



2ND FISH-X CONFERENCE AT WWF EUROPEAN POLICY OFFICE

# “DIGITAL TRACEABILITY: BOOSTING SUSTAINABLE SEAFOOD CONSUMPTION IN THE EU”

10 April 2024



Co-funded by the European Union

## Summary Report

# Fish-X Conference “Digital traceability: Boosting sustainable seafood consumption in the EU”

**Wednesday, April 10, 2024 – 09:00 to 17:00 CEST**

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This conference was organised over a full day by the EU-funded Fish-X project at WWF European Policy Office in Brussels. The general presentation is available [online](#). The conference was attended by 42 participants from EU institutions, fisheries advisors from permanent representation of Member States to the European Union, national ministries for agriculture and fisheries, research institute, civil society organisations, advisory councils on fisheries management, producer organisations and the fishing industry. The conference's objective sought to explore how digital traceability can steer sustainable seafood consumption by effectively implementing relevant EU legislation and providing meaningful information to consumers.

**Welcoming remarks: Dr. Antonia Leroy, Head of EU Ocean Policy at WWF European Policy Office**

**Dr. Antonia Leroy** introduced the Fish-X project to the participants, which aims at installing digital tools on board of small-scale vessels in line with the provision of the new EU Fisheries Control Regulation. The field work takes place in Portugal, Croatia and Germany. In parallel, the collection of data will feed into a blockchain-based technology aiming at the highest degree of transparency across seafood supply chain actors to be displayed with a traceability platform. Ultimately, the Fish-X project seeks to drive the digital transition for small-scale fishers.

Antonia elaborated on the focus of the conference where seafood traceability has a role to play in fully documenting fisheries to better understand how to fish sustainably, decarbonising fisheries sectors, building resilience and adapting to climate change events. Much still needs to be done to match the 55% emission reduction targets by 2030 and to protect 30% of our seas by 2030. One way of doing this is by changing the way we, as a society, produce, transport, process and consume seafood to alleviate the humans' burden on our seas.

**Morning panel discussion: New Monitoring Control Surveillance (MCS) measures enforced by the EU Fisheries Control Regulation: what innovation on traceability?**

**Louis Lambrechts**, Ocean Policy Officer at WWF EPO, moderated the session. He kicked off by recalling the most-awaited EU Fisheries Control Regulation which entered into force on 9 January 2024. This legislative revision, 5 years in the making, is undoubtedly one of the most significant fisheries policy developments in the past 10 years, bringing the EU fisheries sector into a much-needed digital era. From digital traceability to mandatory vessel monitoring systems and electronic logbooks, there is a lot to unpack from this new regulation.

**Guiding questions:**

- **Amongst the many key measures the new EU Fisheries Control Regulation brings forward, which one is the most significant for your work and why?**
- **Despite this progress, when it comes to seafood traceability, could you name one challenge that these new measures may not, or only partially solve, and why?**

**Anne Gautrais-Le Goff**, Policy Officer within the D4 Control and Inspection Unit at DG Mare, highlighted the need for further exchange with operators in the seafood supply chain to ensure a proper implementation of the revised traceability provisions set in the amended Fisheries Control Regulation (Council Regulation No 1224/2009 as last amended by Regulation (EU) 2023/2843). For lots of fresh and frozen fishery and aquaculture products the minimum traceability information is already set in paragraph 5 of Article 58. However, the EU Commission has the power to further add some rules by adopting delegating acts by January 2026. Therefore, learning from operators is key to identifying the right necessary additional information. For prepared and preserved fishery and aquaculture products, the EU Commission has to publish a study on the minimum traceability information for such lots and the digital systems used before adopting the minimum traceability rules for such lots by January 2029. Anne also reminded that traceability starts with catch registration information to ensure accurate quality and consistency of information across the supply chain. Operators and competent authorities in the Member States have to fulfil their roles to implement, control and enforce the rules. Transparency along the value chain should benefit all including the

small-scale fisheries (SSF) by increasing the commercial value of their products while allowing them to differentiate with e.g. imported products.

**Esben Sverdrup Jensen**, President of the European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO), underlined the need for having legislation that is designed in a suitable and workable way for the members of the producers' organisations. Esben recalled that it is in the interest of the fishing community to convey as much information as possible to the consumers and to take advantage of the technologies to simplify and facilitate fishers' work. The technological solutions should be able to work on a vessel. Finally, Esben stressed that national authorities must work together with the sector and third parties in developing solutions, most importantly, that should allow stakeholders to access and communicate with existing electronic logbook systems.

**Margreet Brinxma**, Senior Supply Chain Innovation Manager at the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) emphasised the importance of traceability without which certification scheme would be meaningless. Together with a robust management system, traceability enables the trustworthiness of seafood supply. In addition, innovation in traceability is key however technological developments need to be planned in the long-term given the amount of investment. The verification of information is also an important aspect of traceability, however doing so manually is time consuming; only a limited number of auditors are available. Here too, automatisisation and digitalisation will help. Margreet underlined the current trend to move towards automated processes to fasten the exchange of traceability data and associated assurance checks. This trend will enable a better understanding of supply chain risks, through automated verification of digital traceability data. An informed risk-based approach will help auditors to focus in-person audits on high-risk commodities and activities.

**Huw Thomas**, Market Development Lead Europe, Middle East, and Africa at the Global Dialogue on Seafood Traceability (GDST), explained the growing need for digital information and datasets to be passed on in a standardised way between the operators of the supply chain to enable trade and sale. Therefore, the GDST came into play to share data and alleviate the burden on industry. Philanthropically funded, the standard provided by GDST is free of charge

including the software development kits, which were designed specifically to assist the small-scale providers achieve capability.

**Rita Sá**, Oceans & fisheries Coordinator at the ANP|WWF Portugal and member of the Fish-X project, detailed her role in the project to collaborate with small-scale fishers to accompany them towards a digital transition. Technological tools, including better traceability, enables data exchange, increasing the knowledge on the seafood supply, and highlighting that transparency should cover all selling points, down to the restaurants. Rita gave the example of Portugal where small-scale fisheries is an important fleet segment. In terms of traceability along the value chain, the Portuguese fleet is catching various species but the volumes are small. Therefore, providing granular details on catches is a key issue.

### **Technical session 1 - How to combine sustainability ranking, certification and labeling of seafood products?**

**Moderator:** Laure Guillevic (WWP EPO)

**Supporting Fish-X partners:** Raquel Pereira (Sciaena), Joana Oliveira and Rita Sá (WWF Portugal), Jana Stunkel (TMT)

The technical session was structured as follows: a brief introduction of the set of three policy instruments - namely labelling, certification and sustainability ranking, group discussion around three main questions and joint wrap-up with reporting of the main takeaways for each group.

#### **What are the advantages of each of the policy instruments?**

- *Labelling* – it was pointed out that it is burdensome but objective, empowers the consumer, more factual and transparent, mandatory

- *Certification* – it gives a clear identification with comprehensive verification (audits), grant market access and requires less knowledge from the consumer
- *Sustainability ranking* – no extra certification cost if publicly-led, more neutral, easier choice, encourages progress from operators, should be made mandatory to be efficient

### **What political/legislative barriers do you experience/foresee with the new provisions of the control regulation?**

- Data collected (i.e. under Common Market Organisation) might not be enough for the policy instruments, potential unrealistic political timelines for implementation, data management and data privacy issues
- Grass-roots movements such as the farmers' movements which induced some political shifts and targeted reopening of legislative texts
- Some provisions need time, political will, actors' buy-in and capacity to be implemented such as the landing obligation, the use of logbooks and the new rules contained in the revised EU Fisheries Control Regulation.

### **How do these three policy instruments sit together? Any gaps/blind spots?**

- Lack of definition for "sustainability", risk of greenwashing, lack of available collected data, missing the social pillar of fisheries and difficult to audit the social component of sustainability for imported products, need to be mindful to include small-scale fisheries.
- The Sustainable Food Systems Framework law could bring all the different aspects together and tackle the issue in a holistic way.
- Having a sound methodology is key behind the sustainability ranking. The carbon footprint should account for the difference of impact of terrestrial and marine food

products on biodiversity whether meat or fish products. For aquaculture, the impact of feed should be included in the calculation.

- Having a level-playing field for fresh vs. processed products and for the HORECA sector should be ensured. The voluntary or mandatory aspect of such labelling schemes determines the level of ambition.
- A greater wealth of data will be collected by digital systems such as Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) and sensors, useful to document all processes onboard and fish catches and to get high resolution of data production.

## Technical session 2 - Challenges of digital traceability along the supply chain

**Moderator:** Sylvie Giraud (CLS)

**Supporting Fish-X partners:** Nicolas Blanc (Sciaena), Immanuel Viridi (Ourz), Sarah Gebauer (north.io), Ankith Kumar (TMT)

### Main challenges faced by seafood traceability supply chain:

- **Lack of IT infrastructure and manual paperwork:** Throughout the supply chain, there is a lack of IT infrastructure, and manual paperwork persists, hindering the digitization of data.
- **Technical capability and knowledge gap:** SSF Fishers and supply chain actors lack technical capabilities and clear knowledge of regulations, necessitating capacity building efforts across the supply chain.
- **Imbalanced benefits to comply with legislation:** There is an apparent compliance challenge which arises from imbalanced benefits in complying with regulations, where the advantages primarily favor other stakeholders. To ensure compliance, benefits must be clearly outlined to fishers when imposing the use of digital traceability systems. Big retail firms have a clear benefit in making mandatory the



use of traceability systems to the whole supply chain actors. It provides them with strategic information to manage their suppliers. Consumers are also eager to have access to as much information as possible about the seafood product they buy. The question of the number of actors that should be visible within a given traceability system at a given stage was raised.

- **Focus of IUU Regulation:** Regulation targeting Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing should focus more on buyers rather than fishers.
- **Data standardization, harmonization, interoperability, veracity:** Standardization of data and interoperability are crucial for ensuring verifiable digital data. Addressing issues related to **readability** and harmonization along with the provision of data standards is essential. Standards should facilitate efficient and harmonized data exchange within and between Member States (in the case of cross border sales) while accommodating variations in internal data formats.
- **Data veracity:** the solution is based on verifiable data from legal sources.
- **Consumer access to traceability information:** Consideration should be given to which traceability information and whether consumers should have access to traceability information.

#### **Potential solutions and considerations:**

- **Capacity building:** Capacity building efforts should be undertaken throughout the supply chain to address technical capability and knowledge gaps.
- **Focus on benefits for fishers:** Solutions should be implemented in a way that brings tangible benefits to fishers while ensuring compliance with regulations. Regulations also offer an opportunity to secure the rights of fishers and better value from enhanced access to the market. Education and awareness raising programs are deemed necessary, especially for small operators.
- **Interoperability for SSF:** Implementing interoperability for SSF data exchanges is crucial, considering the variety of organizational structures within the SSF sector and the variety of trade circuits (direct sales, short or not-so-short supply chains).

- **Shift in mentality:** A shift in mentality is necessary to overcome challenges related to secrecy of fisheries data and reluctance from fishers to share information about fishing grounds and catches. This shift may involve distinguishing between information for public access and information solely for authorities and not duplicating data entries in the control system used both by regulators (Member States and the EC) and in the B2B digital traceability system.
- **Collective design:** Collective design and development efforts are needed to adapt the variety of supply chains and regional/local specifics.
- **Value of transparent products:** Emphasizing the commercial value of transparent products may facilitate a shift in mentality among fishers, encouraging greater willingness to share data and fishing grounds.

Addressing these challenges and implementing solutions will require collaborative efforts from stakeholders across the seafood traceability supply chain, with a focus on promoting transparency, compliance, and sustainable practices.

### Panel discussion 2: How can digital traceability system ensure sustainable seafood consumption?

**Vanya Vulperhorst**, Campaign Director Illegal Fishing and Transparency at Oceana, moderated the session. She kicked off the panel discussion by emphasising that investments in sustainability should pay off for all actors of the seafood supply chain. The campaign "*Follow the fish*", led by Oceana and joined by numerous actors of the seafood industry and civil society, demands sustainability information on seafood in the EU, including imported and processed products. Vanya reminded that there is now an opportunity to require digital traceability for imported and processed products with the revision of the EU Fisheries Control Regulation and available technological tools.

**Guiding questions:**

- **What is THE element to steer sustainable seafood consumption?**
- **Along the value chain, from the moment of capture or farming production site to the consumers' plate, what are the crucial steps to ensure robust traceability?**

**Dr. Başak Babaoğlu**, Manager for EU Affairs Corporate Responsibility & Public Policy at the Metro Brussels Representation Office, explained the usefulness of a business-to-business digital tool “PROTRACE” to know the origin of fresh and frozen products. In use for ten years now, customers can scan a QR code to get comprehensive information on food products, including seafood. The system does not cover processed products yet, as traceability of processed products is a much more complex topic, which requires data availability from various sources. Besides, such data has to be interoperable and connected with another. The revised EU Control Fisheries Regulation will harmonise the collection of data across EU countries.

**Charles Guirriec**, Founder of Poiscaille.fr, stressed out the importance of labelling vessels instead of labelling fisheries to promote good fisheries practices. After working as a fishery observer and civil servant at the French Ministry of Fisheries, Charles considered he would have a greater impact by launching his start up to provide fish boxes across the French territory whose main objective is to help sustainable fishers to earn a fair income out of their activities. The supply of seafood is guaranteed to be fresh with a delivery of maximum 72 hours after being caught, a lower impact on the environment with daily trips, selective fishery practices, small vessels (below 12 meters), and local production with only fish caught on the French territory. The Poiscaille's business model relies on subscriptions to buy exactly what is needed. To ensure continuous supply, Poiscaille has a network of fishers on the three shores. In France, the context is favourable as people like to cook and Poiscaille can benefit from a strong network of transportation within the country. Nowadays, Poiscaille gathers 21,000 subscribers reaching a level of €1m revenue per month. Thanks to this support, Poiscaille collaborates with 250 boats across the country, representing around 5% of the French fishing fleet.

**Catherine Vogler**, Senior Manager Seafood Market at WWF Switzerland, pointed out the need to reduce seafood consumption while sustainably and responsibly sourcing seafood. To do that, the WWF has a tool to assess the sustainability of seafood from wildcatch and aquaculture which is called the Common Assessment Methodology (CAM). Analysed against 25 criteria structured around stock status, environmental impacts and quality of fishery management, WWF Switzerland risk-assesses the portfolio of seafood corporate partners to time bound ambitious goals. Being able to communicate their commitments and their achievements against these goals is a powerful incentive. The first actions to be taken include to eliminate endangered species (e.g. ray, sharks, eel), phasing out red-scored sources, and increasing the proportion of green-rated and certified sources (i.e. MSC, ASC, organic). Catherine highlighted that in order to conduct a meaningful assessment of sustainability, we need reliable and granular information on the species, origin and the fishing gear or production method used. For restaurants, this information has to be shared upon request. Switzerland imports 53% of its seafood from the EU, therefore having an effective implementation of the EU Fisheries Control regulation is key.

**Immanuel Virdi**, Project Management Lead at Ourz and partner of the Fish-X project, pinpointed the awareness and education as the most critical factors for consumption. Ourz has developed a blockchain traceability system—and over the past years focused on implementing this system mainly as a marketing and differentiation tool for small and medium size enterprises ultimately aiming at building trust with consumers. For the Fish-X project, the idea is to adapt the platform to the specific requirements of supply chains in the context of small-scale fisheries. Best practices inform the development process of co-designing the platform with trial partners in the Baltic region. Currently, there are additional reasons to foster traceability with the new requirements of the EU Deforestation Regulation, the Green Claims Directive, and obviously the EU Fisheries Control regulation.

### What's next with the EU election?

**Laure Guillevic**, Ocean Policy Officer at WWF EPO, recalled the timely moment of the Fish-X conference to talk about the forthcoming EU Election, happening from 6-9 June 2024 across Europe. As shown by the current mandate soon coming to an end, politics play a big role in the unfolding of the legislative agenda. The pending Sustainable Food Systems Framework law and the Nature Restoration law are only two examples of many. Therefore, the election of the Members of the European Parliament is a much-needed democratic exercise to set ambitious goals for fisheries and marine biodiversity for the next five years. The WWF has pulled together a set of ocean electoral asks such as the Ocean Deal to approach ocean issues in a holistic way, across domains, from environment to fisheries, transport, tourism, with the appropriate governance means. Now more than ever, the Climate Risk Assessment report of the European Environment Agency (EEA) shows us that we are not equipped with our current policy frameworks to address the climate and environment challenges our ocean faces, therefore the next mandate will be critical.

### Concluding remarks: Jana Stünkel Fish-X coordinator from TransMarTech SH

**Jana Stünkel** thanked all participants, speakers and organisers for the event. While gaps remain to come up with comprehensive traceability systems across the seafood supply chain, a lot of solutions were put forward such as the traceability platform developed by Ourz within the Fish-X project to support small-scale fishers. Now is the time of implementation of the various provisions contained in the EU Fisheries Control regulation and for the stakeholders to turn written rules into actions. The Fish-X project stands ready for this challenge for its final year!

**Acknowledgements:** The Fish-X consortium would like to specially thank Dr. Antonia Leroy for the moderation of the event as well as Larissa Milo-Dale and Louis Lambrechts, team members of the Ocean Unit at the WWF European Policy Office, for their crucial support throughout the day. Furthermore, we would like to acknowledge the valuable participation of all the speakers (by alphabetical order): Anne Gautrais-Le Goff, Başak Babaoğlu, Catherine Vogler, Charles Guirriec, Esben Sverdrup-Jensen, Huw Thomas, Immanuel Viridi, Jana Stünkel, Margreet Brinxma, Rita Sá and the two moderators of the two panel discussions: Louis Lambrechts and Vanya Vulperhorst. Finally, the Fish-X project team is thankful to all participants for joining us during the conference!