



COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

SUB-COMMITTEE ON FISH TRADE

Fifteenth Session

Agadir, Morocco, 22-26 February 2016

GUIDELINES FOR CATCH DOCUMENTATION SCHEMES

Executive Summary

Following a request by the Committee on Fisheries (COFI), this paper provides a summary of the progress made to develop Guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes (the Guidelines) to improve the traceability of fishery products. In addition, the work plan of a Technical Consultation on the Guidelines planned for 2016 is presented in this paper.

Suggested action by the Sub-Committee

- Provide guidance on how to proceed with the draft Guidelines developed by the Expert Consultation, and the paper submitted by some Member States;
- Provide guidance on identifying areas where further work is required to finalize the Guidelines; and
- Provide guidance on the work plan of the Technical Consultation of April 2016, both in terms of substance and process.



INTRODUCTION

1. The Fisheries Resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 2013 expressed serious concerns over the continued threat to fish stocks and aquatic ecosystems presented by illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing, and also acknowledged the negative impact this form of fishing has on food security and the economies of states, particularly in developing regions. Recognizing FAO's work on catch documentation schemes (the CDS) and traceability in accordance with its agreed terms of reference and framework principles, the resolution called upon UN Member States to initiate work within FAO on the elaboration, in accordance with international law, including the agreements established under the World Trade Organization (WTO), of guidelines and other relevant criteria relating to CDS, including possible formats.
2. In response to this request, the Thirty-first Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI 31), in June 2014, proposed that FAO undertake the development of guidelines and other relevant criteria related to CDS, including possible formats, based on six identified principles. COFI 31 further stipulated that the assessment of schemes and formats would include cost-benefit considerations and take into account CDS already implemented by certain FAO Members, as well as by Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs).
3. Following the request of COFI 31, the Expert Consultation on Establishing Guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes (the Expert Consultation) was convened in Rome from 21 to 24 July 2015. It was attended by eight experts in their individual capacities, seven resource persons and FAO staff. The full report of the Expert Consultation is provided as COFI:FT/XV/2016/Inf.6.

RESULTS OF THE EXPERT CONSULTATION

4. Two background documents were presented to the Expert Consultation for information and consideration. The first was a study entitled Catch Documentation Schemes and the Impact Assessment, which reviewed existing schemes, analysed different impacts and recommended ways forward. The second was an initial draft Catch Documentation and Certification Guidelines for participants to comment on and revise.
5. The Expert Consultation agreed on the basic structure of the text and a table of contents outlining nine distinct sections. The structure was deemed most appropriate by the experts to organize the content and ensure the inclusion of all necessary components. These sections are: Preamble; Purpose and scope; Objective; Definitions; Principles; Application of basic principles; Special requirements of developing states; CDS recommended standards and functions; and Data requirements/formats.
6. During the course of the background study, the COFI Bureau made the decision to remove "harmonization" from the scope initially specified in the report of COFI 31. However, the Expert Consultation recommended that the term should be included in the Guidelines in the section covering the purpose and scope of the Guidelines (Section 2) and in the statement of the objective of the Guidelines (Section 3), recognizing that the overarching aim of any guidelines may have broad applicability. It was also noted that the consideration of existing schemes and their possible enhancement could lead to harmonization, particularly for the purposes of interoperable data exchange and effective enforcement through international cooperation.
7. Given the variety and complexity of domestic traceability systems and CDS, and the associated difficulty of developing the Guidelines within the available time frame, the Guidelines are intended to provide broadly applicable and practical recommendations for the development and implementation of such systems. It was decided to restrict the scope of the Guidelines in this regard to the certification of catch at the vessel unloading stage and the associated trade certification requirements when fish and fishery products enter international trade.

8. Additionally, the Expert Consultation proposed two further principles, in addition to the six put forward by COFI 31, on which the Guidelines were to be based. These were principles g) CDS should allow fish and fishery products to be traced from catch to market, and h) CDS are most effective when states involved in the supply chain cooperate in the scheme; states should seek wide multilateral engagement in development and implementation, bearing in mind the obligations of states to cooperate under international agreements.

9. The Expert Consultation agreed to include in the Guidelines a section outlining the special requirements of developing states in terms of their capacity to effectively implement the Guidelines, particularly with regard to the electronic issuance of catch documentation (Section 7). Specifically, Section 7.2 of the Guidelines encourages countries, relevant international organizations, whether governmental or non-governmental, and financial institutions, either individually or through coordination, to provide assistance and help build capacity (including financial and technical assistance, technology transfer and training) of developing countries to effectively implement the Guidelines.

10. The Expert Consultation further elaborated, both in plenary and in working groups, on “Recommended standards and functions” and “Data requirements/formats”. Most experts agreed that sufficient consideration of the cost and benefits of CDS were taken into account in the process to maximize the effectiveness of CDS, while avoiding added costs and administrative burdens to stakeholders involved.

11. The report of the Expert Consultation was adopted on 24 July 2015.

12. Subsequent to the Expert Consultation, some member countries proposed a paper for discussion (COFI:FT/XV/2016/Inf.7) during the meeting of the Sub-Committee.

WORK PLAN OF TECHNICAL CONSULTATION

13. With financial support from Norway, the Technical Consultation on establishing Guidelines for CDS will be convened from 12 to 15 April in Rome. FAO Members are invited to participate and enter into debate on the Guidelines with a view to finalizing and submitting them to the Thirty-second Session of the Committee of Fisheries in July 2016 for review and adoption.