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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION

Marketing standards framework for fishery and aquaculture products

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Executive summary

The present evaluation assessed whether the regulatory framework defined by the existing marketing standards for fishery and aquaculture products is still fit for purpose and whether it allows achieving the objectives set out in Regulation (EU) No 1379/2013 on the common organisation of the markets in fishery and aquaculture products (the ‘CMO’ Regulation). The existing marketing standards only cover fresh and chilled fishery products, canned tuna and bonito as well as preserved sardine and sardine-type products.

These objectives are (i) to enable the EU market to be supplied with sustainable products, (ii) to allow realising the full potential of the internal market in fishery and aquaculture products, (iii) to help to improve the profitability of production by facilitating marketing activities based on fair competition and (iv) to ensure that imported products meet the same requirement and marketing standards as Union producers.

The evaluation assessed the performance of the marketing standards framework according to five criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and EU added value. An external evaluation study contributed to the assessment¹. The evaluation provides evidence and conclusions that will form the basis for a possible future revision of the marketing standards framework so that it can achieve its objectives and produce the desired results.

Relevance: The existing standards are still relevant for the products covered. The scope of the current EU marketing standards, based on their current criteria, also seems to be relevant, except in the case of standardised products, such as fish fingers, for which the absence of EU minimum quality criteria has raised issues, and potentially for some fresh products based on industry demand.

Effectiveness: The achievements against the objectives defined in the CMO Regulation are limited by the standards’ narrow scope in terms of products covered and by their focus on quality. Therefore, the standards, in their current form, cannot generally enable the EU market to be supplied with sustainable products or provide market transparency on that aspect. There is no evidence that the standards facilitated or obstructed exchanges within the internal market. The standards may have positively affected profitability, at least indirectly, by preventing that competition takes place to the detriment of product quality. Finally, the standards do not contribute to a level playing field as regards, in particular, environmental and social aspects for any of the products covered. This is a concern for operators in all supply chains for fishery and aquaculture products, including those products currently not covered by the standards.

Efficiency: The enforcement costs of the standards for public authorities are marginal, and implementation costs borne by operators are marginal or null. Overall, the benefits of the standards outweigh the costs and there is no evidence that alternatives, such as private

¹ [Study: Evaluation of the marketing standards framework for fishery and aquaculture products](#)

standards, would be more cost-effective. However, the evaluation detected a lack of clear rules or guidance about what types of control should apply to the standards and at which stages of the supply chain.

Coherence: EU marketing standards are generally **coherent** with both fisheries and sanitary control regulations, even though controls focus more on the legality of catch and food safety. Consumer information rules, as well as other international and private standards provide additional information and so act in a complementary fashion. Some inconsistencies were detected with international standards of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), which may lead to confusion and diverging interpretations in the sector or risk misleading consumers.

EU added value: The evaluation found that EU added value was evident as national standards cannot contribute to harmonisation and transparency at an EU level, ensure a level playing field with non-EU products, or create a common culture of compliance. Compared to private standards, EU marketing standards also provide free access to a common set of definitions and quality criteria and therefore ensure that all operators have access to the same information.

The overall conclusion of the evaluation is that the marketing standards are generally relevant, efficient and coherent and add value within the boundaries of their current scope and underlying criteria. However, as regards their effectiveness in achieving the objectives set out in the CMO Regulation, there seem to be significant shortcomings. The public consultation conducted in the context of the evaluation called for increased market transparency of the marketing standards. Furthermore, feedback gathered from the sector indicates that there remains an issue of a non-level playing field, in particular in terms of environmental and social aspects. Finally, while market demand for product sustainability is increasing (and leading to a potentially confusing proliferation of private initiatives, each with its own sustainability criteria) the existing marketing standards have not been equipped to deliver on the objective of enabling the EU market to be provided with sustainable products.

The results of this evaluation will feed into a reflection on how to address the challenges and shortcomings identified and how to improve the overall performance of the marketing standards framework for fishery and aquaculture products.