market requirements, data recording and control systems; and d) importance of communication and recording of accurate and verifiable data and information from various value chain actors.

¹⁹ These consultations gathered more than 20 national ports and international organizations and were held in 2019–2021.

²⁰ Please refer to COFI:FT/XVIII/2022/Inf.8.

²¹ The event had 80 participants from more than 20 countries, 8 international organizations, 3 NGOs and 2 private companies. Participants discussed various topics, with traceability addressed in a panel discussion on 24 June 2021.

²² indonesianfoodsafety.org/seafood-trade-corridor-webinar/

- The Market Advisory Council’s webinar on “Blockchain and other new technologies for the transmission of traceability information and other data in the seafood supply chain”²³ on 2 December 2021.
- The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) “Seafood Traceability Stakeholder Workshop” on 14 and 15 September 2021²⁴.
- The first International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) working group meeting on CDS on 4 and 5 April 2022.

International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM)

22. FAO and CIHEAM-Zaragoza organized an online advanced course on “Innovative tools and methods for ensuring seafood authenticity” between May and June 2021.²⁵ FAO and CIHEAM-Bari have collaborated since 2019 on a training session on traceability within “Advanced Specialised Course on “Sustainable Development of Coastal Communities”²⁶. This training is open to officials from Ministries of Agriculture and Fisheries from Mediterranean nations and members of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).

Seafood Alliance for Legality and Traceability (SALT)²⁷

23. FAO has been collaborating with SALT since 2019, joining its advisory committee as an observer in 2020. Between 2021 and 2022, FAO and SALT have discussed ways to enhance their collaboration to assist developing countries while building on the FAO BPI. Activities will include regional workshops and capacity development on various topics, including traceability, while exchanging experiences and lessons learnt.

Global Dialogue on Seafood Traceability (GDST)

24. FAO joined the GDST’s Dialogue Advisory Group in early 2019. Periodical meetings have been held and information exchanged between the two organizations, allowing FAO to provide advisory contributions and attend regular meetings, aiming to align work on traceability and share expertise and knowledge.

²³ The webinar was jointly organized by the Market Advisory Council, the North Sea Advisory Council, and the North Western Waters Advisory Council.

²⁴ The workshop was co-organized by NOAA Fisheries, the Henry L. Stimson Center, and the World Wildlife Fund.

²⁵ Amongst other topics, the course addressed effective science-based traceability systems. It was funded by SEA-TRACES (EU-funded INTERREG Atlantic Area) and FAO. edu.iamz.ciheam.org/SeafoodAuthenticity/en/

²⁶ The course is funded by the Italian Development Cooperation, the first intake was in 2019: iamb.it/uploads/attachments/1567/Advanced_Specialised_Course_in_SDCC_-_First_edition.pdf

The 2021 programme can be found in:

iamb.it/uploads/attachments/1570/SDCC_Training_course_programme_2021.pdf. At the time of writing of this working document, the 2022 edition is being prepared and traceability is a topic part of the course.

²⁷ SALT is a public-private partnership collaborating on solutions for legal and sustainable seafood with a particular focus on traceability. saltraceability.org/