

Partnership Dialogues of “The Ocean Conference”

7-9 June 2017

UN/CEFACT input to theme 4: Making Fisheries Sustainable

Submitted by the Dutch delegation to UN/CEFACT

Geneva, 23 March 2017

A. STATUS AND TRENDS

Sustainable Development Goal 14 of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development brings international attention to the overexploitation of oceans and marine resources by humans to the extent that their sustainability and resilience is threatened on a wide scale. In particular, it points at the pressing need for the international community to address the issue of the conservation and the rebuilding of global fish stocks that have been quickly depleted as a result of many factors, including the industrialization of the fisheries sector to date.

Overfishing and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IUU) are destructive fishing practices that have a negative impact on sustainable fisheries, livelihoods, and world fish stocks. In 2016, illicit fishing was reported to account for up to 26 million tons of fish per year, which is a staggering 25% of fish harvested annually from the oceans and valued at up to USD 23 billion¹. This is the value lost each year to legitimate fishers. Besides economic damage, such practices can threaten local biodiversity and food security in many countries. About 1 billion people, largely in developing countries, rely on fish as their primary animal protein source. In 2013, fish provided more than 3.1 billion people with almost 20% of their per capita intake of animal protein, and the global population with about 17 % of such protein².

B. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Developing an overarching traceability system of traded fish from vessel to final consumer is key to preventing IUU and to promoting sustainable fisheries. Insufficient data management, low data collection and lack of timely and accurate data remain a challenge in this regard and are often referred to as important factors undermining effective sustainable fisheries. The management of fisheries to date has been largely based on the collection and exchange of large sets of data between various fishery management organizations (FMOs). The very diverse data sets have created a patchwork of data management solutions, which hinders efficient data exchange and the quality of data, and greatly increases data management cost.

An essential step for an effective management of fish resources is the timely acquisition of information on vessels, stocks and catches as well as the exchange of such information between stakeholders.

Member countries of the United Nations have realized that the development of a system of standardized electronic messages is a crucial precondition for establishing reliable data on catches and for the sustainable management of the world’s fish stocks. Within the United Nations, the best practice for the exchange of electronic documents has been developed by the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), which is hosted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). UN/CEFACT standards are used worldwide and

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2016)

² Ibid.

promoted by a wide range of major international organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the International Federation of Freight Forwarders Associations (FIATA), the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). These organizations support the commitments made by Governments in order to implement the World Trade Organization's Trade Facilitation Agreement.

Within UN/CEFACT, a group of experts develops messages for the simplification and automation of trade in agriculture and fishery products. The group has already developed, *inter alia*, the standard for the electronic Sanitary and Phytosanitary certificate (eCERT), electronic management and exchange of laboratory messages (eLAB), Tracking and Tracing animal and products (TT) and certificates to control the trade of protected and endangered species (eCITES toolkit). This group developed a standard for the exchange of fishery messages for the sustainable management of fisheries to provide fishery management organizations (FMOs) with the data they need to sustainably manage global fish stocks.

In today's business process, the exchange of information concerning fisheries is done through FMOs, which use very different data sets or paper declarations, making interoperability and cross-border communication of this information problematic, as outlined above. The Fisheries Language for Universal Exchange (FLUX) standard provides a harmonized message standard addressing this challenge by allowing FMOs to automatically access the electronic data from fishing vessels needed for stock management, such as vessel and trip identification, fishing operations (daily catch or haul-by-haul) or fishing data (catch area, species and quantity, date and time, and gear used).

With this standard, FMOs around the world have for the first time access to a free, open and global standard to automate the collection and dissemination of the fishery catch data needed for sustainable fishery management. Furthermore, this standard may serve as an efficient tool for detecting and combatting IUU. In addition, the development of a reliable and up-to-date database on fish catch will improve research on science-based fishery management.

C. EXISTING PARTNERSHIPS

Sustainability standards and traceability systems are a positive step towards promoting sustainability fish and seafood production. In this area, there are more than 50 voluntary seafood standards in operation, which are tailored to specific supply chains or geographical areas. Sustainability production methods, sometimes also included in standards, are becoming a market entry requirement for some developed country markets. In this area, the majority of work is being done at the private sector level and on a national basis, and is not harmonized internationally. FMOs are among the key actors involved.

D. NEW PARTNERSHIPS

UN/CEFACT recognizes the importance of sustainable fishery and established a Team of Specialists as a new global partnership in sustainable fisheries management to ensure the depletion of fishery resources due to uncontrolled catches. The Team of Specialists is composed of experts with the collective expertise to address the specific tasks defined by or for governmental institutions, business, civil society, consumer organizations and international organizations.

Such a Team will encourage the adoption and ensure uniform use of standards in the fishery sector on a global scale. In particular, it will promote, facilitate and support the implementation of the FLUX standard or other sustainable fisheries standards worldwide. It will also enhance the sharing of information, experiences and good practices on the implementation of the FLUX standard or other sustainable fisheries standards, which will contribute to internationally harmonized processes for sustainable fishery management.
