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

What is the Global Dialogue on Seafood Traceability (GDST)? The GDST is an international, business-to-business platform established in 2017 to create the first-ever global industry standards for seafood traceability. More than 60 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. The GDST was convened and facilitated by WWF (the global conservation NGO) and the Institute of Food Technologists (a major food science NGO).

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 by establishing agreed authoritative data sources.

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 utilizing or compatible with EPCIS.

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 30 vendors are already offering third-party traceability services compatible with GDST.

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 uptake of the GDST standards, providing technical support for implementation, 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 food service. 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 coordination from the two NGOs that originally convened it (WWF and the Institute of Food Technologists). 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 the new entity will enable the GDST to continue promoting and supporting GDST implementation, 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 guidelines for the verification of KDEs and/or to expand the KDE list to include stronger attention to labor and social issues; 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, and GDST compliance is already beginning to emerge as an enhancement to brand value. 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 the GDST standards will help prepare companies for rapidly emerging new regulations, such as the FSMA Section 204 regulations in the United States, the revisions to the EU "Control Regulation" (including new seafood traceability requirements) in the EU, and anticipated new import controls in Japan. Participating in the GDST process may also help companies have a voice in influencing forthcoming regulatory policies.

3. Joining the GDST provides repeated opportunities for positive brand visibility through "early adopter" leadership that promotes legal, traceable, and responsible seafood.

4. GDST members have an opportunity to shape the future of the GDST standards and the GDST process, including the formation of the new GDST independent entity.

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 use of the GDST standards.

Adopting the GDST standards automatically makes your company a member of the GDST, giving you access to "members only" technical support and policy briefings, and allowing you to participate in decisions about the future of the GDST standards and services. There is no fee for adopting the standards and becoming a GDST member.

Companies are also encouraged to explore the flexible paths towards implementing the GDST standards through the Implementation Roadmap and other tools offered in the GDST Resource Library. These tools include guidance on initial steps towards implementation both within your company and with your supply chain partners.

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