



COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

SUB-COMMITTEE ON FISH TRADE

Seventeenth Session

Vigo, Spain, 25–29 November 2019

TRACEABILITY: FAO'S RECENT WORK AND THE FUTURE

Executive Summary

This document provides an update on activities undertaken by FAO on fisheries and aquaculture traceability since the 16th Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade (COFI:FT) (Busan, 2017), including technical assistance and capacity building activities, technical research reports, and the establishment of partnerships with relevant initiatives.

Suggested action by the Sub-Committee

- Comment on FAO's recent work on fisheries and aquaculture traceability;
- Provide information on relevant national, regional and inter-regional experiences in fisheries and aquaculture traceability, including the introduction of relevant policies and compliance with market requirements;
- Share national experiences on the challenges of compliance with market requirements on traceability;
- Provide guidance for FAO's further work on fisheries and aquaculture traceability, in particular on technical assistance and capacity building for developing countries and the small-scale sector;
- Note the progress achieved, including relevant studies undertaken and collaboration with international initiatives and organizations, and suggest actions and recommendations for FAO future work on traceability.



BACKGROUND

1. Traceability of fish and fishery products plays a key role in verifying the integrity of a supply chain, for ensuring the quality and safety of these products, their legality or their origin from a sustainably managed fishery. The benefits of traceability have been increasingly recognized by governments, consumers and various stakeholders along the value chain. Many countries have introduced mandatory traceability requirements as an explicit obligation to enforce food safety regulations. Traceability mechanisms are also critical to several important market-oriented issues, such as catch documentation schemes to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and the assessment of the chain of custody in sustainability certification.

2. Since 2008, traceability in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors has been an integral part of the agendas of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) and COFI:FT, where it was recognized that traceability was increasingly becoming a requirement in international trade and that efforts should be made to integrate those requirements in order to avoid unnecessary barriers to trade. In addition, COFI:FT suggested the development of best practice guidelines for integrated traceability.

3. The 12th Session of COFI:FT (Buenos Aires, 2010) reviewed the draft best practice guidelines for integrated traceability proposed by FAO, and acknowledged that traceability initiatives were useful tools to verify the integrity of the supply chain. Members agreed on the benefits of integrating traceability requirements, and also recognized that the requirements for food safety were somewhat different from those linked to sustainability. It was agreed that FAO should have an ongoing role in providing technical assistance to countries implementing traceability systems or seeking to integrate them. It was also recommended that FAO should monitor technical developments and assess their applicability in traceability systems.

4. The 13th Session of COFI:FT (Hyderabad, 2012) requested FAO to compile best practices and existing standards for a range of traceability purposes, and the production of a gap analysis. The principles for traceability schemes were also identified: not creating unnecessary barriers to trade, equivalence, risk-based, reliable, simple, clear and transparent. The Sub-Committee agreed to have an expert consultation for the support of the development of the best practice guidelines.

5. The 14th Session of COFI:FT (Bergen, 2014) reviewed the draft best practice guidelines on traceability in relation to food safety, sustainability and legality. Some Members indicated concerns in presenting such guidelines to COFI and recommended that further work in this area should focus on ensuring the legality of fish. It was also mentioned that the draft guidelines lacked a gap analysis.

6. Following the previous recommendations, the 15th Session of COFI:FT (Agadir, 2016) reviewed the analysis of gaps and inconsistencies in traceability standards and norms for fisheries and aquaculture and noted the usefulness of the report in developing catch documentation and food safety schemes. The Sub-Committee also noted the role of traceability along the value chain, catch documentation schemes and other market access measures as tools to prevent the entry of illegal fish into international trade and domestic markets.

7. The 16th Session of COFI:FT (Busan, 2017) supported measures leading to the prevention, deterrence and elimination of IUU fishing, including traceability and catch documentation schemes, noting that these should not become unnecessary technical barriers to trade, and also reported on national initiatives in implementing such measures.

FAO RECENT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES FOR MEMBER STATES ON SEAFOOD TRACEABILITY

8. A series of national, regional and international workshops and seminars were held since the last Session of COFI:FT. These focussed mainly on capacity building, dissemination of information, and training activities organized to assist Members to strengthen their national seafood traceability systems.

National and regional good practices in seafood traceability in Africa to combat IUU fishing

9. Building on a similar capacity building workshop for Asian countries held in 2016 in Kochi, India¹, FAO organized a regional workshop on national and regional good practices in seafood traceability in Africa to combat IUU fishing in Casablanca, Morocco, 8–10 May 2018. The workshop gathered participants from different departments of national governments from Western and Eastern Africa, as well as representatives from the Southwest Indian Ocean Fisheries Commission (SWIOFC) and the Ministerial Conference on fisheries cooperation among African States bordering the Atlantic Ocean (COMHAFAT/ATLAFCO). This event helped to raise awareness on these topics and provided training on traceability and related tools to combat IUU fishing, and guided delegates to reflect on supply chain entry points for illegal fish and fishery products and means to strengthen measures to address these weaknesses. The workshop deployed the FAO Good Practice Guidelines² on national seafood traceability systems as well as other recently issued FAO publications as training materials³.

International Seminar on Sustainable Seafood Value Chain: Traceability⁴

10. FAO organized the "International seminar on sustainable seafood value chain: traceability" in Shanghai, China from 28–30 November 2018, with the financial support of Shanghai Ocean University. Participants included fisheries and trade government officials from African, Asian and Latin American countries, as well as representatives from academia, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), intergovernmental bodies namely the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC). This seminar served as a platform for the participants to address a variety of topics pertinent to the sustainable seafood value chains and the applications of traceability.

11. During the final discussion, participants reiterated the importance of FAO's work, especially in terms of harmonization of initiatives as well as capacity building activities. In this regard, participants proposed and highlighted the following recommendations: a) the development of a guidance to support Members on the implementation or revision of national seafood traceability regulatory frameworks, including a list of minimum requirements for traceability along the seafood value chains; b) the importance of data verification to address issues related to transparency, data recording and verification, as well as support to interoperability; c) the identification, documentation and dissemination of benefits and incentives for the adoption of traceability systems in the seafood supply chain; d) a more proactive role to be played by FAO in coordinating global work on fisheries and aquaculture traceability, and contributing to multiple stakeholder initiatives constructively; and e) continuation of technical capacity building and support actions by FAO to Members in establishing or strengthening national traceability system, for combating IUU fishing or food safety purposes.

Agadir Dialogue on Traceability and Socially Responsible Fisheries and Aquaculture Value Chains

12. Traceability and social responsibility were addressed on the side-lines of the 5th Edition of Salon Halieutis⁵, one of the largest bi-yearly exhibition and conference in Africa organized by the Moroccan Ministry of Agriculture, Maritime Fisheries, Forestry, Rural Development and Water. The "traceability roundtable", held in Agadir, Morocco, on 22 February 2019, was attended by participants from industry leaders, professional organizations, regulatory bodies, regional institutions and trade promotion, retail and manufacturers organizations. Current practices and requirements to meet traceability needs of national and international markets were discussed. The audience shared their respective experiences

¹ <http://www.fao.org/3/I8795EN/i8795en.pdf>

² <http://www.fao.org/3/I8795EN/i8795en.pdf>

³ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i8183e.pdf>; <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5684e.pdf%202016>

⁴ <http://www.fao.org/in-action/globefish/news-events/details-events/en/c/1174288/>

⁵ <http://www.salonhalieutis.com/en/>

and identified challenges and priority actions to improve traceability practices. The importance of regulatory frameworks for the development, enforcement, monitoring, and verification of traceability systems were duly highlighted.

13. Similar to the results of the 2018 FAO International Seminar, participants underscored and reiterated that addressing challenges in the implementation and upgrading of current traceability systems would require: a) raising awareness about benefits and incentives for the adoption of traceability systems; b) mobilization of efforts in order to harmonize standards for traceability for domestically, regionally and internationally traded fish and fish products; c) adoption of supply and value chain approaches to better organize the fisheries sector, improve cooperation and coordination between stakeholders and facilitate implementation of full-chain traceability systems; and d) set-up of a full-chain traceability systems relying on linking Key Data Elements (KDEs) to Unique Identifiers and underscoring the establishment of Critical Tracking Events.

The UTF project on “Establishment of a national traceability system in the seafood supply chain in the Sultanate of Oman”

14. In a step to move forward to enhance safety and quality requirements of the Omani seafood industry “from net to plate” and to have a preliminary understanding of the problems related to IUU fishing, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries Wealth is planning to develop a project in collaboration with FAO.

15. The project aims at implementing a comprehensive digital based traceability system with clear procedures for withdrawal and recalls to cover the whole supply chain. In preparation for the technical assistance project, FAO performed a fact-finding and preliminary gap analysis mission for traceability project design where recommendations were formulated, and a proposal for next steps were agreed upon. The project will build and expand on the Sultanate of Oman-FAO Strategic Partnership and contribute to the Country Programming Framework, Oman Vision 2020, and the Fisheries and Aquaculture Vision 2040. Initial contact has been established for work to be undertaken in close collaboration with the European Commission Maritime Affairs and Fisheries.

RECENT FAO STUDIES CONDUCTED IN RELATION TO TRACEABILITY IN FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE

Seafood traceability for fisheries compliance: Country-level support for catch documentation schemes

16. The report on “Seafood traceability for fisheries compliance: Country-level support for catch documentation schemes”⁶ was published in late 2017, with funding support from the Government of Japan. This report explores how coastal, flag, port, processing or end-market States in the seafood supply chains can contribute to maximizing the effectiveness of catch documentation schemes. The focus is on the traceability of seafood consignments. However, the report also explores other important compliance mechanisms beyond traceability and supports the effective implementation of catch documentation schemes at the country level. The report explains what traceability mechanisms are built into catch documentation schemes, and what type of additional support instruments must be provided by individual countries along seafood supply chains. The study finds that traditional fisheries monitoring, inspection, and sanctioning mechanisms are of primary importance regarding the flag, coastal and end-market States, whereas effective country-level traceability mechanisms are of particular importance to port and processing States.

⁶ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i8183e.pdf>

Beyond regulatory compliance: Seafood traceability benefits and success cases

17. A technical paper entitled “Beyond regulatory compliance: Seafood traceability benefits and success cases ” is under preparation with the funding support from the Government of Japan. The objective of the study is to define and analyse benefits of fisheries and aquaculture traceability, besides regulatory compliance, such as supply chain management improvement, market access facilitation, and risk mitigation. It will review and analyse information regarding existing traceability standards and norms serving various purposes in the sector, including international standards and guidelines, regulatory standards, and non-regulatory standards. Regional success cases will be included and analysed. This technical paper will present traceability from different perspectives and will help to understand, in a more positive way, the necessity to establish company traceability systems. It will also compile existing policy incentives from government or industry associations to encourage the establishment of those systems.

Application of blockchain technology in seafood value chain development

18. FAO has produced numerous studies and reports about blockchain technology application in agriculture, but none in fisheries and aquaculture. In this regard, an upcoming report will provide an overview of how this new technology has been utilized in fisheries and aquaculture value chains worldwide. The report will review and analyse applications and opportunities of blockchain technology in fisheries and aquaculture value chains, focusing on the competitive advantages in addressing issues of traceability, transparency, fish fraud, food integrity and safety. In addition, the report will also compile public policy and trade implications of the use of blockchains, with policy recommendations for governments and international organizations.

FAO COLLABORATION AND WORK WITH OTHER INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES AND ORGANIZATIONS

Global Dialogue on Seafood Traceability

19. Global Dialogue on Seafood Traceability (GDST) is an international “business-to-business” forum to develop global voluntary guidelines for interoperable seafood traceability. This industry-driven dialogue was launched in 2017 with the participation of 61 industry members.

20. It aims to produce an aligned global framework for seafood traceability based on four pillars: (1) internationally agreed KDEs routinely associated with seafood products; (2) technical specifications for interoperable traceability systems, along with standard legal and business formats facilitating business-to-business information exchange; (3) internationally agreed benchmarks for verifying data validity; and (4) harmonization of business-smart national regulations to help reduce compliance burdens. GDST is organized around three overarching working groups (WG). WG1 focuses on defining, aligning and verifying KDEs; WG2 is centred on IT architecture, practices, and processes for data access and security; and WG3 deals with policy and regulatory alignment.

21. In early 2019, FAO joined the Dialogue Advisory Group and started receiving regular updates about GDST progress, allowing FAO to provide advisory contributions and to attend regular meetings.

International Organization for Standardization

22. In the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) the Technical Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture (ISO/TC 234) is formed by 22 participating member countries, 27 observer countries, and ten liaison organization, including FAO. The Technical Committee aims to implement standardization in the field of fisheries and aquaculture, including, but not limited to, terminology, technical specifications for equipment and their operation, characterization of aquaculture sites and maintenance of appropriate physical, chemical and biological conditions, environmental monitoring, data reporting, traceability and waste disposal.

23. In the area of traceability, eight standards have been developed covering specifications on the information to be recorded, but not on how information should exchange along the value chain. FAO continues to participate in the meetings of the Technical Committee to explore how the current standards and full-supply chain traceability could be introduced, improved and applied by stakeholders, and linked more efficiently to FAO's current work.