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European Union

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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Mandatory use of the digital system 'CATCH' to fight illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing
- Information from the Commission

Delegations will find attached an information note from the Commission services on the above-mentioned subject with a view to the meeting of the Council (Agriculture and Fisheries) on 26 February 2024, where it will be presented under "Any Other Business".

**MANDATORY USE OF THE DIGITAL SYSTEM “CATCH”
TO FIGHT ILLEGAL, UNREPORTED AND UNREGULATED FISHING**

INFORMATION NOTE

Council Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008¹ (hereafter the “IUU Regulation”) established a Catch Certification Scheme to ensure that fishery products stemming from illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing do not reach the EU market. This scheme is part of the EU policies contributing to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 14 ‘Life below water’.

Regulation (EU) 2023/2842² as regards fisheries control entered into force on 9 January 2024. It amends, among other Regulations, the IUU Regulation by introducing important changes to the Catch Certification Scheme. Most of the changes will be applicable 24 months after the entry into force of Regulation (EU) 2023/2842, i.e. from 10 January 2026.

The modifications to the Catch Certification Scheme focus on ensuring the traceability along the supply chain, introducing a new digital system called CATCH. The use of this new digital CATCH system will become compulsory to Union importers and Member States’ authorities from that date. Therefore, the preparatory work during 2024-2025 in the Member States will be crucial, to ensure that all the operators and authorities are aware and ready to use the system by the set deadline .

CATCH is an EU-wide real-time IT system for the management of all information, data and documents linked to the EU Catch Certification Scheme. It allows for the submission of certificates and documents accompanying the fishery products to be imported into the EU in accordance with the IUU Regulation.

¹ Council Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008 of 29 September 2008 establishing a Community system to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, amending Regulations (EEC) No 2847/93, (EC) No 1936/2001 and (EC) No 601/2004 and repealing Regulations (EC) No 1093/94 and (EC) No 1447/1999.

² Regulation (EU) 2023/2842 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 November 2023 amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1224/2009, and amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1967/2006 and (EC) No 1005/2008 and Regulations (EU) 2016/1139, (EU) 2017/2403 and (EU) 2019/473 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards fisheries control.

The main objective of CATCH is to streamline the catch certification procedures and to offer a fully digitised and paperless workflow. It will facilitate the exchange of data, information and documents between all involved trading parties and control authorities and therefore will simplify and speed up the administrative procedures.

CATCH is intended to improve the effectiveness of the EU Catch Certification Scheme by ensuring a centralised digital management environment with the objective to identify and prohibit importation into the EU of fishery products obtained from IUU fishing. CATCH will enhance the cooperation and coordination between economic operators and competent authorities and between the competent authorities of the EU Member States. Concretely, CATCH will:

- allow for the detection of fraudulent catch certificates;
- prevent overuse of catch certificates through quantity management when catch certificates are used several times in relation to different consignments destined to the EU market;
- support risk management applied to controls; and
- harmonise the documentary workflows.

The Commission will continue working with the Member States authorities by organising trainings, setting up an IT helpdesk, developing guidelines and fine-tuning the CATCH system and all its components, so to allow its full, seamless, and correct implementation as of 10 January 2026.

Although the use of CATCH will be mandatory only for the EU operators and Member States' authorities, the system will also allow third countries' operators and authorities to create, validate, and transfer catch certificates and related documents directly in CATCH. As such, the production flow of relevant data and documents can become digital from the origin of the product (exporting flag State) to the final destination (importing Member State). The Commission will promote the direct use of CATCH by third countries, highlighting the benefits for trade facilitation, like speeding up the administrative procedures at the border, increasing the reliability of data, the fact that the use of the tool is free of cost, the system is available in all the EU official languages, and some other languages. The Commission will promote the use of the CATCH by third country operators and authorities through seminars, trainings and exploring interoperability solutions for those third countries that already have IT systems for validating catch certificates.