

Working Group 2: EU Markets

Minutes

Thursday, 5 February 2026 (09:30 – 12:30 CEST)

European Food Centre (Wandelaarkaai 7 / 61, 8400 Oostende)

Interpretation in EN, ES, FR

Welcome from the Chair, Pierre Commère

[Presentation](#)

Adoption of the agenda and of the last meeting's minutes (01.12.25): adopted

Action points

- Fisheries Control regulation
 - Consideration via an urgent written procedure of the draft advice proposed by Seafood Europe on upcoming digital traceability requirements for fishery and aquaculture products falling under Chapter 03 of the Combined Nomenclature
 - Draft advice considered from 5 to 10 December 2025 by Working Group 2
 - Following an information note from DG MARE, Working Group 2 decided to suspend the procedure.
- Fight against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing
 - Consideration via a written procedure of draft advice to be proposed by EIJ on unregulated squid in the Southwest Atlantic
 - Pending
- EU Strategy for External Fisheries Actions
 - Comprehensive exchange of views with DG MARE representatives on the upcoming strategy to be held at the 5 February 2026 meeting of the Executive Committee.
 - Agenda item scheduled

European Market Observatory for Fisheries and Aquaculture Products

- Presentation of 2025 edition of “The EU Fish Market” report by Laurène Jolly (MARE A4) and Bianca Abbagnano (EUMOFA)

[Presentation](#)

Bianca Abbagnano (EUMOFA) recalled that EUMOFA is a market-intelligence tool of DG MARE providing up-to-date data on the entire fisheries and aquaculture supply chain, informing EU stakeholders, businesses and



consumers. “The EU Fish Market” is one of its flagship publications, offering a comparative analysis of production, trade, consumption and market trends based on the latest available data.

Ms Abbagnano explained that high prices continued to shape household consumption in 2024, with expenditure rising by 4% for the third consecutive year despite declining volumes. Fresh fish consumption at home fell by 4% and has been decreasing since 2021. Trade flows also slowed: EU trade value fell by 1%, volumes by 0.5%, although 2024 still recorded the third-highest trade value of the decade. The EU trade deficit narrowed by 2%, driven by a modest increase in export values. Fuel prices continued to decline, stabilising below €0.6/litre.

Ms Abbagnano, on apparent consumption, recalled that EUMOFA estimations rely on production data with a two-year lag, meaning 2023 is the latest reference year. Apparent consumption in 2023 reached its lowest level of the decade and has been falling since 2018 (with a temporary rise in 2021). As a result, the EU self-sufficiency rate rose to 31.1%, its first increase since 2017, driven mainly by lower imports rather than higher production.

Ms Abbagnano outlined the global trends. Worldwide, production of aquatic animals continued to grow, overwhelmingly driven by aquaculture, which reached a 10-year high in 2023 due to expansion in Asia (China, Indonesia, India, Vietnam, Bangladesh). The EU ranked eighth globally and saw a 1% increase in total production, mainly through higher catches rather than aquaculture growth. The EU trade in fishery and aquaculture products, i.e. the sum of EU import from non-EU countries and EU exports to non-EU countries, remains the second-largest worldwide in both volume and value, behind China. Concerning EU supply, she highlighted that the estimated total supply for human consumption amounted to 12.38 million tonnes LWE (Live Weight Equivalent) in 2023 (–3% from 2022), the lowest level of the decade, reflecting declines in catches, aquaculture and imports. Wild products continue to dominate EU supply (about 70%).

Ms Abbagnano explained that, when comparing Member States, Portugal remains the highest per-capita consumer, exceeding 53 kg LWE per capita in 2023, more than twice the EU average (23 kg LWE). Most major consuming countries saw declines from 2022, with the exception of Italy and Cyprus, which recorded slight increases. Among the 50 most consumed species, few recorded growth in 2023 - mainly Alaska pollock, herring and gilthead seabream- while both salmon and tuna (aggregated) showed negative trends.

Consumption of processed fishery and aquaculture products through foodservices and retail sales reached 2.1 million tonnes in 2024 (+1% over 2023), largely concentrated in Germany, Spain, France and Italy. Retail and out-of-home consumption trends diverged: retail peaked in 2020 and has since stabilised, while out-of-home consumption has continued to rise after the COVID-19 dip.

Ms Abbagnano provided an overview of the trade dynamics. From 2023 to 2024, the value of the EU trade deficit decreased. Deficits widened in Spain, France, Italy and the Netherlands, but improved in Denmark, Sweden and Germany. She highlighted that fish imports remain 35 times higher than meat imports, and the price gap between fish and meat has widened over the past five years. Six partners, specifically Norway, the UK, Ecuador, China, Iceland and Morocco, accounted for one-third of EU extra-EU imports. The EU recorded the third-highest import value of the decade in 2024, while exports to third countries reached 2.2 million tonnes valued at €8 billion, with the United States being the main destination in value terms.

Ms Abbagnano, concerning intra-EU trade, highlighted the record levels reached: 5.8 million tonnes worth €32 billion, representing around 30% of total EU trade flows. These flows were dominated by re-exports and high-value products circulating between multiple Member States.



Ms Abbagnano, concerning landings and aquaculture, underlined that 2023 landings continued a multi-year decline from their peak in 2017, with a persistent diverging evolution-between falling volumes and comparatively stable values. Aquaculture production also declined in both volume and value reaching 1.04 million tonnes (-4% over 2022) and a value of EUR 4.76 billion (-1% from 2022). In terms of volumes produced, 2023 was the second lowest year of the 2014-2023 period, but it also represented the second highest in terms of production value. This trend reflects higher production costs and subsequent rises in unit prices rather than purely volume-driven growth.

Ms Abbagnano drew attention to upcoming EUMOFA publications for 2026, specifically the next edition of “the EU Fish Market” report, the Blue Bioeconomy Report, a study on consumption of fishery and aquaculture products in the EU, a study on EU tuna, an update of the report on caviar, and a series of case studies available in the “Monthly Highlights”.

- **Exchange of views**

The Chair thanked Ms Abbagnano for the comprehensive presentation, highlighting, however, that the overview refers back to consolidated data from two to three years back, not taking stock on more recent market developments.

Thibault Pivetta (EMPA), concerning the planned case study on mussels’ production in the EU, called for the including of Spain in the Member States covered.

Daniel Voces (Europêche) commented that the presented report, together with the Annual Economic Report on the EU Fishing Fleet, showed the various challenges faced by the industry, including a significant decline in domestic landings. In his view, it was important to study the constraints faced by the EU fleet. Mr Voces drew attention to a recent presentation by FAO representatives on the contribution of fishery and aquaculture products to food security. The EU seemed to be the only region showing decreases in both production and consumption. He wanted to know whether EUMOFA had more up-to-date data than the FAO.

Sergio López García (OPP Burela) argued that, while the report provided very useful information, it should ultimately inform concrete political decisions. Mr López highlighted the continuous negative trends in landings, which, in his view, should be a source of concern for all actors in the value chain. He wanted to know how DG MARE would use the findings to inform its policy work.

Patrick Murphy (IS&WFPO) requested suggestions on how the findings of the report could be use for practical actions by the relevant stakeholders and policymakers. Mr Murphy wanted to know the explanation for the decrease in consumption. He expressed concern about the continued decreasing trend.

Laurène Jolly (DG MARE) responded that due note was taken of Mr Pivetta’s suggestion. Concerning projections, Ms Jolly explained that, unlike the FAO, EUMOFA does not have the mandate to undertake projection modelling, but keeps track of the projections published by the FAO. She reassured members that the data from EUMOFA was widely used by DG MARE, including in the context of the ongoing evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy. Regarding the consumption trends, she emphasised the importance of considering the overall distribution. For instance, the consumption of processed products is rather improving. The same trend was observed in the latest Eurobarometer survey. Sustained high-prices exerted pressure on the consumption of all food categories .



Bianca Abbagnano (EUMOFA) added that, in the upcoming months, EUMOFA would be publishing a comprehensive study on the consumption of fishery and aquaculture products.

Roberto Alonso (ANFACO-CYTMA) welcomed the work of EUMOFA on consumer trends, deeming it essential for the sector, especially for export-oriented operators. Concerning the decrease in domestic landings, Mr Alonso highlighted that, historically, processing takes place close to the raw material landings. The influence of the EU on shared fishing stocks was decreasing. Global catches were being taken over by third countries. He encouraged EUMOFA to consider total captures in its work.

Laurène Jolly (DG MARE) thanked Mr Alonso for the suggestion, expressing availability to check internally how to better integrate total captures and shared stocks data if available.

EU Cluster for Food Traceability and Trust

- **Presentation on cross-project collaboration for resilient, transparent and sustainable EU food supply chains by Vlasiz Tsezos (Agritrack)**

[Presentation](#)

Vlasiz Tsezos (Agritrack) explained that the EU Cluster for Food Traceability and Trust, launched in 2024, brings together 13 EU-funded projects aiming to avoid duplication, increase coherence cross initiatives and deliver implementation-ready solutions for the market. The Cluster spans the entire food value chain and works to strengthen the transparency, integrity and sustainability of EU food systems by combining technological innovation, multidisciplinary expertise and policy-driven approaches.

Mr Tsezos highlighted that 2026 marked a critical inflection point for the traceability of fishery and aquaculture products in the EU and worldwide. Several regulatory milestones would converge: the entry into force, in January 2026, of minimum digital traceability requirements under the revised Fisheries Control Regulation and the research of digital interoperability solutions; the emergence of new global traceability rules, including in the United States; and, by January 2029, additional traceability obligations for prepared and preserved products (Chapter 16). He stressed that early alignment among actors would be essential to avoid fragmented or ineffective implementation. He outlined the main challenges observed across EU-funded projects, namely lack of alignment between regulatory ambitions and everyday operational realities, especially in SME-dominated seafood supply chains; interoperability gaps, with systems unable to communicate seamlessly, resulting in duplicated data entry and inconsistencies, and lot marking difficulties, with frequent disruptions in lot continuity during transformations and repacking.

Mr Tsezos explained that interoperability remains difficult because of the diversity of tools used across fishing vessels, farms, processors, distributors and retailers. This is where the concept of an interoperable traceability event data layer becomes essential, enabling the smooth transfer of data across actors without bespoke integrations and while maintaining lot integrity. He drew attention to evidence from multiple EU pilots demonstrating that digital, interoperable traceability is technically feasible today. The pilots show successful integration in real workflows, robust lot handling (including splits and merges), alignment with Global Dialogue on Seafood Traceability standards, and compatibility with both EU and USA requirements,



including FSMA 204. These developments also support wider frameworks such as the traceability enhancement programme of the Marine Stewardship Council.

Mr Tsezos outlined how effective traceability solutions should operate: by capturing data from multiple sources, structuring them into standardised events, and ensuring consistent, audit-ready information that can be shared across systems. He emphasised that traceability solutions do not replace existing systems, but act as a digital intelligence layer, non-disruptive and designed to harmonise and structure data from existing tools. He highlighted that the Cluster represents a shared vision for transparent, secure and sustainable food systems and accelerates convergence towards effective solutions through collaboration and synergies across projects.

Mr Tsezos drew attention to further opportunities for engagement between the Cluster and the MAC. These include low-lift implementation trials allowing operators to test traceability approaches in proportionate, real-life conditions; optional access to implementation examples; and the possibility to request a short video or live demonstration of EU-funded platforms. These sessions could focus on digital data capture, practical lot handling, interoperable data exchange and audit-ready documentation. Relevant use cases cover both aquaculture and wild-capture supply chains, drawing on operational experience from the EU and the USA.

- **Exchange of views**

Guus Pastoor (Seafood Europe) mentioned the added value of the presentation. Concerning the issue of interoperability, Mr Pastoor argued that the challenges related to data quality, not to IT. He stated that IT systems were already available and were generally mandated by retailers. Therefore, he wanted to know if the data quality challenges were being addressed by the projects.

Vlasis Tsezos (Agritrack) acknowledged that data quality was a challenge, adding that the projects aimed to address it through the incorporation of digital tools for data collection and verification. “Health assessments” per lot assessed outlier data, including missing or incorrect data, allowing for a timely correction. Mr Tsezos emphasised that there were several layers to address the issue, including through mobile phone applications, to ensure a consistent “health assessment” per lot and to notify the users.

Adrien Simonnet (UMF) underscored the importance of improving data quality, particularly from the source. Mr Simonnet drew attention to the challenges related to commercial confidentiality in connection to receiving data from suppliers. In his view, these challenges should be considered by the projects.

Vlasis Tsezos (Agritrack) responded that the transferring of data followed specific data protocols, which determined which operator had access to which information on each lot. Mr Tsezos emphasised that there was technology available to ensure that downstream operators only have access to the lot-specific information.

Traceability

- **Presentation on the implementation of traceability by Àngels Segura (AECOC)**

[Presentation](#)



Àngels Segura (AECOC) explained that her organisation, as GS1 Spain, is an organisation of global standards, composed of the entire value chain, with over with over 34.000 member companies - 1000 of them in the seafood sector. Ms Segura highlighted that GS1 is a global standards organisation active in 120 countries, with billions of barcodes scanned daily and more than two million organisations using GS1 standards worldwide. GS1 standards were originally developed to improve logistics efficiency at checkout but have since become a globally recognised foundation for interoperability across multiple sectors, including seafood. She stressed that robust traceability requires common data structures and harmonised transmission models, especially in sectors where large volumes of information flow through numerous operators.

Ms Segura highlighted that, at the core of GS1 traceability, there were three essential steps: registering, identifying and transmitting information, all based on a shared structure. The way operators capture, identify and share data must be aligned to ensure full interoperability throughout the supply chain. She underscored that, given the high volume of information to manage, there was a need for greater digitalisation, enabling information to be handled efficiently and avoiding errors. GS1 standards help identify products and exchange information through a common language, although this can be more complex in the fisheries sector, where a harmonised product catalogue between supplier and client is required.

Ms Segura explained that data capture can rely on multiple formats, such as GS1-128 barcodes, electronic data interchange (EDI), bidimensional codes, such as DataMatrix codes, all designed to structure information and transmit it reliably. She emphasised that these tools are well-established and that the electronic transfer of data remains a key instrument for exchanging data electronically in a standardised manner, including traceability information.

Ms Segura outlined three GS1 traceability models used in seafood supply chains. Model 1 was a GS1-128 physical label combined with an electronic delivery note (DESADV), used for example by Mercadona with its providers. Model 2 consisted of transferring all information physically on the packaging through a GS1 DataMatrix. This model is not used yet, but some retailers, such as El Corte Inglés and Carrefour in Spain, have been interested on it. Model 3 was an EPCIS event-based model, where traceability events are uploaded to a digital platform and accessed by clients.

Ms Segura acknowledged that the fisheries sector remained particularly complex, with information still often transferred manually, increasing the risk of errors quantity of data and the diversity of existing systems. She encouraged a change in the way of working, to decrease the probability of human error, and to address the current challenges in systems to work with one another.

- **Presentation of MSC's digital traceability project by James Caldwell (MSC)**

[Presentation](#)

James Caldwell (MSC) explained that his organisation is the leading global ecolabel for wild-capture fisheries, recognised internationally, and operating through a chain of custody system covering more than 43,000 certified sites and nearly 6,000 certificate holders.

Mr Caldwell explained that growing regulatory requirements, global efforts to address IUU fishing and food fraud, and increasing consumer expectations were driving the seafood sector towards standardised digital



traceability. Recent legislation in major markets, including the EU, US, Japan, Korea and China, requires the collection of harmonised traceability data, accelerating the transition to digital systems.

Mr Caldwell highlighted that, within the MSC Chain of Custody Standard, traceability remains the area where most non-conformities occur. For this reason, MSC intends to strengthen its requirements by requiring certificate holders to collect traceability data in a standardised digital format and by deploying interoperable verification software capable of automatically checking traceability records. The system is built on the Electronic Product Code Information Services data standard and the Global Dialogue on Seafood Traceability framework.

Mr Caldwell emphasised that his organisation deliberately chose an interoperability-based approach, avoiding the prescription of any specific IT system. Instead, certificate holders can choose the software that works best for their business, provided it supports a common data language. The MSC framework defines the Key Data Elements needed for verification and allows for a decentralised model, where MSC does not store operational data but verifies it when needed.

Mr Caldwell outlined the development of the digital verification tool, tested through pilots using Electronic Product Code Information Services -formatted data. The tool verifies traceability information directly against partner systems, deletes data after each verification, and retains only metadata, while also incorporating risk-based algorithms. This approach aims to reduce audit burden, improve data integrity, and strengthen confidence in supply-chain information.

Mr Caldwell drew attention to the expected benefits for partners, including support in meeting regulatory requirements, reduced reputational risk, risk-based auditing, and greater assurance through more frequent automated checks. In the longer term, sector-wide alignment on data standards could facilitate broader digitalisation across all certificate holders.

Mr Caldwell informed that MSC was conducting pilot testing (2025–2026) to assess both the completeness of its proposed Critical Tracking Events and Key Data Elements, and the functionality of the verification tool. He added that not all systems were, at the time, compatible, and that MSC was working to improve accessibility for operators without advanced digital systems. He indicated that his organisation expects a transition phase leading up to 2030, with further testing, consultation and gradual rollout. The programme aims to remain inclusive for small-scale operators and avoid prohibitive requirements as the sector shifts towards fully digital, standardised traceability.

- **Presentation on the adoption and implementation of digital interoperable data exchange by Huw Thomas (GDST)**

[Presentation](#)

Huw Thomas (GDST) emphasised that traceability has been on the industry’s agenda for many years, but that new needs and expectations around data were emerging. One of the main challenges was that traceability information was often historic: it arrives late, supply-chain actors do not always know where products are going, and this can create significant reputational risks for the sector. Mr Thomas presented his organisation’s vision of interoperable, near real-time digital data exchange, arguing that linking digital datasets along the supply chain is the key to moving from reactive, historic traceability to proactive risk management. Looking



ahead to 2030, he suggested that the GDST standard could enable an evolution from traditional food-safety traceability towards broader trade and transparency data in a fully digital environment.

Mr Thomas outlined the current status of GDST, which brings together more than 130 partners, including seafood companies, certification schemes, software providers and NGOs, and operates as an industry-led, not-for-profit foundation based in the Netherlands. GDST works with 11 governments (including Indonesia, EU Member States, the US, Peru, Ecuador, Chile and Mexico) and benefits from the support of the FAO, the UN Global Compact and the UN Transparency Protocol.

Mr Thomas stressed that GDST is fundamentally about digital, interoperable data exchange that enables traceability and transparency, rather than about prescribing specific IT systems. Current studies indicate that up to 80% of relevant data does not reach the next stage in the chain, largely because of incompatible formats and fragmented approaches. In response, the GDST traceability standard defines what data should be collected, when it should be captured, how it should be formatted and how it should be shared, while leaving companies free to choose their own internal data architectures and solutions.

Mr Thomas argued that, to achieve true interoperability, digitalisation alone would not be sufficient. GDST defines interoperability through three pillars: (1) a common set of Critical Tracking Events and Key Data Elements, representing a shared understanding of “what we need to know” and a common nomenclature; (2) standardisation of data formats; and (3) standardisation of communication protocols. Combining these three elements allows diverse systems to exchange and interpret data automatically, while letting companies choose the solutions that best fit their business.

Mr Thomas drew attention to the digital transformation journey developed by GDST, which provides a structured methodology for companies to move step by step from basic data capture to full digital, interoperable traceability. He highlighted that many tools, guidance documents and resources are freely available on the GDST’s website, and that additional support is offered to partners, including capability tests for software solutions and participation in pilots and third-party initiatives.

Mr Thomas provided examples of engagement with Governments notably with Indonesia, where GDST has supported the development of the STELINA traceability legislation. Indonesia’s platform achieved GDST capability in October 2025, with legislation in force from January 2025, and further work is planned with Mexico and other countries to replicate this approach. He added that such initiatives show how transparency can lead to benchmarking and new opportunities for both Governments and industry.

Mr Thomas encouraged the other members to join the dialogue and engage with the standard. He explained that GDST aims to be financially independent from seafood industry partnership income by the end of 2028 and is developing modular extensions, including on labour and human rights and for aquatic feed components, to respond to evolving stakeholder needs. He encouraged all interested parties to consult the GDST’s website, participate in ongoing discussions and consider integrating “GDST-compliant digital traceability using GDST-capable software and hardware” into their sourcing policies.

- **Exchange of views**

The Chair recognised the significant amount of ongoing work on critical topics, and argued that the issue of data quality remained critical, particularly regarding lot mixing, re-lotting and sorting. The Chair highlighted



that traceability for sanitary requirements had been in place for many years. Operators were facing increasing requests for traceability for fisheries-specific information. While new legal requirements, under the revised Fisheries Control Regulation, entered into force on 10 January 2026, the implementation of the new requirements were at a different stage across the Member States. He added that the Commission also acknowledged that there were further complexities.

Julien Daudu (EJF) asked Mr Thomas to indicate the European governments with whom GDST was engaging. Mr Daudu requested information on how the GDST standards worked with CATCH.

Huw Thomas (GDST) responded that his organisation had maintained a dialogue with DG MARE for several years, expressing satisfaction that the GDST was referenced in the preparatory work of the implementing acts of the revised Fisheries Control Regulation. Mr Thomas explained that GDST encouraged DG MARE to clarify the meaning of “digital” and “interoperability”, but that the DG remained reluctant to prescribe definitions. While his organisation took an aspirational approach at the start, it was now focused on testing and practical implementation. In his view, there were benefits to the low prescription provided by DG MARE.

Mr Thomas expressed willingness to engage with all the EU Member States to clarify the operationalisation of traceability but added that, due to limited capacity, it had not been possible to engage with all yet. He informed that he had been unable to engage with the DG MARE Unit responsible for CATCH. Engagement, however, was taking place with several sourcing third countries.

Pim Visser (NOVA) argued that DG MARE was imposing requirements on operators without prescribing the necessary details. In his view, there was a lack of direction from DG MARE. He further argued that the CATCH IT tool showed how DG MARE tried to implement new systems without positive results. He questioned the purpose of the described approach, since the EU was selling less and less fishery products.

Àngels Segura (AECOC) expressed agreement with Mr Visser. Ms Segura argued that, without a common direction from the EU, the larger retailers would be able to set how to transmit the information, which would be in accordance with their own systems. She highlighted that each retailer operated very differently.

Stephan Meyer (Fischverband) argued against taking away the decision-making power from the European Commission and let it be driven by large retailers. Mr Meyer welcomed the examples provided by Mr Caldwell and Mr Thomas on implementation in third countries. Concerning CATCH, he stated that the system presented challenges but could also be an opportunity. He requested information on how the small-scale fleet was being integrated in the initiatives to provide digital data, while protecting data ownership. He asked for information on potential further engagement with the Member States and with the European Fisheries Control Agency.

Huw Thomas (GDST) explained that his organisation worked to include small-scale fishers, as demonstrated in the engagement with Indonesia. Mr Thomas highlighted the interest of retailers in the development of scalable solutions, particularly accounting for the Port State Measures Agreement. In his view, 2026 would represent a change on data interoperability.

James Caldwell (MSC) stated that GDST completed much of the foundational work. In his view, it was important to ensure accessibility for small-scale operators. His organisation would be developing voluntary tools to assist the small-scale operators.



María Luisa Álvarez Blanco (FEDEPESCA) expressed agreement with Mr Visser, highlighting her own experience of 20 to 25 years working on traceability. Ms Álvarez underscored the vulnerabilities faced by small operators, including small wholesalers and retailers, since large retailers could impose the standards. She drew attention to recent projects undertaken by wholesale and retail companies of fishery products of Madrid on the implementation of digital traceability, which required significant financing, work hours, and public hours. Nevertheless, the wholesalers based in the fish warehouse of MercaMadrid had been unable to receive the necessary information from the various suppliers. She highlighted that, in the case of Spain, there were 17 regional administrations, which lead to differences across fisheries-related inspections, adding that retailers faced significant control activities from local and regional authorities.

Vanya Vulperhorst (Oceana) welcomed the concrete examples on the implementation of traceability. Ms Vulperhorst recalled that extensive exchanges on the traceability requirements took place during the revision of the Fisheries Control Regulation. There was general agreement not to proceed with an EU-wide system. Therefore, in her view, it would be too late to request such a system. She wanted to know how many of the MSC-labelled operators would be ready to implement the traceability system.

Sarah Hautier (EuroCommerce) stated that her organisation was not seeking prescriptive or detailed guidance from DG MARE. In her view, it was important to ensure flexibility, since retailers have a wide range of suppliers. Therefore, suppliers should not be obliged to use one specific system, instead there should be interoperability. Ms Hautier drew attention to the data quality challenges.

Huw Thomas (GDST) outlined three possible implementation models: single window, personalised windows, and standardisation. Mr Thomas argued that standardisation was the only viable long-term solution, as shown by global standards, such as for Wi-Fi. He stated that the aim of his organisation was to make all systems GDST-capable, based on already available technology.

James Caldwell (MSC) informed that the number of certificate holders able to implement the GDST standards was limited. Nevertheless, since the previous year, there were major developments by major supply chain players, illustrating more proactivity.

The Chair expressed support for standardisation driven by industry rather than public authorities, given slower institutional reaction times.

CATCH

- **Update on the implementation of the IT tool by Pavlina Nikolova and Desiree Kjolsen (MARE B4)**

Pavlina Nikolova (DG MARE) stated that the mandatory use of CATCH for EU importers, as of 10 January 2026, is the cornerstone of the modernisation of the EU catch certification scheme under the IUU Regulation and the common EU policy to fight against IUU fishing. The objective of CATCH is first and foremost, to strengthen and harmonise import controls across EU borders, as called for by the Member States themselves and multiple stakeholders, including the EU industry and the European Court of Auditors. Ms Nikolova highlighted that the European Court of Auditors considered CATCH the right response to its recommendations and issued, in December 2025, a closure letter regarding their Special Report “EU action to combat illegal fishing: Control systems in place but weakened by uneven checks and sanctions by Member States”.



Ms Nikolova emphasised that CATCH had been finetuned and further developed by the European Commission in close cooperation with the Member States competent authorities over the previous two years, to meet the compulsory provisions of the amended IUU Regulation, as decided by the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament. She underscored that the Commission had been doing everything in its power to ensure that the start of application of CATCH would not result in disruption of trade flows and impact supply of fishery products to the EU market. She highlighted that the Commission made publicly available extensive online training material (FAQs, documentation and videos on TRACES platform). Member States competent authorities received dedicated trainings, including two hands-on trainings in Brussels, plus documentation from the European Commission to be able to prepare their operators for the start of application of CATCH.

Ms Nikolova stressed that the responsibility to prepare EU operators for CATCH and to reply first to their questions lies with their national authorities. An “Any Other Business” point by the Commission at the June 2025 Agri-Fish Council reminded Member States of the need to step up preparations. The Commission continuously assisted Member States in their responsibility by providing expertise and substantial online training material. The Commission, in several meetings with Advisory Councils, encouraged EU operators to address the upcoming changes with their non-EU country suppliers.

Ms Nikolova informed that more than 8400 importer declarations had been validated by Member States competent authorities from 10 January until 11 February 2026 and that no major disruption of trade had occurred. She outlined the issues observed by the Commission. As CATCH is a new, living system, it is continuously adapted to user needs. All IT issues are addressed as soon as confirmed, including with two system updates on 21 January and 4 February 2026, taking stock of the collective experience. The Commission provides continuous guidance and support to Member States.

Ms Nikolova further outlined that, in the months preceding the entry into application of CATCH and, in the first days of operation, many questions from Member States and operators suggested they had not sufficiently studied the extensive training material, guidelines and Frequently Asked Questions published by the Commission. Some Member States simply forward to the Commission questions from operators, without an attempt by the national competent authority to respond and resolve even the most straightforward issues. In her view, the described approach clogs the support system available to all Member States.

Ms Nikolova argued that some specific points regarding the readiness of CATCH are not part of the legal obligations under the IUU Regulation and cannot be considered a deficiency of CATCH, emphasising that this has already been explained by Commission to the Member States on multiple occasions. Some issues are being attributed to CATCH but are in fact not a new obligation. They are the result of the uneven and ineffective applications of the EU catch certification scheme in its paper format. She expressed availability to continue support EU Member States competent authorities in the implementation of CATCH, adding that a dedicated CATCH Helpdesk remains available to all users.

Ms Nikolova and Ms Kjolsen proceeded with an overview of the written questions submitted by members ahead of the meeting as well as the corresponding responses from DG MARE:

- 1) Is the implementation a ‘fixed given’ or can 2026 be used as a transition?



“Assuming this is a reference to the compulsory use of CATCH digital system, it should be noted that there is no transitional period for the compulsory use of the CATCH digital system which started on 10 January 2026.

To ensure uniform implementation of CATCH and advise on timely solutions to confirmed general issues, the Commission has issued regular guidance to Member States. To prevent bottlenecks in trade flows, the Commission has advised Member States about temporary solutions for certain issues including, for very specific cases and for strictly limited time, to accept paper catch certificates on the condition that once the issue has been resolved, those certificates would be submitted and validated through CATCH. The Commission has not generally exempted any Member State from the compulsory use of CATCH.

A dedicated IT helpdesk is also available to assist any users of CATCH, including EU operators.

In 2026, we are phasing in the new requirements of the EU catch certificate template: the Commission, as the implementer of the decision of the co-legislators, has put in place a number of flexibilities to allow non-EU countries to adapt to the new requirements without imports being blocked. Concretely this means two things that are taken into account in CATCH:

- Six-month grace period for the three new data fields required in the catch certificate (the fishing gear, the extended catch area information and the introduction of a fishing license holder signature). This implies that absence of this data (i.e. in three out of the many data fields) will not block the submission of a catch certificate from an importer to a competent authority. Instead, a warning displayed to the operator and an alert generated for your competent authority. It is then up to the competent authorities of each EU member state to decide to launch a verification request, to remind the operators of the new requirements and related temporary flexibility and finally to decide on the importation.
- In line with the general phase-in approach, for the seven countries that previously had specific templates under the agreed records (US, Canada, NZ, Norway, Iceland, Faroes and South Africa), it is possible to continue to use their templates for the first three months after 10 January 2026, following which they will benefit from the general grace period on the three new data fields in the catch certificate template. De facto, only the US have asked to use this flexibility, while for New Zealand, Iceland, Faroes and Norway are currently interoperability is currently in place between their national systems and CATCH.”

2) What are the main bugs reported and which means the Commission is engaging to fix them? Within which timeframe?

“CATCH is a living system that evolves and improves daily as any other IT tool. Since 10 January, we have had two upgrades to fix bugs or other needed changes identified by user and system developers. The first one on 21 January, the second on 4 February.

Be aware that most of the reported “bugs” are actually not bugs but incorrect use of CATCH by operators and authorities. Once a bug is reported and if it is actually a bug, we have in most cases been able to provide a work-around for the users until it has been fixed in CATCH.”

3) The implementation of CATCH is leading to huge issues, as skippers must be involved in every export transaction of their catch. They must give permission to the exporters to act on their behalf. But the implementation of this takes time.



“The requirement to obtain a master’s signature existed also for the paper-based catch certificate. The advantage with CATCH is that the signature can now be provided online via a smart phone for example.

Moreover, the new catch certificate template used since 10 January 2026 is more flexible. The previous catch certificate template required a signature and a seal of the master in box 5 whereas the new revised catch certificate template provides for a possibility that either a master or a fishing license holder signs the box 5 (and the seal is no longer required). This change in the revised template aims to facilitate obtaining a signature in box 5 in cases when the master is not available and yet ensures that the person signing is the one who can be held responsible for the fishing activity declared in the catch certificate i.e. the fishing license holder.

Please note that to sign catch certificates in CATCH, masters and fishing license holders must have an EU login account and request a role in TRACES as operators.”

4) Whether exports to UK requires CATCH to be applied?

“The short answer is no. CATCH is not obligatory in this situation, but CATCH may be used.

We would like to reiterate that the IUU Regulation foresees the validation of catch certificates for exportation in only two situations:

- a. when catches made by Member States’(MS)-flagged vessels are exported to non-EU countries requesting catch certificates based on Article 15 of the IUU Regulation (currently this applies to eight non-EU countries, i.e. Iceland, Ivory Coast, Kuwait, Madagascar, Norway, Thailand, Tunisia and Ukraine) and
- b. when catches made by MS-flagged vessels are landed in or sent to a non-EU country where they are processed before being sent (back) to the EU.

The IUU Regulation does not cover other exportations of catches made by Member State-flagged vessels. Only in these two situations, the use of CATCH will be compulsory for validation of export catch certificates.”

5) When will the consolidated version of the updated IUU Regulation and Fisheries Control Regulation be published on Eurlex?

“The new consolidation of Regulation 1005/2008 (the IUU regulation), taking into account the amendments of Regulation 2023/2842 applicable as from 10 January 2026, will be available in EUR-Lex on Wednesday 25 February.

The new consolidation of Regulation 1010/2009 (the implementing regulation to the IUU Regulation), taking into account the amendments of Regulation 2025/1522 applicable as from 10 January 2026, will be available in EUR-Lex on Friday, 20 February.

The consolidated version of the Control Regulation should be available before the end of this month (February).”

6) Please provide an overview on the current state of exchange with third countries regarding the full utilisation of CATCH IT for full digital handling of catch certificates. For which countries can it be



expected that the EU operators burden of "hand typing and transfer to CATCH IT" or paper catch certificates will be over?

“The Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland and Norway are since 10 January 2026 providing catch certificates and processing statements through interoperability with CATCH.

New Zealand is providing catch certificates through interoperability with CATCH since 10 January 2026. Processing statements are expected end April.

The following countries are expected to provide catch certificates and processing statements through interoperability with CATCH:

- a. UK – catch certificates by the end of February 2026; processing statements by the end of March 2026
- b. Japan – January 2027.

In addition, countries such as Ecuador, India and the Maldives have shown interest in interoperability and technical talks have started with Argentina and Morocco.

As for direct use of CATCH, we can inform that:

- Papua New Guinea, Uruguay and Mauritius have been given access to CATCH but did not start using it yet.
- Falkland Islands, Honduras and Venezuela have been given instructions on how to request access but did not do it yet.
- Other countries having flagged an interest are Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Namibia, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Tanzania.”

7) How can Catch Certificates (with their unique CATCH ID) become accessible for operators in the market? When will CATCH IT within TRACES provide a public open API or similar interface to access minimal lot information as Art 58, 5 of 1224/2009?

“Catch certificates should only be accessed by the importers they are destined to either through nomination in CATCH or with the flag and the national catch certificate number of the catch certificate. If a freight forwarder is handling the importation but the importer is not registered in CATCH as an importer, the document will not be available to the importer. So operators must register for their role in CATCH.”

CATCH is not an open database where everybody can access all information. As an importer of a specific consignment, you can of course access that information. The API/similar interface is currently not available, but we have taken note of this request in relation to future discussions on traceability.”

8) Which experience does the EC have on the acceptance of contingency arrangement documents (as Art 12c, b of updated 1005/2008) issued by Member States for export of processed fishery and aquaculture products to third countries, especially UK? Do UK authorities accept the contingency



documents? What will the European Commission do to ensure market access for imports and exports while contingency measures are in place?

“Turning to the unavailability of TRACES (which includes CATCH), this is announced in advance to all users in TRACES. They are mainly for a short period and if longer and if possible, then outside working hours. If you know that the system is unavailable for specific hours, try to postpone – but if strictly needed a paper certificate can be produced instead of using CATCH. Paper certificates templates are available on the IUU website of DG MARE.

Be aware that the paper certificate has to be introduced retroactively in CATCH once the system is back online.

As explained above, for exports to the UK it is not compulsory to use CATCH.”

- 9) Which information does the European Commission have on the changed Chinese system for issuing catch certificates for exports to EU? The newly introduced system is not compatible with CATCH IT in TRACES and adds additional complications for exporters. Can the European Commission please give a summary of the state-of-play with Chinese authorities in this matter?

“The Chinese do have a system in place, but it is very basic and would not meet the needs of CATCH. They do not intend to request interoperability with CATCH. They are not interested in direct use of CATCH for the time being, but we will continue to promote that. As regards their templates for exporting fisheries products to the EU, we have exchanged continuously with China, and they were amended to fully comply with the updated IUU requirements.

We are not aware of changes in the Chinese catch certification system or non-compliant templates. If you have concrete information that shows otherwise, we would be happy to receive some examples.”

- 10) Will importer data be publicly available? Will non-governmental individuals be able to access such certificates? If not, how might non-governmental organisations obtain access to such information in the interests of transparency?

“The short answer is: No, these documents are only available to the operators/authorities concerned by the specific certificates.

The legal reference is Article 6a of the amended Implementing Regulation (1010/2009), paragraphs 5 and 6. The latter paragraph refers to TRACES legislation: Article 36.4 of Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1715 which says:

4. Without prejudice to the Commissions’ right of access pursuant to Article 8(2), entities that have not contributed to the handling, production or transmission of data, information or documents in TRACES, or are not involved in the placing on the market or the movement concerned, shall not have access to such data, information or documents.”

- 11) In January, the menu concerning the boats was presenting many dysfunctions (i.e. to create a new boat or to find a boat previously created); is it fixed?

“It has not been an issue to create a new vessel in CATCH, but it is not possible to create a duplicate.



The Commission has however improved the search functions, and it is now possible to search by either flag or by IMO number or by registration number etc.”

12) The validity date for the fishing licence is often missing whereas this information is considered mandatory; our competent authority told us that importers have to request a reedition of the certificate by the country of origin competent authority. Our members think it will be very complicated/long to have these documents reedited. This could be the source of slowdowns or blockages, especially after March 31st (France case). More generally, given that a majority of third countries are not ready to use CATCH and won't be before several months best case, has the Commission provided them with further training on the correct completion of the “paper” templates, specifying the mandatory fields?

“Every time we move from a paper-based system to a digital one, it is not possible anymore to circumvent certain processes or data. We have seen this with the introduction of ERS/logbooks, with the EBCD and now with CATCH.

The Commission has realised that many of the required fields when the certificate was paper-based were systematically not fulfilled. So, it has been 15 years with many incomplete certificates which were never challenged.

The fishing license validity is not a new data field, so has always been obligatory to fulfil it.

The Commission has reminded all countries exporting to the EU on several occasions of the changes to the EU catch certification scheme, including new and old data requirements in the catch certificate. A series of regional workshops were organised by the Commission in 2025, covering all countries notified under the IUU Regulation. Non-EU countries were also provided with profiles for CATCH training environment.”

13) Is there a software development planned to replace manual data entry by importers with automatic identification (AI?) of info from the certificates that would be uploaded to the database? If so, by what deadline?

“This has been explored in detail. However, CATCH is embedded in the TRACES NT environment, as the large part of EU import-related certificates (for example in sanitary authorisations). While this has advantages such as being able to access the database of fishing vessels under the sanitary establishments, there are also limitations. With regard to AI, there is no such software available in TRACES at this moment in time.

The Commission however tries to populate as much data as we can in CATCH, and it will continue to be enriched as the system is used, leading to increased automation in data selection and input.”

- **Exchange of views**

Guus Pastoor (Seafood Europe) emphasised that his organisation fully supports the principles of CATCH and the move towards digitalisation but expressed deep concerns about the difficult and uncoordinated implementation that had overwhelmed operators. In his view, both third country and EU operators were insufficiently prepared. To avoid consignments being stopped at the border, importers were manually introducing data, which represented a very significant burden, as one consignment could relate to 60 catch



certificates. He stressed that the situation was very challenging, representing substantial extra costs for importers, particularly in staff. When third countries were not prepared to implement CATCH, they continued to simply send the catch certificates in paper format, which would likely continue for a long time. He expressed doubts that TRACES would be sufficient for future expansion.

Mariola Valero De Juan (Spain) expressed appreciation for the communication of DG MARE and flexibility on the registering of vessel data, as it had been blocking many imports. Ms Valero requested information on how many Member States were authorising imports exclusively via CATCH. Ms Valero expressed appreciation for the efforts to integrate third countries into the system but argued that these efforts have been completed prior to implementation. She requested information on when implementation of interoperability with the systems of third countries would take place.

Julien Lamothe (ANOP) stressed that the signature issue could not be ignored since catch certificates involve all fishers, including shipowners at sea. Mr Lamothe requested that operators be allowed to use a proxy.

Stefan Meyer (Fischverband) welcomed the detailed responses provided by DG MARE. Mr Meyer recalled that catch certificates from third countries were official documents. With the manual introduction of data into CATCH, there was a risk of errors by business operators. Therefore, he wanted to know how the legal risk faced by business operators would be addressed. In his view, the risk should return to the official authorities.

Julien Daudu (EJF) expressed sympathy for operational challenges faced by operators and the Member States. Mr Daudu expressed confidence that CATCH would contribute to an increased level-playing-field on import controls. He committed to encouraging the uptake of the tool by third countries.

Pim Visser (NOVA), concerning the six-month phasing-in period for the fishing area and gear information under the new template, wanted to know if it applied equally to export and to import certificates.

Roberto Alonso (ANFACO-CYTMA), to facilitate the implementation of Artificial Intelligence, wondered about the possibility of CATCH emitting programming codes, instead of PDF documents. Mr Alonso requested clarification on the requests from the UK authorities, emphasising that exports to the UK faced significant delays and difficulties.

Pavlina Nikolova (DG MARE) welcomed the positive feedback provided by the members. In response to Mr Pastoor, Ms Nikolova responded that she did not doubt the commitment of operators, emphasising that each actor had a role to play in the implementation of CATCH. She recalled that, when the paper-based system was originally implemented, there were also anxieties. Nevertheless, the paper-based system was successfully implemented with due cooperation.

Ms Nikolova, concerning the legal responsibilities related to errors, recalled that the catch certificates and the processing statements are supposed to be attached when submitting the information in CATCH. Therefore, these documents continued to be the reference point for the competent authorities.



Ms Nikolova, concerning the facilitation of Artificial Intelligence, stated that it could assist in the future, but that human verification would still be required.

Desiree Kjolsen (DG MARE), concerning exports to the UK, clarified that, even though the UK mirrored the EU's legislation, catch certificates could be submitted in paper format.

Ms Kjolsen, concerning the signature requirements, emphasised that the aim had been to facilitate the implementation by allowing also signing by a fishing license holder. She recalled that, prior to the revision of the Fisheries Control Regulation, the signature was already a requirement. She added that the signature could be provided in a digital format.

Pavlina Nikolova (DG MARE), concerning the number of Member States using CATCH, informed that all Member States with the exception of Luxembourg had been validating import declarations in CATCH.

The Chair emphasised the general agreement on the principles of CATCH, while also acknowledging the difficulties of implementation. The Chair expressed hope that, following the progressive resolution of the implementation challenges, the system would be successful.

AOB

- **Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine**

The Secretary General informed that he had been contacted, via email message, by the Secretariat of the Pelagic Advisory Council (PELAC) concerning the potential development of joint advice on Russia. The message emphasised that the war led to Russia being treated as an outcast in the international stage with the exception of the field of fisheries, particularly pelagic fisheries. Russia signed fishing agreements with Norway and with the Faroe Island, while also benefiting from a special international reserve to fish mackerel and blue whiting in international waters. The message also drew attention to the challenging context of reduced Total Allowable Catches for mackerel and blue whiting. While the fishing aspects were under the competence of the PELAC, it could be relevant to include recommendations on trade measures, which would fall under the competence of the MAC.

The Secretary General expressed availability, in case the Working Group decided to work together with the PELAC, to contribute to the development of the draft proposal. He highlighted that it would be necessary to further clarify the scope of the proposal, particularly the focus on pelagic fisheries.

The Working Group agreed to proceed with the development of joint advice with the PELAC concerning Russia.

- **Conclusion of the Chair's mandate**

The Chair recalled that, following his professional retirement, the meeting would be his final one. The Chair expressed appreciation for the opportunity to moderate the meetings and for the work of the members.

The Secretary General thanked the Chair for the positive collaboration and continued availability.





Summary of action items

- AOB
 - Secretary General to coordinate with the Secretariat of the Pelagic Advisory Council concerning the proposal for a joint advice on Russia.



Attendance list

Représentant	Organisation	Role
Adrien Simonnet	Union du Mareyage Français (UMF)	Member
Alen Lovrinov	Producer Organisation Omega 3	Member
Alexandre Bonneau	SNCE	Member
Alonso Abreu Lozano	Asociación de Armadores de Punta Del Moral	Member
Angels Segura Unió	AECOC	Member
Anna Rokicka	Polish Association of Fish Processors (PSPR)	Member
Anne Mette Bæk	EFFOP	Member
Arthur Yon	FROM Nord	Member
Bela Halasi	COPA COGECA	Member
Benoît Thomassen	FEAP	Member
Bertrand Charron	Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC)	Member
Bianca Abbagnano	EUMOFA	Expert
Caroline Gamblin	PACT'ALIM	Member
Christine Absil	Good Fish Foundation	Member
Daniel Voces	Europêche	Member
Desiree Kjolsen	European Commission	Expert
Emiel Brouckaert	European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO)	Member
Falke De Sager	European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO)	Member
Gerd Heinen	European Commission	Expert
Guus Pastoor	Visfederatie / Seafood Europe	Member
Hommel Kassa	SNCE	Member
Huw Thomas	Global Dialogue on Seafood Traceability (GDST)	Member
James Caldwell	Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)	Member
Janne Posti	Conxemar	Member
Jean-Marie Robert	Les Pêcheurs de Bretagne	Member
João Pereira	FRUCOM	Member



Représentant	Organisation	Role
John Lynch	Irish South and East Fish Producers Organisation (ISEFPO)	Member
José Maria Gallart	OPP Almería	Member
Juan Manuel Trujillo Castillo	ETF	Member
Juana Parada	OR.PA.GU.	Member
Jules Danto	European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO)	Member
Julien Daudu	Environmental Justice Foundation	Member
Julien Lamothe	European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO) / ANOP	Member
Juliette Margueritte	ESSA	Member
Katarina Sipic	Seafood Europe	Member
Laura Harpøth	EFFOP	Member
Laure Guillevic	WWF	Member
Laurène Jolly	European Commission	Expert
Linda Zanki Duvnjak	OP Friska Riba	Member
Linne Verhoeven	Seafood Europe	Member
Manuel Fernández	FACOPE	Member
María Luisa Álvarez Blanco	FEDEPESCA	Member
Marine Cusa	Oceana	Member
Mariola Valero De Juan	Spain	Observer
Matthew Gréant	Environmental Justice Foundation	Member
Mike Turenhout	Visfederatie	Member
Olivier Hottlet	FRUCOM	Member
Nicolás Fernández	OPP72	Member
Patrick Murphy	Irish South & West Fish Producers Organisation	Member
Pavlina Nikolova	European Commission	Expert
Pedro Hernandez Saez	CARBOPESCA	Member
Pedro Luis Casado López	OPP80	Member
Pedro Reis Santos	Market Advisory Council (MAC)	Secretariat



Représentant	Organisation	Role
Pieter Roden	Foodrise	Member
Pierre Commère	Seafood Europe	Chair
Pim Visser	NOVA	Member
Roberto Alonso	ANFACO-CYTMA	Member
Sara Vandamme	VVV	Member
Sarah Hautier	EuroCommerce	Member
Sergio López García	OPP7 Burela	Member
Stefan Meyer	Bundesverband der deutschen Fischindustrie und des Fischgrosshandels e.V.	Member
Sylvie Becaus	VVV	Member
Tamas Eisenbeck	Seafood Europe	Member
Thomas Kruse	Danish Pelagic Producer Organisation	Member
Tom Premereur	VVV	Member
Thibault Pivetta	European Molluscs' Producers Association (EMPA)	Member
Vanya Vulperhorst	Oceana	Member
Vlasis Tzesos	EU Cluster for Food Traceability and Trust	Expert
William Morré	Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)	Member
Xavier Pires	ALIF	Member
Yobana Bermúdez	Seafood Europe	Member

