

Towards Guaranteed Traceability of Fish and Fishery Products from Southeast Asia: the ASEAN Catch Documentation Scheme

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During the implementation of the project “Combating IUU Fishing in the Southeast Asian Region through the Application of Catch Certification for International Trade in Fish and Fishery Products” by the SEAFDEC Marine Fishery Resources Development and Management Department (SEAFDEC/MFRDMD) with funding support from the Japanese Trust Fund (JTF)-II in 2011-2012 and JTF-VI during 2013-2019, the series of core experts meetings convened among SEAFDEC and the ASEAN Member States (AMSs) at the outset of the Project implementation agreed on the development and promotion of the ASEAN Guidelines for Preventing the Entry of Fish and Fishery Products from IUU Fishing Activities into the Supply Chain also known as the ASEAN Guidelines. Moreover, as part of the ASEAN Guidelines, a catch certification system for large- and small-scale fisheries should also be established for the Southeast Asian region to ensure that only non-IUU/legal fish and fishery products are traded in the supply chain. These tools had been envisioned to address the issues and concerns on IUU fishing activities directly or indirectly, in large- and small-scale fisheries in the Southeast Asian waters, as well as enhance and strengthen the traceability of the region’s fish and fishery products entering the supply chain.

The Resolution and Plan of Action on Responsible Fisheries for Food Security for the ASEAN Region Towards 2020 (RES&POA-2020) adopted in June 2011 included provisions that were used as basis for the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Member Countries in pursuing their objectives of attaining sustainability in fisheries (SEAFDEC, 2011). Specifically, the project “Combating IUU Fishing in the Southeast Asian Region through the Application of Catch Certification for International Trade in Fish and Fishery Products” was implemented by SEAFDEC/MFRDMD in response to the directives indicated in the RES&POA-2020: Resolution No. 8 on the need to: “Foster cooperation among ASEAN Member Countries and with international and regional organizations in combating IUU fishing,” and Plan of Action No. 67 to: “Strengthen cooperation among Member Countries to implement international standards with regards to trading on fish and fishery products within the ASEAN region.” Thus, during the series of core experts meetings involving the AMSs and organized through the Project, the status of the existing trade of fish and fishery products from the region had been assessed, while the existing practices of small-scale fisheries in the region including the existing mechanisms and associated problems in complying with the trade measures imposed by the importing countries, had been compiled. Such information had been used as inputs for the development of regional guidelines that aim to prevent IUU fish and fishery products from being traded.

The ASEAN Guidelines had been envisioned as a first step towards creating a catch certification scheme for non-IUU fishing products, and as a form of mandatory certification requirement to eliminate IUU fishing. Under this scheme, all imports would be considered legal if the flag State could certify that the fish had been harvested in accordance with their own fisheries management regime/requirements or from an area governed by an RFMO or other regional bodies, or in the high seas that comply with international standards. Moreover, such trade measures in support of national and international conservation goals should be transparent and administered in a fair and nondiscriminatory manner, with the underlying conservation goals which must be based on best available scientific evidence (Abdul-Razak *et al.*, 2013a; Abdul-Razak *et al.*, 2013b).

Meanwhile, in compliance with the requirements stipulated in the EC Regulation 1005/2008 establishing a “Community System to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU Fishing,” which took effect on 1 January 2010, the Southeast Asian countries most of which have recently emerged as major exporters of fish and fishery products to the world market, reviewed their respective fisheries regulations to ensure that provisions relevant to eliminating IUU fishing in their respective waters, are in place. Along the lines of the EC Regulation 1005/2008, the Southeast Asian countries have been able to support the worldwide efforts of using trade measures to counter IUU fishing activities in the Southeast Asian region. The analysis of the information gathered had served as basis for formulating solutions that could address the issues and concerns of the AMSs on the adoption of the EU catch certification as means of combating IUU fishing in the region. Moreover, cooperation among the AMSs had been strengthened allowing the countries to exchange information on their experiences in combating IUU fishing, facilitate trade within the region, and propose for the development of a catch certification system for large- and small-scale fisheries to ensure that only non-IUU or legal fish and fishery products are traded by the AMSs.

Development and Promotion of the ASEAN Guidelines

The AMSs have their respective fishery laws and regulations in place that include provisions on eliminating IUU fishing in their respective waters. However, strict enforcement of such regulations might not have been effective because of various constraints that include insufficient manpower and financial resources. Meanwhile, IUU fishing activities continue to take place that also led to illegal trading of IUU fish and fishery products in the Southeast Asian region (Abdul-Razak *et al.*,

2016a). In order to address this concern and in compliance with international requirements to counter IUU fishing to be able to trade fish and fishery products in the world market, the AMSs cooperated with SEAFDEC for the development of the ASEAN Guidelines for Preventing the Entry of Fish and Fishery Products from IUU Fishing Activities into the Supply Chain. As envisioned, the ASEAN Guidelines would serve as a foundation for the formulation of relevant policies at national level as well as for the development of clear direction and understanding of the need to prevent the entry of IUU fish and fishery products into the supply chain.

The development of this ASEAN Guidelines took into consideration relevant international instruments, e.g. IPOA-IUU Fishing, EC Regulation. However, implementation of the ASEAN Guidelines in the Southeast Asian region had been confronted with many issues in terms of legal framework, manpower and financial resources, and awareness building (Abdul-Razak *et al.*, 2016b). Specifically, additional budget would be required for capacity building of concerned

stakeholders in the respective AMSs. While some AMSs still have inadequate legal frameworks to be able to implement the ASEAN Guidelines, this would necessitate improvement of the existing systems and governance in fisheries management.

Finally, upon the consideration of the ASEAN Guidelines (Figure 1) by the SEAFDEC Council during its Forty-seventh Meeting in April 2015, the ASEAN Guidelines was endorsed by the 23rd Meeting of the ASEAN Sectoral Working Group on Fisheries (ASWGF_i) in June 2015 for consideration by the higher level meetings of the ASEAN. In August 2015, the ASEAN Guidelines was endorsed by the 37th Senior Officials Meeting of the ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry (SOM-AMAF) and finally by the 37th Meeting of AMAF in September 2015 (Mazalina *et al.*, 2015a). In order to strengthen national efforts in combating IUU fishing, the AMSs had been encouraged to develop their respective policies and National Plan of Action to Prevent the Entry of Fish and Fishery Products from IUU Fishing Activities into the Supply Chain, based on the ASEAN Guidelines. The AMSs had also been encouraged to establish and/or strengthen bilateral or multi-lateral arrangements and measures in combating IUU fishing in their common or shared or transboundary waters based on the ASEAN Guidelines (Mazalina *et al.*, 2015b).

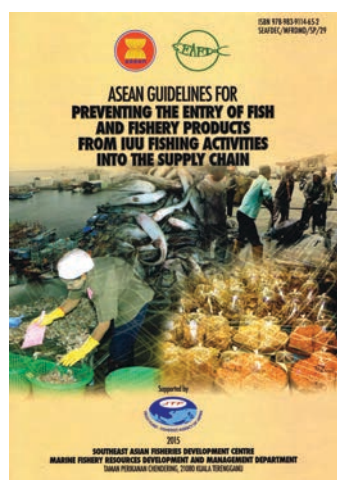


Figure 1. ASEAN Guidelines for Preventing the Entry of Fish and Fishery Products from IUU Fishing Activities into the Supply Chain (ASEAN Guidelines)

Self-evaluation of the Implementation of the ASEAN Guidelines

As the ASEAN Guidelines is voluntary in nature, its implementation was meant to be in accordance with the capacity of each AMS. Nonetheless, the status of implementation the ASEAN Guidelines was monitored through self-evaluation by each AMS in 2017, 2018, and

Table 1. Three-year self-evaluation scores of the status of implementation of the ASEAN Guidelines by the AMSs

AMSs	Percentage of actions in ASEAN Guidelines implemented per year in 2017, 2018, 2019 (%)		
	2017	2018	2019
Brunei Darussalam	68.1	-	84.8
Cambodia	65.8	84.8	86.4
Indonesia	87.8	96.4	97.6
Lao PDR	46.4	60.0	80.0
Malaysia	88.5	92.4	98.4
Myanmar	84.1	94.0	94.8
Philippines	80.7	96.4	99.6
Singapore	70.2	-	96.0
Thailand	90.9	98.0	98.0
Viet Nam	76.7	92.4	96.4
Events when respective self-evaluation scores were reported by the AMSs	Second Regional Technical Consultation on Promotion of the ASEAN Guidelines for Preventing the Entry of Fish and Fishery Products from IUU Fishing Activities into the Supply Chain, 21-23 November 2017, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (Abdul-Razak <i>et al.</i> , 2018)	Consultative visits to AMSs in 2018: Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam.	Terminal Meeting of the JTF-6 Project on Combating IUU Fishing in Southeast Asia through the Application of Catch Certification for International Trade in Fish and Fishery Products, 3-5 September 2019, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (Abdul-Razak <i>et al.</i> , 2019a; Abdul-Razak <i>et al.</i> , 2019b)

2019, and carried out by giving a certain score to the actions they have undertaken to implement the ASEAN Guidelines (Table 1). Where possible, remarks were also recorded to explain why a certain score is given for particular action taken.

The score system used is 0.0 to 5.0 indicating the percentage of the action implemented, where score 0.0 indicates not applicable or the ASEAN Guidelines were not implemented, 1.0 means 1.0-20.0 percent was implemented, 2.0 means 21.0-40.0 percent implemented, 3.0 means 41.0-60.0 percent was implemented, 4.0 means 61.0-80.0 percent implemented, and 5 means 81.0-100.0 percent of the Guidelines was implemented. The ASEAN Guidelines has 50 sub-actions which means that a total score is 250 would imply that such particular AMS had implemented 81.0-100.0 percent of the actions to combat IUU fishing.

During the Project Terminal Meeting in September 2019, results of the self-evaluation had indicated that most AMSs implemented more than 80 % of the articles in the ASEAN Guidelines, and the increasing trend in the implementation of the ASEAN Guidelines from 2016 until 2019 (Table 1) suggests that the AMSs are committed to combat IUU fishing in the Southeast Asian region. Moreover, it was recommended that self-evaluation of the implementation of the ASEAN Guidelines should be conducted annually as part of the national initiatives, to keep track of the activities to combat IUU fishing in the respective countries.

Establishment and Dissemination of the ASEAN Catch Documentation Scheme

The project “Combating IUU Fishing in the Southeast Asian Region through the Application of Catch Certification for International Trade in Fish and Fishery Products” implemented by SEAFDEC/MFRDMD from 2011-2019, also included the conduct of study on the existing fishing and trading practices of small-scale fisheries in the Southeast Asian region, and on the issues and concerns encountered by the region’s large-scale fisheries in complying with the EC Regulation 1005/2008. The outputs of the activities carried out through the Project had provided the basis for possible promotion of the implementation of the EU catch certification in combating IUU fishing in the Southeast Asian region. During the series of consultations and dialogues among the AMSs, it was suggested that a catch certification or traceability system for large- and small-scale fisheries should be established to facilitate trading of fish and fishery products from the region, and ensure the international market that only non-IUU or legal fish and fishery products are being traded by the AMSs.

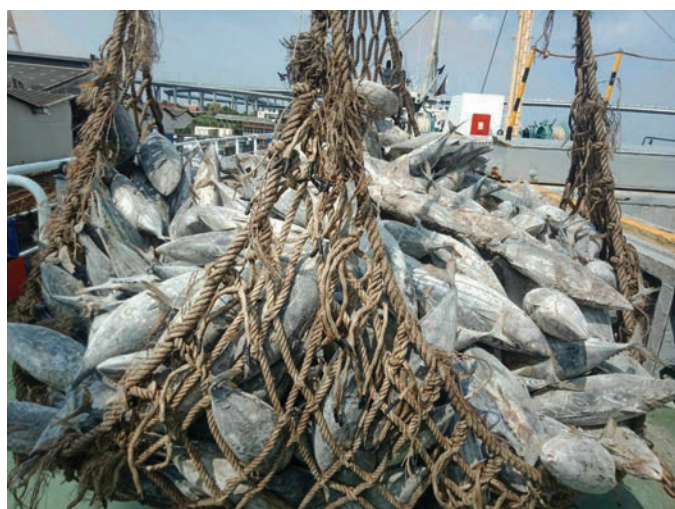
As an initial step, SEAFDEC/MFRDMD and the SEAFDEC Secretariat conducted a series of core experts meetings and consultative visits to the AMSs to identify the issues related to the existing fishing and trading practices in small-scale fisheries, the possible solutions for complying with the

EC Regulation 1005/2008 in large-scale fisheries, and the measures to counter IUU fishing activities in the Southeast Asian waters. Through such meetings and consultations, the ASEAN Guidelines was developed and promoted in the region, while the idea of establishing a catch documentation scheme for the region was also being formed.

Taking heed of the call of the “International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing” or the IPOA-IUU, for the countries to develop internationally-agreed market-related measures to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing that could encompass several types of controls on trading of fish and fishery products derived from IUU fishing, SEAFDEC/MFRDMD in collaboration with SEAFDEC/TD and the SEAFDEC Secretariat initiated an activity under the abovementioned SEAFDEC/MFRDMD Project, with the aim of developing a catch documentation scheme for the Southeast Asian region.

Intended as a market-related measure to combat IUU fishing in the region and to document the verifiable information on the fish catch from point of capture to their final destination (Smithrithee *et al.*, 2020), the ASEAN Catch Documentation Scheme (ACDS) was launched during the Meeting of SEAFDEC Council in Brunei Darussalam in April 2017. In addressing the difficulties encountered by the AMSs in adopting the ACDS, the Project sustained the conduct of on-site training sessions in the AMSs. The need to establish the ACDS became eminent considering that many of the AMSs have emerged as major contributors to the world’s total fisheries production as well as major exporters of fish and fishery products to the world market.

As developed, the ACDS was initially intended to improve the traceability of marine capture fisheries in the AMSs in order to enhance intra-regional and international trade of fish and fishery products from the AMSs. In the process of developing the ACDS, its scope had been identified and its provisions and coverage including the catch flow and movement of the





ACDS, had been formulated (Siriraksophon *et al.*, 2016). Although still voluntary for the AMSs, the ACDS could be applied for trading of marine fish and fishery products, *i.e.* fresh or processed, which means that a catch certificate including the details of transshipments shall accompany all catch under the jurisdiction of the AMSs (Siriraksophon *et al.*, 2017). Since the ACDS could also be applied for catch from small-scale fishing vessels that contribute to trading among the AMSs, the ACDS Guide that includes Infographics was published by SEAFDEC (SEAFDEC, 2018).

In order to enhance the adoption of the ACDS, an electronic catch documentation system, the eACDS has been developed with the main objective of simplifying the processes of the ACDS to ease the burden of the stakeholders. Two applications had been developed for the eACDS: web-based and mobile, which involve two phases, *i.e.* for domestic marine capture fisheries, and for the traceability of imported fish and fishery products including catch that had been moved through



Figure 2. KDEs required for the eACDS application software (adapted from Saraphaivanich *et al.*, 2019)

transshipment vessels (Saraphaivanich *et al.*, 2019). The key data elements (KDEs) required for the eACDS include: point of catch, buyers/receivers and sellers, processors, exporters and international shippers, importers, and end consumers (Figure 2).

As part of the development of the eACDS, the steps involved in the implementation of the eACDS with focus on the applications of the software (Box 1) had been summarized and disseminated to the AMSs (adapted from Saraphaivanich *et al.* 2019)). After having been pilot-tested in Brunei Darussalam, the eACDS would also be promoted in Malaysia, Myanmar, and Viet Nam.

Box 1. Steps involved in the implementation of the eACDS	
Step 1: Port-out control	Fishing Master informs and gets permission from the Fishing Port Authority before going out for fishing operation, and is issued an initial Catch Declaration (CD) with password for accessing the mobile application for catch reporting at sea.
Step 2: Catch reporting at sea	After each fishing operation at sea, Fishing Master reports their estimated catch through the mobile eACDS application using the access accounts and password that appear on the initial CD form (features for offline reporting is also available if fishing vessel does not have communication signal)
Step 3: Port-in control and catch-weight verification	Fishing Master reports to the Port-in Control on the catch-weight and species, and is issued the CD by the Fishing Port Authority to guarantee that the catch is regulated and does not come from IUU fishing activities
Step 4: Catch movement to local market	For purchasing fish by buyers and processors for local markets and/or for processing, registered buyers report the necessary information to the center/port using the mobile application, while the movement document (MD) will be issued by the Fishing Port Authority (Note: At the markets, consumers would be able to trace the origin of the fish catch and other information from the QR-Code attached to the MD)
Step 5: Catch movement to processing plants	Movement Document (MD) is issued by authorized fishery officer at ports, for transferring of fish to either local markets or fish processing plants
Step 6: Issuance of CC to processors	Processors to request for Catch Certificate (CC) from competent authority using the web-based application fish that are sent to processing plants, especially in cases where the processed products are meant for export
Step 7: Issuance of the CC by Competent Authority (CA)	When CA receives request from processors, CA will validate all information and if found okay, CA will issue the CC to the processor for exportation of the products
Step 8: Issuance of CC and QR-Code	This is for exportation of fish and fishery products for tracing of the origin of the fish and fishery products
Step 9: Use of mobile QR-Code application	This is for consumers/importers to trace the origin of the fish and fishery products

Conclusion and Recommendations

Results of the implementation of the JTF-funded project “Combating IUU Fishing in the Southeast Asian Region through the Application of Catch Certification for International Trade in Fish and Fishery Products” are shown in **Box 2**. It is desired that these results and the adoption of the ASEAN documentation scheme, could guarantee the quality of fish and fishery products from the Southeast Asian region, thus, enhancing the competitiveness of these products in the world market.

Box 2. Major outputs of the Project “Combating IUU Fishing in the Southeast Asian Region through the Application of Catch Certification for International Trade in Fish and Fishery Products”

- Existing fishing and trading practices in small-scale fisheries identified and compiled
- Issues that hinder the compliance with the EC Regulation 1005/2008 in large-scale fisheries identified
- The ASEAN Guidelines for Preventing the Entry of Fish and Fishery Products from IUU Fishing Activities into the Supply Chain, published
- The ASEAN Guidelines for Preventing the Entry of Fish and Fishery Products from IUU Fishing Activities into the Supply Chain promoted in the AMSs
- The implementation of the ASEAN Guidelines for Preventing the Entry of Fish and Fishery Products from IUU Fishing Activities into the Supply Chain in the AMSs monitored and feedbacks compiled
- Development of the ASEAN Catch Documentation Scheme (ACDS) initiated by SEAFDEC/MFRDMD in collaboration with the SEAFDEC Secretariat
- On-site testing of the eACDS carried out in Brunei Darussalam in collaboration with SEAFDEC Secretariat and SEAFDEC/TD
- Follow-up trials for the implementation of the eACDS in Malaysia, Myanmar, and Viet Nam initiated, and their progress being continuously monitored

After the **ASEAN Guidelines for Preventing the Entry of Fish and Fishery Products from IUU Fishing Activities into the Supply Chain** was finalized in 2014, and promoted in the AMSs starting in 2015, some countries still need assistance to be able to adopt the ASEAN Guidelines. Although the AMSs recognized the importance of combating IUU fishing through the adoption of trading measures and are seriously tackling the issues on IUU fishing, the level of implementation of the ASEAN Guidelines differs from country to country based on the circumstances surrounding the respective fishery and trading industry in the countries. Therefore, in order to promote the ASEAN Guidelines in the AMSs, appropriate strategies and measures should be introduced to ensure that effective and practical national plans are formulated and their effective implementation is in place. Nevertheless, the AMSs are still encountering various issues, concerns and difficulties (**Box 3**) that need to be addressed to be able to fully implement the ASEAN Guidelines.

In an effort to address the aforementioned issues, the SEAFDEC/MFRDMD is committed to continue providing technical assistance through capacity building activities

Box 3: Issues, concerns and difficulties encountered by AMSs during the implementation of the ASEAN Guidelines

Legal framework

Some AMSs lack the necessary legal frameworks for implementing some parts of the ASEAN Guidelines, e.g. installation of VMS. Without any legal framework, the countries would not have any enforcement power. In some aspects, difficulties in establishing legal framework reflect the lack of technical guidance and assistance or lack of human and/or financial resources to follow the provisions stipulated in the ASEAN Guidelines. Moreover, there is also a need for the respective governments to look into issues related to the evaluation and improvement of existing systems and governance.

Inadequate resources

The ASEAN Guidelines covers very wide range of fishing and trading activities. In order that the AMSs could follow every aspect of the Guidelines, the countries should have certain amount of resources, which could include human and financial resources, to be able to monitor efficiently their fishing and trading activities

Awareness building

Another challenge that confronts the AMSs in the implementation of the Guidelines is awareness building of the stakeholders. The key stakeholders in the supply chain, e.g. of aquaculture products, are unaware about the benefits and advantages of using a traceability system in their operations. Also, some traditional stakeholders are averse to change and are reluctant to implement any traceability system

to enable the AMSs to adopt the ASEAN Guidelines at national level, considering that the effective and practical implementation of the ASEAN Guidelines depends primarily on the domestic circumstances in fishing, trading, and the socio-economic situation of each AMS. Nonetheless, promotion of the ASEAN Guidelines would be sustained as its total implementation would mean significant reduction in the IUU fishing activities in the Southeast Asian region. Furthermore, the SEAFDEC/MFRDMD would continue to assist the AMSs to carry out the self-evaluation of the implementation of the ASEAN Guidelines as part of their national initiatives, and to keep track of the activities to combat IUU fishing in their respective countries.

Way Forward

Although the ASEAN Guidelines has been disseminated since 2015, some AMSs still require assistance in preparing their respective implementation plans for adopting the ASEAN Guidelines at national levels. In this connection, the domestic circumstances in fishing and trading should be carefully examined taking into consideration each country’s situation, while appropriate strategies and measures should be introduced to ensure that effective and practical national plans are formulated. The varying situations surrounding fisheries and trading in the AMSs that differ country by country should be carefully taken into account when establishing the strategies. The countries’ self-initiatives to develop appropriate national implementation plans must be esteemed for the ASEAN Guidelines based on their own legal and governance frameworks. In addition, sharing of information among the

countries should be enhanced to facilitate discussions on the effective, practical, and appropriate actions and protocols in combating IUU fishing at national and local levels. Sharing of information would be advocated as the results would contribute to the harmonization of the measures that already exist in the AMSs, for combating IUU fishing by preventing the trade of fish and fishery products from IUU fishing. Furthermore, self-assessment of the ASEAN Guidelines by the AMSs would be sustained as the results could provide a better picture of the role played by the countries in promoting the ASEAN Guidelines. It is envisioned that the current results of the self-evaluation, showing the varying status of implementation of the ASEAN Guidelines in AMSs from 80 %, could be improved. It should also be noted that the variation was due to the existence of legal frameworks.

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