



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

What are the GDST standards?

The GDST standards are global, voluntary, industry-led standards on 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 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 increase the value of information in traceability systems through digitization.

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 the GDST standards, and more than forty companies offering third-party traceability services have signed a pledge to work towards offering systems compatible with the GDST standards. The GDST was convened and facilitated by [WWF](#) (a conservation NGO) and the [Institute of Food Technologists](#) (a food science NGO).

Today, the GDST standards are being recognized as a game-changer across the seafood industry, and the GDST itself has evolved into one of the most influential B2B initiatives in the sector. Under the leadership of its industry-led [Steering Committee](#), the [GDST Secretariat](#) works to promote the uptake of the GDST standards, provide technical implementation support, maintain and update the standards, and address relevant policy and regulatory issues (often working in coordination with other leading seafood industry platforms).

A pivotal moment for the GDST

With momentum growing towards widespread adoption of its standards, the GDST is now evolving into a permanent entity, independent from the two NGOs that originally convened it. In 2022, a newly incorporated GDST will be established under an industry-led governance structure, with interim steps towards legal independence already underway and a [new Executive Director](#) on board as of February 1. The renewed organizational structure will further strengthen the GDST’s ability to serve its members and help make the transition to interoperable digital traceability a business-smart strategy for companies across the seafood sector.

Among the GDST's future activities and member services will be:

- Working with GDST members to issue technical updates to the standards that meet evolving company needs and concerns;
- Providing tools and mechanisms to verify the GDST compatibility of IT systems, including those offered by traceability vendors and solution providers;
- Providing technical support and implementation guidance to GDST members;
- Expanding the GDST norms to include standards or guidelines for the verification of KDEs, and involving GDST members in decisions to be taken about future GDST verification mechanisms; and
- Strengthening the voice of GDST members to influence relevant regulatory and policy-making processes.

Now is the time to join the GDST

Right now, is an important time to consider adopting the GDST standards and joining in the ongoing GDST process, because:

1. 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;
2. The industry trend towards GDST adoption is gathering momentum; 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;
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.

How 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.

Contact Us

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