



**GENERAL FISHERIES COMMISSION FOR  
THE MEDITERRANEAN  
COMMISSION GÉNÉRALE DES PÊCHES  
POUR LA MÉDITERRANÉE**



**Committee on Aquaculture (CAQ)**

**Eighth Session**

**Paris, France, 13-15 March 2013**

**Brief notes on aquaculture certification, traceability and existing  
guidelines**

## BACKGROUND

1. The present paper notes were presented and discussed during the Fifth Coordinating Meeting of the Working Groups (CMWG) of the Committee on Aquaculture (CAQ) of the General Fisheries Commission of the Mediterranean (GFCM) held in Rome (Italy) at GFCM premises. The considerations made by the CMWG are also reported in the document. These notes were subsequently updated to include the main conclusions of the 30<sup>th</sup> Committee on Fisheries (COFI) held in Rome from 9–13 July 2012.

## INTRODUCTION

2. The GFCM recognizes that to meet the growing demand for responsible, sustainable and high quality aquaculture products there is a need to improve the management of the sector and acknowledges the increasing importance that certification and traceability play for the aquaculture industry, especially in relation to food safety and security. Previous attempts have been made by the GFCM to address these issues and the work done provides the basis for further actions (GFCM, 2011<sup>1</sup>). A number of certification schemes already exist for fish and fishery products, each one with its own specifications, standards, levels of transparency and sponsors, covering different facets of aquaculture including environmental aspects, animal welfare, social and economical development aspects (GFCM, 2011).

### Certification

3. Certification is defined as a “*Procedure by which certification body or entity gives written or equivalent assurance that a product, process or service conforms to specified requirements. Certification may be, as appropriate, based on a range of audit activities that may include continuous audit in the production chain*” (FAO, 2011a<sup>2</sup>). The application of certification in aquaculture is now viewed as a potential market-based tool for minimizing potential negative impacts and increasing

<sup>1</sup> GFCM. 2011. Draft GFCM occasional paper on ecolabelling and certification schemes. 45p.

<sup>2</sup> FAO. 2011a. Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification. Rome/Roma, FAO. 2011. 122 pp.

societal and consumer benefits and confidence in the process of aquaculture production and marketing (FAO, 2011a).

4. FAO prepared guidelines for the development, organization and implementation of credible aquaculture certification schemes which were approved by the 29<sup>th</sup> Committee on Fisheries (COFI - Rome, 31 Jan–4 Feb 2011<sup>3</sup>). The guidelines provide the following four minimum substantive criteria for developing aquaculture certification standards: (1) animal health and welfare; (2) food safety; (3) environmental integrity; and (4) socio-economic aspects.

5. The Committee acknowledged the following:

- the implementation of the Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification shall be gradual;
- the existence of standards and guidelines set by international organizations and instruments such as the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) for aquatic animal health and welfare, CODEX Alimentarius Commission for Food Safety and ILO for socio-economic aspects;
- absence of a precise international reference framework for the implementation of some specific minimum criteria contained in the Guidelines.

6. Based on the above, the Committee recommended the following:

- develop, at a multilateral level and in coordination with the relevant intergovernmental organizations, appropriate standards, in order to ensure that the certification systems do not become unnecessary barriers to trade and remain consistent with the reference international standards, in particular with the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures and the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade of the WTO;
- provision of assistance for building the capacity and enhancing the ability of stakeholders to participate in developing and complying with aquaculture certification schemes consistent with the FAO guidelines;
- FAO to develop an evaluation framework to assess the conformity of public and private certification schemes with the Guidelines.

7. During the 30<sup>th</sup> COFI held in 2012<sup>4</sup>, the Committee reiterated that the implementation of the guidelines on aquaculture certification should be gradual and that it would be necessary to develop, at multilateral level and in coordination with the relevant Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGOs), appropriate standards in order to ensure that the certification system does not become unnecessary barriers to trade and remains consistent with the referenced international standards.

8. The Committee also requested FAO to develop a conformity assessment framework for aquaculture certification guidelines and noted that such activities and resulting tools should not create any technical barriers to trade.

### **Traceability**

9. Traceability is defined as “*the ability to follow the movement of a product of aquaculture, or inputs such as feed and seed, through specified stage(s) of production, processing and distribution*” (FAO, 2011a). In international seafood trade that management of production is outside the control of the importing country, and this is a risk. Knowing where food is coming from (or what it’s made of) is key to assessing risks and applying control measures, and traceability provides this knowledge.

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<sup>3</sup> FAO. 2011b. Report of the twenty-ninth session of the Committee on Fisheries. Rome, 31 January–4 February 2011. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Report. No. 973. Rome, FAO. 59 pp.

<sup>4</sup> FAO. 2012. Report of the thirtieth session of the Committee on Fisheries. Rome, 9–13 July 2012. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Report. No. 1012. Rome, FAO. 59 pp.

10. Traceability is needed to satisfy the requirements of (1) *food safety*: occasionally food safety problems such as contamination, pathogens, etc., occur either voluntary or accidentally. There is a need to identify responsibilities as well as to make sure that the source of, for example contamination, is identified and removed; (2) *transparency*: consumers are increasingly concerned about where the food they eat is coming from. Ensuring that consumers and buyers can trace the food they buy all along the aquaculture value chain will be, for example, a requisite for accessing EC markets as from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2015 (European Union, 2011)<sup>5</sup>. The EU traceability regulation will be harder in the future and it can be used as trade barrier; (3) *sustainability*: there is increasing awareness/concerns about sustainable sourcing.

11. COFI in 2011 stated that “*FAO should initiate work to develop international best practices guidelines for traceability of fish and fishery products in order to facilitate coherence of different traceability systems*” (FAO, 2011b). The concepts of traceability and certification are strictly intertwined: one of the principles underpinning the FAO guidelines on certification schemes states that a certification scheme “*should include adequate procedures for maintaining chain of custody and traceability of certified aquaculture products and processes*”.

### CONSIDERATIONS BY THE 5<sup>TH</sup> CMWG

12. The above issues on certification and traceability in aquaculture were discussed at the Fifth CMWG of CAQ and hereunder reported. The meeting acknowledged the increasing importance that certification and traceability play for the aquaculture industry, especially in relation to food safety and security, and market access. It was stressed that, following the FAO guidelines for the development, organization and implementation of credible aquaculture certification schemes approved by the 29<sup>th</sup> Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in 2011, there is now a need to provide assistance for building the capacity and enhancing the ability of stakeholders to participate in developing and complying with aquaculture certification schemes consistent with such guidelines. Finally the CMWG emphasized the importance of traceability for (1) food safety, (2) transparency with consumers, and (3) sustainability, as well as (4) for accessing international markets e.g. the EU but also domestic markets in a foreseeable future.

13. The CMWG also acknowledged the increasing importance played by certification and traceability in aquaculture as well as the FAO guidelines in response to trade barrier issues related to certification. CMWG concluded that there is a need to support member countries in dealing with certification and aquaculture. It was also proposed that the envisaged future initiatives dealing with aquaculture farmers’ organizations and farmers and certification-traceability could be linked in that farmers’ organizations could play a key role in promoting aquaculture certification. CMWG considered that this initiative will have to be included within the activities of the WGSA.

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<sup>5</sup> European Union. 2011. Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 404/2011 of 8 April 2011 laying down detailed rules for the implementation of Council Regulation (EC) No 1224/2009 establishing a Community control system for ensuring compliance with the rules of the Common Fisheries Policy. Traceability is addressed in Chapter I under Title IV ‘Control of Marketing’.