Revised EU rules and digitalisation of fisheries control

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EU adopts revised rules for fisheries control and integrates digital catch certification

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

Update

The EU has revised its rules for fisheries control, applicable to both EU and non-EU fishing vessels operating in EU waters. It aims to better control and enforce the Common Fisheries Policy, and to fulfil international obligations to prevent, deter, and eliminate illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. The digital information management system for catch certification (CATCH) will be fully digitalised and integrated into the Trade Control and Expert System (TRACES). This will be achieved by gradually expanding geolocalisation and electronic reporting to all fishing vessels.

Impacted products

wild fish, fishery products

What is changing?

The control of EU fishing activities will be entirely digitalised. Full digital traceability along the supply chain will be mandatory for all fresh, frozen, and aquaculture products, enabling the authorities to more effectively tackle illegal fishing and provide better information on the origin of these products to consumers. The system will gradually be expanded to processed fishery products such as canned products (European Commission 2024). These rules will apply to all fishery products, including imported products. The digital information management system for catch certification (CATCH) will be integrated as a component of the Trade Control and Expert System (TRACES).

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Why?

Electronic risk management and analysis is more effective for control and enforcement. CATCH can interoperate with other systems relevant to the fight against IUU fishing.

Timeline

Date of publication: 20 December 2023.

Date of application: 9 January 2024.

Transitional provisions

CATCH will become compulsory for EU operators and authorities for imports of fishery products from 10 January 2026. Catch certificates and related documents that have been validated, endorsed, or signed before 10 January 2026 may be used by importers until 10 January 2028 (in accordance with Regulation 1005/2008).

What are the major implications for exporting countries?

Fishery and aquaculture products imported from non-EU countries are subject to the same rules as products originating in the EU. Mandatory traceability information for imported products must include a reference to the catch certificate number(s), submitted in accordance with the IUU Regulation. Measures against non-cooperating countries in fighting IUU fishing are being strengthened by this new Regulation.

CATCH allows operators and authorities in non-EU countries to create, validate, and transfer catch certificates and related documents directly online. Its use will remain voluntary for non-EU countries after the adoption of this Regulation. Once the workflow is fully digital, from the origin of the product (the exporting flag State) to its final destination (the importing Member State), it is expected that operators and authorities of non-EU countries will have access to the system, at the latest after the transitional period (from 10 January 2026).

Once CATCH has been integrated into TRACES, new users will be able to apply for access directly through the TRACES NT platform. Operators will have to contact the relevant competent authority in their country to obtain access through TRACES NT.

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Recommended Actions

Fishery operators and exporters of fish products to the EU should consider replacing paper-based catch recording and certification systems with a digital system that is compatible or interoperable with the EU CATCH tool and/or with TRACES. They should also try to ensure full digital traceability of fish and seafood products for export to the EU.

Background

The successful implementation of the EU's Common Fisheries Policy depends on effective, efficient, modern, and transparent control and enforcement. Traceability from first sale to retail point is important for food safety, and helps to ensure fair competition and protect consumers' interests.

Traceability also helps to control and combat IUU fishing. Importing or trading in fishery products from IUU fishing is a serious infringement of the rules of the Common Fisheries Policy (Regulation 1005/2008, Art. 42). Accurate information on the species and origin of fishery or aquaculture products must be kept on record by operators and must be made available to competent authorities upon request.

This Regulation amends (amongst others) Regulation 1224/2009 establishing an EU control system for ensuring compliance with the Common Fisheries Policy; the IUU Regulation (1005/2008); and Regulation 2017/2403 on the sustainable management of external fishing fleets (see EU external fisheries policy explained).

Resources

Online resources from the European Commission, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE):

- CATCH – Information note
- What is new in the EU Catch Certification Scheme after the amendment of the EU IUU Regulation
- The EU fisheries control system gets a major revamp

Regulation 1224/2009 establishing a Union control system for ensuring compliance with the common fisheries policy

IUU Regulation 1005/2008

Regulation 2017/2403 on the sustainable management of external fishing fleets

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Sources

Regulation (EU) 2023/2842 as regards fisheries control

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