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Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries / Sustainable Value Chains

Overview of Activities Related to the Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries in 2020

Submitted by the secretariat for information

Summary

The Chair of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries (ToSSF) will report on the activities relating to the Programme of Work (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2020/22), implemented since the twenty-seventh Plenary of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) in April 2021.

Document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2021/22 is submitted by the secretariat to the twenty-seventh session of the Plenary for information.



I. Introduction

1. Overfishing, destructive fishing practices, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing are depleting world fish stocks. These activities threaten not only fish stocks, but also the coastal communities which rely on fisheries resources for economic survival and as a reliable source of protein. The international community recognizes the importance of protecting fishery resources through Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development.
2. An essential step to attain effective and sustainable management of fishery resources is timely acquisition and exchange of information on fishing location, gear used, species and quantity caught, etc. Until now, fishing vessels have mainly used paper-based logbooks to record and exchange such information. To improve information acquisition and management, UN/CEFACT has developed an open and global standard which for allows the electronic exchange of fishery data.
3. The Fisheries Language for Universal eXchange (FLUX) provides a harmonized message standard which allows fishery management organizations (FMOs) to automatically access electronic data from fishing vessels, such as vessel and trip identification, fishing operations (daily catch or haul-by-haul) and 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, a tool which automates the collection and dissemination of the operational fishery data needed for sustainable fishery management and for detecting and combatting illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Additionally, the development of a reliable and up-to-date database on fish catch will improve the knowledge base for scientific fisheries management.
4. The FLUX standard was presented at the twenty-seventh UN/CEFACT Forum in Geneva (2017) where experts from government, regional and international organizations, regional FMOs, industry, research, and control and enforcement authorities agreed on its importance as a standardized tool to exchange fisheries information in an effective, transparent, and efficient manner. At this forum, it was proposed that a community should be established to promote and support the implementation of the FLUX standard.
5. The UN/CEFACT Agricultural, Agri-Food and Fisheries Domain has supported the proposal to create a group of experts from this community. The establishment of the group of experts, now referred to as the Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries (ToSSF), was endorsed by the twenty-third UN/CEFACT Plenary, and was approved by the Executive Committee (EXCOM) of the UNECE in June 2017.
6. The Programme of Work 2018-2019 (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/22) was discussed and adopted at the first session of the ToSSF in January 2018 and subsequently endorsed at the twenty-fourth UN/CEFACT Plenary in May 2018 (Decision 18-3). It is divided into the following four work areas: WA1: Policy dialogue and guidance; WA2: Technical monitoring, assessment and guidance; WA3: Communication and outreach; and WA4: Capacity building.
7. The importance to extend the mandate of the ToSSF beyond July 2019 to complete the remaining tasks of the Programme of Work 2018-2019 (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/22) was stressed at the second meeting of the ToSSF. The UNECE Executive Committee at its 105th meeting in May 2019 extended the mandate of the ToSSF for another two-year period (ECE/EX/2019/L6) at the request of the UN/CEFACT Plenary. Based on the 2018-2019 Programme of Work, the secretariat, jointly with the Chair of the ToSSF, prepared a Programme of Work for 2020-2021 (ToSSF/2020/INF.2). The ToSSF approved the Programme of Work which was then submitted to the twenty-sixth meeting of the UN/CEFACT Plenary.
8. As of November 2020, the membership of the ToSSF consists of sixty-four experts from the following United Nations Member States and organizations: Australia, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, China, Estonia, France, Germany, Iceland, India, Italy, Luxembourg, Malaysia, The Netherlands, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, Uruguay, the China Certification & Inspection Group (CCIC), the Convention on

International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Coletivo Nacional da Pesca e Aquicultura (Conepe), Centre for Socio-Eco-Nomic Development (CSEND) the European Commission's Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE), Fondazione Acquario di Genova ONLUS (FADG), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Global Ghost Gear Initiative, INTERPOL, Marine Stewardship Council, Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), the South Centre, the Ukrainian Fish Industry Workers, United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), World Trade Organization (WTO), and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

9. The present document provides an overview of the activities undertaken by the ToSSF to implement the Programme of Work since the twenty-sixth UN/CEFACT Plenary. It is submitted to the twenty-seventh UN/CEFACT Plenary for information.

II. Third session of the Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries

10. The UNECE ToSSF held its third session on 4 February 2020. The session was attended by 29 delegates and experts representing national government agencies, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. The following UNECE member States were represented: Albania, Germany, the Netherlands and Portugal. The following non-UNECE member States participated in the meeting: Thailand and Mongolia. The following United Nations Bodies and Organs participated in the meeting: UNECE, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), FAO, UNCTAD, and the International Labour Organization (ILO). Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations participated: DG MARE, The North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) and WTO. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations and the private sector participated: Fondazione Acquario di Genova and World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF).

11. The Chair introduced document ToSSF/2020/INF.3, which reports on the progress in the implementation of the Programme of Work. He recalled that the overall objective of the ToSSF is to contribute to integrated maritime governance by promoting, facilitating and supporting the implementation of fishery data standards on a global scale, including FLUX. Finally, he provided an overview of activities undertaken under Work Area 1: Policy dialogue and advice; Work Area 2: Technical monitoring, assessment and guidance; Work Area 3: Communication and outreach; and Work Area 4: Capacity building, to achieve such objectives. Within the Programme of Work, he noted the team had made significant progress. The Chair invited missions to submit nominations to the secretariat for the vacant positions of vice chairs.

12. The Chair reported that the Fisheries Open Source solution community (FOCUS), which was working on the development of an open source software solution for FLUX message exchanges, had decided to terminate their work. This has spurred the need to find alternative ways to make low-cost solutions available for FLUX implementation.

13. He reported on the progress in the development of promotional materials. In November 2019, the latest draft of the FLUX FAQ document, the brochure and the leaflet were circulated to the ToSSF for final comments. The documents have since been sent to the European Commission contractor for proposals on layout and design.

14. The last deliverable planned will be a short promotional video, using a narrative with infographics. Its purpose will be to explain FLUX and its advantages to a lay audience. It will be shareable on social media and used during conferences and fora to raise awareness of FLUX and its benefits. On the 5 December 2019 ToSSF conference call, participants resolved to arrange a face-to-face meeting with the contractor in Brussels in 2020 to provide the input required to produce the promotion video.

15. The Chair also noted that in December 2018 a template for the collection of case studies on FLUX from United Nations Member States had been developed by the UNECE secretariat in consultation with the ToSSF to facilitate the sharing of countries' experiences

and lessons learned on the challenges and opportunities related to implementing FLUX. The first case study has been prepared by the Government of Thailand. A second case study has now been received by the Government of Spain and is available on the ToSSF website ¹.

16. The Chair also reported that the secretariat contributed to the organization of the Third Oceans Forum² on oceans economy, climate and harmful fish subsidies. The Forum was held on 10 September 2019 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva and was jointly organized by UNCTAD, the FAO, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Group of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (ACP), the International Ocean Institute (IOI), and UNECE.

17. The objective of the Forum was to identify the relationship between the oceans, economy, climate change and harmful fisheries subsidies and to take stock of the final phase of negotiations of fish subsidies currently being discussed under the WTO Negotiating Group on Rules. The Forum discussed efforts to prevent the subsidizing of IUU and overfishing and the need of fishing authorities to have access to reliable data about fishing equipment, fishing activities, catches, fish sales and fisheries inspections. The role of FLUX in this context was highlighted.

18. The Chair introduced the Programme of Work for 2020-2021 (ToSSF/2020/INF.2), which was subsequently approved by the meeting participants.

19. The expert from the European Commission provided an update on the current state of the development of documents and promotion materials and noted the completion of the policy brief (ToSSF/2020/INF.6). The group requested that the European Commission and the secretariat follow up on the outstanding documents (FAQ, leaflet and brochure) to finalize them and to organize a meeting with the contractor to define the content of the promotional video. All activities were to be completed by November 2020.

20. The Chair suggested that the outstanding promotional document and materials could be completed with contributions from other United Nations entities (i.e. ILO and CITES).

21. The secretariat will compile all promotional and information-related materials in a single website.

22. Under the agenda item VI. *Planning for future activities*, the expert from the European Commission highlighted the need to analyse existing catch certification schemes/catch documentation schemes (CCS/CDS) in connection with the FLUX standard work underway (i.e. reusing the UN/CEFACT Core Component Library elements). An electronic system for catch certificates (CATCH) is now available for European Union stakeholders to track the international trade of fishery products from landing to the final market. The CATCH system currently requires manual data entry and there is a growing need for a system-to-system integration for automated exchanges between stakeholders. A new FLUX domain for catch certificate and catch documentation schemes is required.

23. The third session of the ToSSF approved 10 decisions which are provided in document ToSSF/2020/INF.5.

III. Promotion and capacity building for the FLUX Sustainable Fisheries Standard project

24. Following the third meeting of the ToSSF, DG MARE worked with a contractor to deliver the outstanding promotional documents and leaflets. All promotional materials are provided on the ToSSF web page on UNECE website. DG MARE reported that the

¹ See <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/cefact/SustainableFisheriesTeamOfSpecialists/CaseStudies/Spain.pdf> (accessed 19 March 2021).

² For more information about the Third Oceans Forum, which took place as part of the United Nations Trade Forum: SDGs and Climate Change (9-13 September 2019), see <https://unctad.org/meeting/un-trade-forum-sdgs-and-climate-change> (accessed 19 March 2021).

development of the planned promotional video had to be cancelled due to COVID-19-related restrictions for travelling and face-to-face meetings.

25. The secretariat had planned to participate in and to provide information on the work of the ToSSF in upcoming policy meetings, in particular at the 2020 United Nations Ocean Forum (Lisbon, Portugal, 2-6 June 2020); the twelfth WTO Ministerial Conference (Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, 8-11 June 2020); the 15th UNCTAD quadrennial conference (Bridgetown, Barbados from 18-23 October 2020) and the 4th meeting of the UNCTAD Oceans Forum in 2021. Due to the COVID-19 these meetings have been cancelled or moved to a later date. The secretariat plans to attend these meetings if and when they are rescheduled.

IV. The UN/CEFACT Forum in November 2020

26. Experts from the ToSSF participated in a session of the Agriculture Fisheries and Agri-Food Domain. A minor update for the inspection report message has been submitted to and accepted by the library maintenance group. It will be included in the CCL 20B and the updated schema for the inspection report will be published. No new requests have been received for updating the FLUX messages.

27. The COVID-19 pandemic has prevented work from beginning on a new FLUX domain for catch certification and catch documentation, which requires a physical workshop of experts, as this domain is very complicated.

V. Future orientation of the work of the Team of Specialists

28. After having consulted with the Chair of the ToSSF, the secretariat has concluded that the main body of work for which TOSSF was created has been completed in the course of 2020. The secretariat will continue to support the implementation of the FLUX standard and will work, as required, with the experts that have come together in the ToSSF. Future fisheries-related activities could include, for example, the organization of, or participation in, conferences on sustainable fisheries, or the organization of promotional and capacity-building events.

29. With the work programme of FLUX-related deliveries now completed, the secretariat suggests that the focus of the ToSSF be turned other areas of sustainable trade.
