

BlueBRIDGE External Advisory Board (EAB) - FIRMS

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Supporting needs for traceability

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A unique ID code for fisheries and its application in traceability and data-sharing

The unique codes for fisheries maintained as part of the Global Record for Stocks and Fisheries (GRSF) will save time and money for the seafood supply chain, traceability/technology companies, governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Currently, most of these entities are using a wide range of bespoke standards and systems for identifying and sharing source fishery information. In other words, to date, a universal standard and code for identifying source fisheries has been unavailable, making the whole traceability and data exchange system in seafood limited in scale and inefficient. As a universal global standard, the codes available through the GRSF will initially supplement and ideally replace existing fishery identification systems for companies, governments, and NGOs interested in sharing information and traceability.

Background on the challenges

Transparency in sourcing and traceability of product have become two of the strongest demands being put on the seafood industry today. Pressure from governments, consumers, non-governmental organizations, and others is mounting on seafood buyers to validate that their product was caught legally, without connection to slavery, and from environmentally sustainable sources. Many traceability technologies and services have been developed and deployed for use in the seafood industry for many different purposes, but standardizing reporting of source fisheries has remained elusive.

In addition, seafood NGOs use different standards for identifying source fisheries within their own systems. While major buyers (e.g., retailers, food service, branded suppliers) usually partner with a single NGO, suppliers often sell into multiple buyers that are using different NGO standards and systems. This creates an undue burden on suppliers to identify source fisheries and submit similar information in different ways to their various customers.

NGOs often need to share data among themselves. However, because ‘units of analysis’ at a fishery level are not standardized and aligned, this data-sharing either never happens or takes a significant amount of time and resources to complete.

Governments in seafood importing countries are increasingly placing requirements on the supply chain to identify source fisheries as well as provide information about the legality of the fisheries. The requirements add another layer of time and effort seafood companies are investing to be allowed to sell and buy product. In addition, exporters selling into markets with different requirements face further burden for reporting their source fisheries.

These challenges can be overcome with the availability of a universal standard and code for fisheries identification.

Basis for a solution

The GRSF standard was created as part of the [BlueBRIDGE project](#) by UN FAO, Sustainable Fisheries Partnership, and University of Washington as a key collaborative instrument to maintain a universal code for identifying source fisheries. The GRSF database will house records for all known and validated fisheries in the world, including those being sourced from for international trade. Each fishery will have its own unique identification code, thereby unlocking big potential for increasing transparency and efficiency of tracking seafood products. However, a number of critical steps need to be taken, including services to support the evolving nature of fisheries and the seafood industry.

Services needed to integrate the GRSF codes into the seafood industry

A number of services are needed to embed and then maintain the fishery ID codes in systems of the seafood supply chain, traceability/technology companies, and NGOs:

1. Provide companies and NGOs access to the fishery ID codes
 - a. The frequency of this can happen as a one-time exercise, regularly (e.g., once per quarter), or automatically (through an API)
 - b. The mechanism for this can happen from the GRSF directly or through a third-party service provider
2. For those who need it, offer companies and NGOs support for integrating the codes into their existing system for identifying/tracking source fisheries or for replacing their existing system completely.
3. Once the GRSF codes have been rolled out to the industry, services will need to be maintained to support validation of ‘existing’ and ‘new’ fisheries (in relation to the GRSF)
 - a. Provide services to traceability companies to validate fishery identification and issue machine readable codes.
 - i. *Use case example 1:* An Indonesian fisherman lands his catch from a fishery and wants to ensure it is properly identified throughout the supply chain to its end market in the United States. Upon entry to a traceability system, he enters baseline information about the fishery into the system, the system queries a ‘Fishery ID tool’ maintained by a service provider, the tool validates existence of the fishery and renders the unique machine-readable code for that fishery in the GRSF.

- b. Provide services to seafood supply chain companies and others who have a unique-machine readable code and want to know the associated fishery ID information.
 - i. *Use case example 2:* A retailer in the United States that eventually bought the fish that was caught by the Indonesian fisherman is suspicious that the species is not the species he ordered. The retailer enters the unique code attached to the product into a website or other tool to validate the fishery identification.
- c. Assist the GRSF owner (FAO) in maintaining the most up to date record of stocks and fisheries in existence.
 - i. *Use case example 3:* Drawing from example 1, let's imagine the Fishery ID tool is unable to validate a fishery from the GRSF. After some troubleshooting to make sure the fishery is not in the GRSF, a service provider will send the fishery ID elements submitted by the fisherman to the GRSF (or designated partner) to research whether it should be added to the database (i.e, determine whether the fishery actually exists as reported).

This list of services needed is not meant to be comprehensive. Also, additional services, such as delivering aggregated data associated with fisheries (e.g., stock status, certifications, risk ratings, government import requirements) can be layered on top of the fishery ID and validation services. Questions remain about who would provide these services (e.g., a single third-party entity in partnership with FAO or multiple entities) and how much can be charged. The GRSF collaboration is currently seeking a consultant (individual or small team) to explore the business cases for these services and to develop a business plan.

Anticipated impacts of universal codes

Embedding common codes in seafood company product management systems, traceability technologies, government regulatory systems, and many other places will allow for much easier and quicker exchange of data through improved interoperability.

For seafood supply chains:

- Share information more efficiently up and down the chain
- Communicate more efficiently with NGOs
- Reduce the burden of complying with government requirements

For traceability/technology companies:

- More easily integrate existing/new customers and thereby further scale their operations

For governments:

- Burden for maintaining their own fishery ID standard is removed, allowing them to focus on collecting and evaluating data on other critical issues

For NGOs, researchers, consultants, donors:

- Share data more efficiently

- Expand the data sets that can be queried to conduct analyses (e.g., researchers will be able to more easily determine the status of the stock, of certification, and of the risk rating for a fishery or fisheries)

The list of anticipated impacts is not meant to be comprehensive. Undoubtedly, additional positive effects will be seen as the codes get embedded and different services tested. However, it will take time for the GRSF to become robust through testing/improvement and for these services to develop.