

UN information exchange tool supports fisheries sustainability

It is estimated that the global seafood trade is worth USD 140 billion, but overfishing and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing are putting the health of fisheries and ocean ecosystems at high risk.

In 2016, for instance, such practices accounted for one quarter of all fish caught, according to the United Nations (UN) statistics.

Since information on fishing practices is based on papers, it is hard to trace fish origins and monitor fisheries stocks. To combat this, the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business has established a universal language for fishery exchange and information, known as Fisheries Language for Universal Exchange (FLUX).

The standard is a free, open and global tool that allows Fishery Management Organizations to automatically access the electronic data on fishing vessels, as well as trip identification, fishing operations, fishing data, landing and sales information, license information and inspection data.

The UN believes that this novel mechanism will contribute to the conservation and sustainability of oceans (Sustainable Development Goal 14), which will be supported by a Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries.

This team, which is an inter-governmental group which consists of public and private sector stakeholders from the fishing industry, civil society and academia, had their first meeting on 29 and 30 January this year.

The aim of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, which hosts the Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business, is to “promote standards for exchange of information related to fishery activities, share experiences on development and implementation issues, and facilitate and support the implementation of these standards worldwide”. The ultimate goal is to improve the exchange of information on fishing and relevant supply chains, in order to foster a more sustainable and ecosystem-based management of marine and aquatic resources.

The UN Environment’s Environment and Trade Hub, the UN Conference on Trade and Development, the FAO and representatives of other organizations, provided insights into its work around the FLUX

information standard, to the Team of Specialists and the country representatives that were present at the meeting.

The Hub provided a perspective on how the FLUX standard can inform the work on fisheries subsidies and current discussions at the World Trade Organization.

The FLUX information standard will allow to enhance the transparency of fisheries supply chains, thus facilitating the elimination of subsidies to overfishing and illegal and under-reported fishing. These insights build on earlier work undertaken by UN Environment and partners as part of their joint voluntary commitment issued at last year's Ocean Conference.

Through this partnership, the three organizations are committed to support states in designing and implementing trade-related policies towards fulfilling their commitments under several specific targets of the Sustainable Development Goal.

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