



Protecting consumers and our oceans

A step-by-step approach to implementing traceability for regulators

Governments and food control agencies have a critical role to play in protecting consumer health and the environment, particularly within the seafood industry. Through collaboration with industry players and consumers, government agencies can establish effective traceability systems, improve transparency, safeguard consumer trust, and protect marine ecosystems.

The successful implementation of a common framework for seafood traceability will require prudent policy-making, collaboration with technology providers, and raising consumer awareness to answer the crucial question: “Where does my fish come from?”.

Why is it important for governments to regulate the seafood industry?

The seafood industry is facing significant challenges that demand governmental oversight. Recent SFS Trace studies revealed that 17% of seafood was mislabelled, 40% had changed countries of origin throughout the audit period, and 40% had no verifiable source. Fraud within the seafood supply chain, a lack of transparency, and weak enforcement of regulations, misleads consumers, creates fertile ground for exploitation, and allows unsustainable practices to persist, further damaging already vulnerable ecosystems and compromising food security.

Governments and regulators have a pivotal role in ensuring the sustainability of their seafood industries through traceability regulations. By enforcing traceability standards, governments can protect their marine resources, support sustainable practices, and prevent IUU fishing. At a macro-level, there are a number of benefits to better management of the seafood industry.

Economic

- 1. Increased market competitiveness:** Strong traceability standards allow domestic seafood industries to compete in international markets, where transparency is increasingly required.
- 2. Job creation and investment:** The digitization of the industry creates new jobs in data management, technology, and compliance while attracting investments from ethical stakeholders who prioritize sustainability.

- 3. Operational efficiency:** With automation and better data flow, regulators and industry players can streamline operations, reducing delays and administrative costs while ensuring compliance with sustainability regulations.

Social

- 1. Improved public health and consumer confidence:** Ensuring seafood is accurately labelled and traceable helps protect public health, reducing the risk of contamination and allergens.
- 2. Empowerment of local communities:** Coastal and fishing communities benefit from fair access to markets, as traceability opens pathways to higher-value, sustainable seafood markets, improving their economic security.
- 3. Ethical labor practices:** Transparency ensures fair labor practices, helping to prevent illegal and exploitative labor in the supply chain.

Environmental

- 1. Sustainable fishing practices:** By monitoring fish stocks and adhering to fishing limits, regulators can prevent overfishing and protect marine biodiversity.
- 2. Conservation of marine ecosystems:** Accurate data collection helps enforce marine protected areas, ensuring that vulnerable ecosystems remain intact.
- 3. Carbon footprint reduction:** Efficient supply chains reduce carbon footprints by optimizing logistics and reducing the distance seafood travels from catch to consumer.

How does digitization play a role in the solution?

To manage and regulate the seafood industry effectively, governments must embrace digitization. Digital traceability solutions allow regulators to monitor the seafood supply chain in real-time, ensuring compliance with safety and sustainability standards.

Why digitization matters for regulation:

- **Improved data accuracy:** Automated digital tools reduce human error, making data more reliable and easier to track.
- **Real-time monitoring:** IoT sensors and blockchain technology provide live data on fishing activities, helping governments detect and address non-compliance or illegal activities swiftly.
- **Enhanced enforcement:** Digital records offer end-to-end traceability, allowing governments to track seafood from catch to consumer, ensuring transparency and integrity in the supply chain.

The successful implementation of a common framework for seafood traceability will require prudent policy-making, collaboration with technology providers, and raising consumer awareness to answer the crucial question: “Where does my fish come from?”

Steps governments can take to improve seafood sector traceability and digitization

Step 1: Define traceability objectives

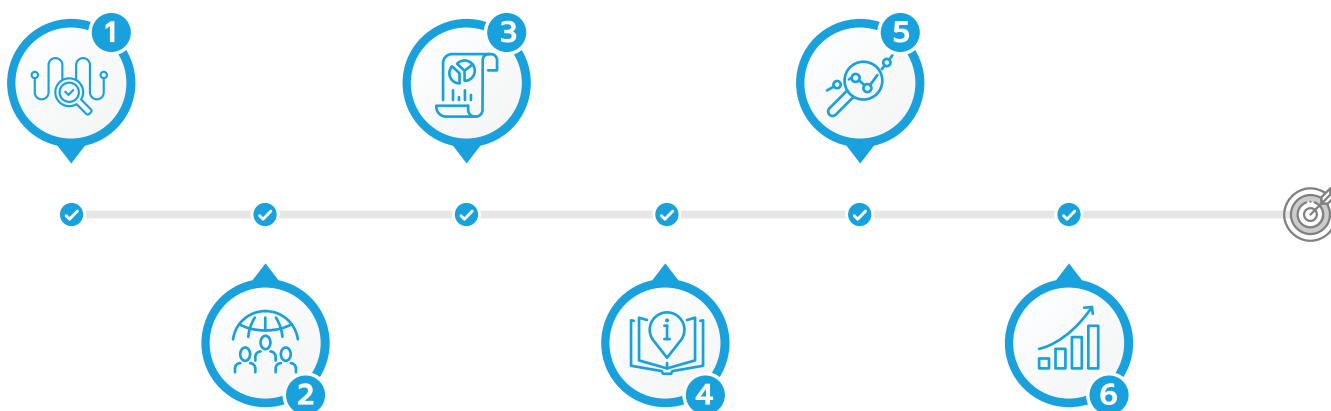
Governments must define clear goals, such as reducing IUU fishing, improving food safety, and promoting sustainable practices, to guide the implementation of traceability standards.

Step 3: Develop and publish data standards

Governments should establish and communicate standardized guidelines for data collection and sharing. These standards should align with frameworks like the Global Dialogue on Seafood Traceability (GDST) to ensure global compliance.

Step 5: Monitor and evaluate

Regular monitoring and audits ensure traceability systems are functioning effectively. Governments should use digital tools such as IoT sensors and blockchain technology to continuously assess compliance with traceability regulations.



Step 2: Engage stakeholders

Collaborating with fisheries, processors, retailers, and technology providers ensures that the development and implementation of traceability systems meet the needs of all players while ensuring compliance.

Step 4: Build guidelines and best practice resources

Governments should create resources to help industry players adapt to new regulations. These practical guides will support the adoption of digital traceability tools and ensure regulatory compliance.

Step 6: Continuously improve

Governments should be prepared to update their traceability frameworks regularly, taking into account advancements in technology, feedback from stakeholders, and evolving risks in the industry.

Risks of inaction

Failing to regulate the seafood industry and implement traceability measures carries significant risks.

- Without proper oversight, IUU fishing will continue to deplete fish stocks, damage ecosystems, and threaten food security.
- The lack of transparency allows fraud to flourish, eroding consumer confidence and increasing public health risks. Countries that fail to adopt robust

traceability systems may face barriers to accessing international markets, missing out on economic opportunities and falling behind in global sustainability efforts.

Governments must act now to secure the future of their seafood industries and protect both consumers and the environment.

Conclusion

Governments and food control agencies

have a unique opportunity to enhance the seafood supply chain by implementing robust standards for traceability. The current lack of transparency in an opaque and complex supply chain has far-reaching consequences. By encouraging traceability measures, regulators can mitigate these risks, ensuring they protect marine ecosystems, improve public health, and foster a more competitive, transparent seafood industry that benefits consumers, communities, and the environment alike.

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