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Multi-stakeholder task force publishes whitepaper on practical implementation of CATCH under Regulation (EU) 2023/2842

The undersigned organisations welcome the publication of the whitepaper “**CATCH in Practice: Bridging Regulatory Intent and Operational Reality under Regulation (EU) 2023/2842**”, prepared by a multidisciplinary task force convened under the **EU Cluster of Food Traceability and Trust**.

The whitepaper provides a constructive contribution to the ongoing implementation of the EU Fisheries Control Regulation and the mandatory use of the CATCH module for catch certificates and related IUU documentation from 10 January 2026. The whitepaper reflects the collective contributions of academia, industry, research organisations and technology experts. Its central message is that **digital submission does not automatically equal interoperability**. The transition to CATCH is an important step forward, but its practical success will depend on whether regulatory intent can be translated into workable digital infrastructure for competent authorities, seafood operators, brokers, third-country authorities and technology providers.

We welcome the progress already made by the European Commission, including the development of CATCH within TRACES NT, the adoption of implementing rules and the establishment of interoperability with several third countries. At the same time, the whitepaper identifies practical challenges that remain for operators, particularly around manual re-entry of data, inconsistent interpretation, missing or unclear technical specifications, and the need for greater transparency on how existing interoperability arrangements function in practice.

The whitepaper therefore makes five recommendations to the European Commission:

1. Publish operator-facing and connector-facing implementation artefacts for CATCH, including a data dictionary, sample payloads, validation rules, error catalogues, access roles and versioning policy.
2. Adopt binding technical definitions or interpretive guidance for key operational terms, including “electronic”, “immediate”, “interoperable”, “end-to-end” and lot identity.
3. Establish a Critical Tracking Event and Key Data Element framework, supported by conformance testing.
4. Publish a tiered access governance framework and roadmap for CATCH connectivity.
5. Publish practical implementation guidance for SMEs, brokers, artisanal fisheries and processing operators, while preparing for the 2028 EU Single Window connection.

The objective of this work is not to question the policy ambition behind CATCH. On the contrary, the whitepaper supports the EU’s objective of strengthening controls against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and improving traceability. Its purpose is to help ensure that the system works in practice across real seafood supply chains, including complex multi-vessel, multi-country, processed and re-exported product flows.

This is particularly important for small and medium-sized enterprises, brokers and operators working with third-country suppliers, who may face disproportionate burdens if digitalisation remains dependent on manual transcription from paper certificates, scanned documents or non-interoperable national systems.

We therefore encourage the European Commission, Member State authorities, third-country competent authorities, seafood operators, technology providers and research partners to consider the recommendations set out in the whitepaper and to continue working together towards a CATCH system that is legally robust, technically interoperable and operationally feasible.

The undersigned organisations remain committed to supporting the successful implementation of Regulation (EU) 2023/2842 and to contributing constructively to a more transparent, effective and interoperable seafood traceability framework.

Contributing Organisations and projects:

EU Cluster of Food Traceability and Trust

Agritrack SA / Seafood Europe / German Association of Fish Processing and Fish Wholesale Industry / Institute of Food Technologists / Queen's University Belfast / University of Thessaly / Agricultural University of Athens / University of Coimbra / FoodGuard EU Horizon Project / ACT4FOOD Digital Europe Project

