

## TRACEABILITY IN THE SUSTAINABLE SEAFOOD SUPPLY CHAIN

## STARTING A TRACEABILITY JOURNEY

In food supply chains, traceability is the ability to identify, track and trace the origin and full extent of a product's journey. The seafood sector is one of the most challenging sectors in which to implement traceability, yet it is also one of the most important.

### WHY DOES TRACEABILITY MATTER?

Companies and brands are increasingly at risk from market volatility, supply chain disruptions, investor pressure and fast-changing consumer preferences. They are also under pressure from governments, consumers, NGOs and other stakeholders to be more transparent with seafood products' journeys, from ocean to plate.

Traceable systems demonstrate a commitment to responsible business practices. Where positive seafood procurement targets are set by committed retailers and suppliers, traceability is often the missing piece. We need to shift this to speed up the recovery of fish stocks for the health of our shared oceans.

### HOW CAN A BUSINESS ENSURE TRANSPARENCY AND TRACEABILITY?

To enable transparency in a seafood supply chain, this requires that companies a) have a traceability system in place and b) understand any material risks that may be present, c) disclose information about their supply chains to consumers, shareholders and other external stakeholders and d) seek to understand their exposure to environmental, social or other risks and what efforts are being done to mitigate those risks.

### WHAT IS TRACEABILITY'S ROI?

New evidence shows a significant return on investment through employing traceability. According to research by Planet Tracker, "An investment of just 1% of the global seafood industry's revenue into improved traceability could increase total profitability by 60%". This appears in a 2022 report titled [How to trace \\$600 billion](#). The report also states that even though a handful of companies have become early traceability adopters, more widespread implementation from all players is needed and would reduce traceability gaps, to the benefit of the entire supply chain.

**"Traceability does not guarantee sustainability, but claims of sustainability cannot be guaranteed without traceability."**

## OBSTACLES = OPPORTUNITIES

The main obstacles to industry-wide traceability are a lack of interoperability between companies (because of poor data capture), system incompatibility as well as management and traceability gaps in the supply chain that often happen when a seafood product is mixed during processing. This lack of interoperability needs to change.

Members of the WWF-SASSI Retailer/Supplier Participation Scheme can help to create better interoperability and be leaders in the traceability realm. This includes your business employing full traceability in your operations, along with expecting this from the agents and suppliers you procure from.

## INDUSTRY GUIDANCE

At the WWF-SASSI and MSC roundtable event in April 2024, titled *Sustainable seafood: Traceability assurance in the supply chain*, a key request was for WWF-SASSI and the MSC to develop a document showcasing the benefits and ways to implement traceability in seafood supply chains.



# BENEFITS OF EMPLOYING TRACEABILITY IN YOUR SUPPLY CHAIN



## TRACEABILITY IMPROVES MARGINS AND RETURNS

- saving time and capacity
- helping reduce recalled products, product waste and legal fees
- removing unnecessary steps in your supply chain, which helps aid businesses in better understanding their supplier sourcing and labour practices.



## TRACEABILITY LOWERS BUSINESS RISK

- knowing and verifying the true “sustainability” of your seafood products ensures that what you are selling is ethically sourced and legally caught – not caught through illegal, unreported or unregulated fishing which accounts for 15-30% of global catches (Planet Tracker 2021).
- helping mitigate food fraud and verifying product claims.



## TRACEABILITY BUILDS CONSUMER TRUST

- helping to generate transparency which aids in consumer awareness to build goodwill
- safeguarding your company’s reputation among investors, partners, employees, customers and other stakeholders.



## TRACEABILITY ENABLES REGULATED COMPLIANCE

- increasing the opportunity to demonstrate compliance to regulation, as well as help shape and meet regulatory standards.



## TRACEABILITY ENHANCES COMPANY IMAGE

- presenting an opportunity to gain a competitive advantage by identifying strategic value chain opportunities above those without traceability.



# 5 EASY STEPS TO START TRACING THE SEAFOOD IN YOUR SUPPLY CHAINS

## 1. MAP STAKEHOLDERS AND SUPPLY CHAINS

- a. Identify and map all stakeholders, from fishers to consumers, including the geographic origins of products and raw materials.
- b. Start by standardising data collection and setting criteria on what the expectation is from suppliers in providing information.
- c. Provide training on the importance of traceability and how to accurately record and track relevant data to personnel involved in the seafood supply chain.
- d. Align with key data elements and critical tracking events of standards such as the Global Dialogue on Seafood Traceability (GDST) Standard.

## 2. CONDUCT REGULAR AUDITS AND INSPECTIONS

- a. Employ a third-party audit system, to ensure transparency, that checks supplier compliance and supports progress toward full compliance in the supply chain where possible.
- b. Or, purchase products that come with a Chain of Custody certification based on Standards such as the MSC or ASC.

## 3. SHORTEN AND SIMPLIFY SUPPLY CHAINS

- a. Prioritise local products with shorter and simpler supply chains, they are more easily traceable.
- b. Choose suppliers who supply traceable products.

## 4. INVEST IN A WIDER OPERATING SYSTEM OR INFORMATION SYSTEM

- a. Rather than only investing in a traceability system, invest in a system such as offered by GDST, SourceMap or an in-house system while simultaneously encouraging your seafood suppliers to do the same.
- b. Agree on data collection information, data integration and data availability so that so that analysing and reporting can be conducted.
- c. Utilising integrated hardware is the most reliable traceability system, especially if the underlying data collection and processing systems are interoperable, meaning that different information technology systems and software applications can communicate and use that information.

## 5. EDUCATE CONSUMERS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF TRACEABILITY

- a. Provide consumers with clear access to information about the origin and sustainability of the seafood products they purchase.



Working towards lasting, positive outcomes for people and nature in the places where we work and from priority environmental challenges we focus on.

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