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COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

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TRACEABILITY REQUIREMENTS

Introduction

Through discussions and analysis of market access and certification issues, seafood traceability and traceability systems in the fisheries sector have been integral to the agendas of the FAO Committee on Fisheries and Sub-Committee on Fish Trade. The eleventh session of COFI:FT (Bremen, Germany 2-6 June 2008)[1] remarked the growing demand for traceability of fish and fish products and subsequent sessions highlighted the importance of traceability systems in verifying the integrity of a supply chain and for remedying failure when such integrity is broken and in ensuring the quality and safety of fish and fish products, their legality, or their origin from a sustainably managed fishery. While the benefits of traceability requirements are recognized, implementing or meeting multiplication of such measures can be costly and particularly challenging for developing countries.

This session background document provides an overview of the recent developments and initiatives related to traceability in the seafood sector and a summary of technical assistance requests from member states received by FAO and examples of some capacity building work in relation to traceability concerning fisheries.[2]

Existing and emerging regulatory frameworks[3]

Tracing the source of fish and fish products is of growing significance to governments, buyers and various stakeholders along the value chain. Countries have introduced mandatory traceability as an explicit requirement to enforce food safety regulations. Traceability is also imbedded in key trade-related measures to combat IUU fishing in particular the Catch Documentation Schemes. In addition, market-based initiatives for marine conservation - most notably in seafood eco-labels and sustainability certifications - rely on chain of custody information and supply chain traceability to ensure that fish and fishery products meet a set of conditions for environmental sustainability. Growing numbers of governments, private companies and other stakeholders have recognized the need for and are advocating for end-to-end, electronic, interoperable traceability systems throughout the supply chain.

Previous analysis of seafood traceability practices presented to the COFI:FT identified three main categories of traceability standards and regulations: international standards and guidelines, regulatory standards and industry and non-governmental organisation (NGO) non‑regulatory standards. What follows are some key recent developments of trade-related measures that have traceability implications.

International standards and guidelines – recent adoption of the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Catch Documentation Scheme

The Fisheries Resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on 9 December 2013 called upon UN Member States to initiate work within FAO on the elaboration of catch documentation scheme (CDS) guidelines. In July 2017, the FAO Conference officially adopted the

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[1] FAO. 2008. Report of the eleventh session of the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade. Bremen, Germany 2-6 June 2008. http://www.fao.org/tempref/docrep/fao/011/i0406t/i0406t00.pdf

[2] Other traceability-related papers distributed for the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade include the following: FAO. 2010. Best Practice Guidelines for Integrated Traceability. http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/018/k7193e.pdf; FAO. 2012. Traceability Best Practice Guidelines. http://www.fao.org/fishery/docs/DOCUMENT/COFI/cofift_13/5e.pdf ; FAO. 2014. Best Practice Guidelines on Traceability. http://www.fao.org/cofi/29510-0d3ea0e690044579673debe9c27579459.pdf.

[3] FAO. 2016. Analysis of Gaps and Inconsistencies in the Seafood Traceability Standards and Norms. http://www.fao.org/3/a-bs233e.pdf

Voluntary Guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes (VG-CDS).[4] The FAO VG-CDS is the first international document that describes the scope and nature of CDSs, their objective and identifies foundational principles and elements. Thus, the VG-CDS provides formalised guidance and best practices that could assist governments, regional fisheries management organizations, regional economic integration organizations and other intergovernmental organizations when developing and implementing new CDSs or when harmonizing or reviewing existing CDSs. As a trade-related measure to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing, a CDS functions most effectively in synergy with other international instruments including the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA) and the Global Record of Fishing Vessels, Refrigerated Transport Vessels and Supply Vessels.

Regional Fisheries Management Organisation catch documentation schemes[5]

There are three Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (RFMO) CDSs currently active: (1) the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources CDS for Patagonian toothfish implemented in 2000, (2) the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna CDS for Southern Bluefin tuna implemented in 2010, and (3) the International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas CDS for Atlantic Bluefin tuna implemented in 2008.

Major Seafood Markets are Expanding Traceability Requirements

In light of concerns related to illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, some countries are developing and implementing regulations and trade measures that undermine market entry of IUU fishing derived seafood products. Traceability systems put in place mandate collection and verification of information that will improve the likelihood of detecting and deterring illegal trade. For instance, the governments of the two largest global markets for seafood imports - the European Union (EU) and the United States of America - have adopted regulations to combat IUU fishing and seafood fraud. The European Union introduced the Catch Certification Scheme in 2008 through the EU IUU Regulation and was implemented as of January 2010. The European Union is currently undertaking efforts to digitize and modernize its Catch Certification Scheme and to integrate the catch certificate and processing statements into the European Commission Directorate General Health and Food Safety Trade Control and Expert System. The Seafood Import Monitoring Program (SIMP) of the United States of America entered into force in January 2018. The SIMP is a risk-based traceability programme that establishes, for imports of certain seafood products, specific reporting and record-keeping requirements needed to prevent entry of IUU fishing derived products and to combat seafood fraud.

The FAO VG-CDS served as reference document to the establishment of the Republic of Korea's CDS, which took effect in June 2017 and is currently applied to three species: long-neck croakers (*Pseudotolithus elongatus*), bobo croakers (*Pseudotolithus typus*) and saury (*Cololabis saira*).

Non-regulatory standards

Parallel to the already mentioned standards and norms, commercial (voluntary) standards have been developed by organisations and associations to set traceability requirements, facilitate data sharing and adopt product identification standards for commercial purposes. Non‑regulatory standards developed by NGOs, the industry and other standards, such as the International Organization for Standardization, are included in this category.

[4] FAO. 2017. Voluntary Guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes. http://www.fao.org/3/a-i8076e.pdf

[5] FAO. 2002. Report of the Expert Consultation of Regional Fisheries Management Bodies on Harmonization of Catch Certification. http://www.fao.org/tempref/docrep/fao/005/y8252e/y8252e00.pdf

Some common challenges concerning traceability[6]

Lack of awareness and understanding, commitment, implementation, technology and standards issues are some key traceability gaps and challenges faced by countries and stakeholders. In addition, the lack of uniform requirements for information gathering and information-sharing further exacerbates the inconsistencies in traceability standards and norms. This undermines interoperability between technology systems, which could potentially increase business risks and costs when adopting traceability and information systems. Many traceability-specific regulations suffer from inconsistencies that have implications for the institutional set-up and the scope of authority of relevant governmental bodies. Inconsistencies are also evident in some international standards and guidelines, regulatory standards and industry and NGO non-regulatory standards. Depending on the regulatory framework encompassing traceability requirements with different policy objectives, there could be differences in data capture, communication and management requirements. With a lack of harmonized definitions to variances in unique identification requirements, some cases require further clarification on traceability information, particularly in order to link specific lot of fishery products to a particular landing. As effective traceability systems require necessary coordination between involved bodies and clear data requirements, such systematic gaps could pose burdens on governments and industry. This has implications for identifying and tracking multiple source fishing activities or fisheries and product transformations, which require consistent groupings or associations in order to verify legal compliance.

Global multi-stakeholder Initiatives focused on traceability

In recent years a number of multi-stakeholder initiatives and partnerships have been established. Represented participants among these varied efforts are seafood industry actors, non-government organizations, technology providers, academia, and governments. What these partnerships have in common is the objective of working toward traceability-driven change in the industry. They are focused on a variety of issues under the umbrella of traceability, including improved transparency in seafood supply, interoperable seafood traceability practices, enhanced regional cooperation, addressing issues such as human rights abuses and illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, promoting sustainable fisheries, and conserving marine biodiversity.

What follows is a non-exhaustive list of some notable initiatives:

- Global Dialogue on Seafood Traceability
- Oceans and Seafood Markets Initiative
- The Oceans and Fisheries Partnerships Catch Documentation and Traceability System
- Seafood Business for Ocean Stewardship (SeaBOS)
- The Seafood Alliance for Legality and Traceability (SALT)
- Seafood Task Force

Technological developments relevant to traceability

Various technological initiatives and developments provide proprietary and technical solutions for simplifying and integrating traceability requirements. Some key developments include digital information and standardized data formats, the international standard for electronic product coding

[6] FAO. 2016. Analysis of Gaps and Inconsistencies in the Seafood Traceability Standards and Norms. Part 6. http://www.fao.org/3/a-bs233e.pdf

(EPC), its application through radio frequency product identification (RFID) and their incorporation into the supply chain and delivery processes. The expanding electronic certification and digital information requirements, in general, and system updates of some RFMOs have implications for the formulation and implementation of traceability requirements. With subsequent data privacy concerns, there are growing discussions of the role of new technology and tools, such as blockchain,

The current and potential use of blockchain technology in the context of traceability and transparency along the value chain was discussed during two FAO regional workshops on traceability and the recent FAO Pacific regional workshop for Small Island Developing States titled "Effective fish trade and sustainable development". Through sharing of specific examples, delegates of member states explored the use of distributed ledger technology that allows viewing of information from each transaction but does not permit altering of information. The subsequent discussions touched on potential market access implications for the use of such technology, which could contribute to the improvement of traceability and transparency and also reduce associated costs.

Such technological developments concerning traceability systems are also linked to broader trade facilitation and market access issues. Trade facilitation could be broadly defined as "simplification, harmonization and standardization of procedures and processes and associated information flows to move goods through the supply chain in a transparent and predictive manner."[7] As trade facilitation efforts will address various bottlenecks, e-traceability will continue to be key components under paperless trading and national single window implementation-related activities.

FAO's work relevant to traceability[8]

As fish production, processing and consumption often takes place in different countries, international collaboration and harmonization is critical in this growing traceability landscape. This need is particularly acute among small-scale operators in developing countries, where the technical capacity to comply with the myriad of rules and ever increasing requirements is limited. Recognizing this need, member states have called on FAO for technical assistance concerning the development and implementation of traceability schemes and for sharing of best practices and existing standards for a range of traceability purposes.

Some member states have made specific requests and recommendations regarding traceability during two recent regional capacity building workshops concerning traceability: one for the Asian region in March 2016 in Kochi India, titled "National and regional good practices in seafood traceability systems to combat IUU fishing in Asia"[9] and another for the African region in Casablanca, Morocco in May 2018 titled "National and regional good practices in seafood traceability in Africa to combat IUU fishing." Participating members shared their respective regulatory frameworks, analysed good practices concerning measures at sea, on landing and those concerning verification and identified common challenges to implementing effective traceability frameworks. The African regional workshop identified unique and different traceability challenges as regards to artisanal and industrial fisheries. During both workshops, participants sought to identify record keeping, transfer of information and documentation requirements along the supply chain. Members also highlighted the need for exploring integration options and approaches for ensuring interoperability between various traceability requirements, particularly in regards to requirements related to the legal provenance of fish and those for food safety-related purposes.

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[7] UNECE. Trade facilitation – principles and benefits. http://tfig.unece.org/details.html

[8] Recent FAO publications concerning traceability: FAO. 2017. Seafood traceability for fisheries compliance: Country-level support for catch documentation schemes. http://www.fao.org/3/a-i8183e.pdf; FAO. 2016. Design options for the development of tuna catch documentation schemes. http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5684e.pdf%202016; FAO. 2018. Seafood Certification and developing countries: Focus on Asia. http://www.fao.org/3/I8018EN/i8018en.pdf

[9] FAO. 2018. Good Practice Guidelines (GPG) on National Seafood Traceability Systems. http://www.fao.org/3/I8795EN/i8795en.pdf.

Some member states have requested assistance from FAO to facilitate the transition from a paper-based system to fully electronic documentation requirements within different traceability systems. In this regard, FAO formulated specific support measures to design and integrate electronic traceability systems that would encompass quality, safety, catch certification and labelling. Ensuring interoperability of systems and incorporating effective information system design based on international or harmonized standards were some key considerations. FAO has also responded to technical assistance requests in the installation, determination of key data elements and use of digital data transparency systems. These systems could improve efficiency, product yields and tracking through the value chain and contribute to meeting product traceability requirements.

In regards to linkages to trade facilitation, FAO has been requested by some member states to enhance the understanding of the impact of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement on fish trade and to analyse trade facilitation activities in light of relevant fish trade regulatory frameworks. FAO will carry out these activities in close cooperation with partner intergovernmental organizations, members and stakeholders. Furthermore, some of the analysis will also be incorporated into a report that will assess the regulatory and governance frameworks in place to promote trade of fish and fish products. Going forward, FAO will continue to support and provide necessary technical inputs to on-going multi-stakeholder initiatives and partnerships.