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Briefing note on the contribution of UN/CEFACT to UN Sustainable Development Goal 14

Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Submitted by the secretariat

Summary

The Sustainable Development Goals, adopted unanimously by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015, will be a key reference point for the work of the United Nations over the coming years. This Briefing Note provides an insight into how UN/CEFACT's work to develop a standard for the exchange of fishery messages for the sustainable management of fisheries (FLUX) contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

This document is presented to the Plenary for information*.

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1. Due to overfishing and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, the world fish stocks are depleting. As of 2011, the fraction of assessed stocks fished within biologically sustainable levels declined to 71.2% and consequently, 28.8% of fish stocks were estimated as fished at a biologically unsustainable level (FAO, 2014). This threatens not only the fish, but also the humans depending on them. The breakdown or collapse of coastal fisheries has a direct impact on the economic well-being of the coastal communities that rely on fisheries for economic survival and a dependable food source. According to the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), "about 1 billion people largely in developing countries rely on fish as their primary animal protein source. In 2010, fish provided more than 2.9 billion people with almost 20% of their intake of animal protein, and 4.3 billion people with about 15 % of such protein" (MSC, 2015).

2. The United Nations has recognised the critical role of the ocean and its resources by dedicating Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources) to it. Of the targets for this Goal, 4 out of 6 indicators relate to the conservation of fish stocks, including:

14.4 By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics

14.7 By 2030, increase the economic benefits to small island developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism

14.a Increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer marine technology, taking into account the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Criteria and Guidelines on the Transfer of Marine Technology, in order to improve ocean health and to enhance the contribution of marine biodiversity to the development of developing countries, in particular small island developing States and least developed countries

3. In order to counter further depletion of this resource, global fish resources are managed by Fishery Management Organisations (FMOs). Vessels fishing within the realm of an FMO have to obtain a permission (linked to a quota) from the FMOs, so that fish stocks can be effectively managed. Through their flag States, vessels have to report catches which are then provided to the FMO.

4. An essential step for an effective management of fish resources through the FMO is the timely acquisition of information on stocks and catches and the exchange of such information between stakeholders. The management of fisheries to date has been largely based upon the collection and exchange of large sets of data between various fishery institutions. The very diverse data sets have created a patchwork of data management solutions which hinders data exchange and the quality of data, and greatly increases data management costs.

5. Up until this point in time, for fishery management purposes, fishing vessels have been recording and reporting their activities using hand-written logbooks based on data exchanged using paper documents. Paper-based logbooks have significant drawbacks, as paper documents are (a) easy to forge or sanitise, (b) error-prone and at times illegible, (c) lacking in quality control, and (d) subject to different bilateral agreements and format standards. Member countries of the UN system realized that the development of a system of

standardised electronic messages is a crucial precondition for establishing reliable data on catch and for the sustainable management of the world's fish stocks.

6. In 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 world-wide and promoted by a very wide range of major international organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Air Transport Association (IATA), International Federation of Freight Forwarders Associations (FIATA), World Customs Organization (WCO) and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). They are also part of the commitments which Governments implement under the World Trade Organization's Trade Facilitation Agreement.

7. 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), and certificates to control trade in CITES species (eCITES toolkit).

8. With the support of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE), the UN/CEFACT expert group is developing a standard for the exchange of fishery messages for the sustainable management of fisheries (FLUX) to provide the FMOs with the data they need to manage global fish stocks.

9. The FLUX standard provides a harmonized message standard that allows 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).

10. With this standard, FMOs around the world will have for the first time access to an open and global standard to automate the collection and dissemination of the fishery catch data needed for sustainable fishery management and needed in order to have an efficient tool for detecting and combatting illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. In addition, the development of a reliable and up-to-date database on fish catch will improve research on science-based fishery management.