
GDST 1.0 – Global Standards for Interoperable Seafood Traceability: The Case for Adoption

What are the GDST 1.0 Standards? The GDST 1.0 standards are global, voluntary, industry-led standards for seafood traceability that are designed to support three main goals:

1. To enable interoperability among all seafood traceability systems so businesses using different proprietary systems can participate seamlessly in digital traceability across entire supply chains;
2. To communicate (especially to producers/suppliers) harmonized expectations about the basic information (“key data elements”) that should accompany all seafood products, including to ensure seafood is produced legally and to support sustainability claims; and
3. To improve the verifiability of information in traceability systems through digital solutions.

Although the GDST standards are specific to seafood products (both wild-caught and aquaculture), they are designed as an extension of the GS1 EPCIS standards widely used by retailers and many suppliers across multiple product categories. Accordingly, implementation of the GDST standards can be integrated into multi-commodity systems employing or compatible with EPCIS.

What is the GDST itself? The Global Dialogue on Seafood Traceability (GDST) is an international, business-to-business platform established in 2017 to create the first-ever global industry standards for seafood traceability. More than sixty companies and associations participated in the GDST’s consensus-based drafting process, with strong participation from around the world, across the supply chain, and at all enterprise sizes. Since being published in March 2020, the GDST standards have been endorsed by multiple industry groups and other leading stakeholders in the sustainable seafood space. Dozens of companies have already made public commitments to implementing GDST standards, and more than thirty companies offering third-party traceability services have begun offering systems compatible with GDST. The GDST was convened and facilitated by WWF (the major conservation NGO) and the Institute of Food Technologists (a major food science NGO), which continue to serve as the GDST Secretariat for the time being.

Today, although the initial drafting of the standards is complete, the GDST remains an active B2B initiative. Under an industry-led [Steering Committee](#), the Secretariat is busy promoting the uptake of the GDST standards, providing technical implementation support, managing multiple partnerships with other industry platforms and associations, addressing relevant policy and regulatory issues, and curating the technical standards themselves.

A pivotal moment for the GDST: The GDST standards are rapidly being recognized as a game-changing phenomenon across the seafood industry and among seafood purveyors in retail and foodservice. Considering the long-term nature of the standards and the ongoing GDST process, the Steering Committee is now working to establish a permanent institutional home for the GDST that can take over management of the process from the two NGOs that originally convened it. An independently incorporated GDST will be established under an industry-led governance structure, with interim steps towards this independent entity to become visible in the next few months. The creation of this new entity will enable the GDST to continue promoting and supporting GDST implementation for the long haul and may include activities such as:

- Overseeing the first technical update to the standards (i.e., the eventual release of GDST version 1.1);
- Establishment of mechanisms to verify the GDST compatibility of third-party systems offered by traceability vendors and solution providers;
- Initiation of discussions to establish new standards or guidelines for the verification of KDEs; and
- Growing involvement of the GDST in relevant regulatory and policy-making processes.

The time is ripe to join the GDST: Now is an important time to consider adopting the GDST standards and joining in the ongoing GDST process, because:

1. The industry trend towards GDST adoption is gathering speed; companies that work internally and with their suppliers and/or customers to start implementing the GDST now will have first-mover advantages and help shape industry behaviors;
2. Implementation of GDST standards will help prepare companies for rapidly emerging new regulations, such as the FSMA Section 204 regulations in the United States and the revisions to the EU “Control Regulation” (including new seafood traceability requirements) in the EU. Participating in the GDST process may also help companies have a voice in influencing forthcoming regulatory policies.
3. Companies actively involved with the GDST have repeated opportunities for positive brand visibility through their “early adopter” leadership in promoting legal, traceable, and responsible seafood; and
4. Participating in the establishment of the new institutional structure for the GDST is an opportunity to shape the future of the GDST standards and the GDST process.

What does it take to get involved? There are multiple ways for companies to get involved. An excellent first step is to join the companies endorsing the GDST standards by [publicly “adopting” the standards](#) via the GDST website. This step, which does not require any specific time-bound commitments, visibly establishes your company as promoting the goal of industry-wide interoperability through the use of the GDST standards. Companies are also encouraged to explore the flexible paths towards implementing the GDST standards through the [Implementation Roadmap and Toolkit](#), among other tools offered in the [GDST Resource Library](#). These tools include guidance on preparation and initial steps towards implementation both within your company and with your supply chain partners.

For more information: The GDST Secretariat is fully available to answer any questions, provide deeper briefings, and work quietly with companies interested in exploring the GDST further. Please contact the Secretariat at info@traceability-dialogue.org.