



National Agricultural Traceability Grants Program – Regulatory Technology Research and Insights Grant Round: Seafood Industry Australia grantee summary

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Australia's seafood industry navigates an intricate and evolving global regulatory environment, necessitating innovative approaches to boost efficiency and ensure compliance. This project conducted extensive investigations and practical trials to address these challenges, confirming substantial manual effort and inherent inefficiencies within current compliance workflows, particularly for international trade.

Key insights from research

Comprehensive consultations with over 20 businesses, major retailers, and government agencies, alongside a detailed examination of more than 100 supply chain documents, illuminated a highly fragmented and dynamic regulatory landscape impacting both domestic and international markets (for example European Catch Certification Scheme, United States of America Seafood Import Monitoring Program (USA SIMP) China Import Food Enterprise Registration (CIFER). A significant finding was the pervasive 'tick-the-box' mentality, where enterprises often perceive regulatory adherence merely as an unavoidable administrative overhead, rather than an avenue for broader operational or commercial advantage. This perspective, coupled with a nascent grasp of traceability technology's comprehensive benefits beyond basic reporting, posed considerable obstacles to initial partner recruitment. Specific difficulties encountered included ambiguous market signals, limited in-market monitoring for product fraud, a predominant focus on the domestic market for many species, inconsistent fisheries management frameworks across jurisdictions, and concerns regarding the ongoing expense of new systems without clear consumer willingness to absorb costs.

Key outcomes from the trial

Despite these initial engagement hurdles, the project successfully piloted two proof-of-concept digital components: automated European traceability report generation and USA SIMP worksheet creation. These practical demonstrations revealed significant potential for:

- Streamlined Administration: reducing the need for manual data extraction and report preparation
- Improved Data Integrity: minimising errors typically associated with manual processes
- Enhanced Audit Preparedness: providing transparent, interconnected data for verification
- Greater Operational Insight: consolidating disparate data points for more effective management decisions.

Nevertheless, the trials also highlighted inherent limitations stemming from reliance on unstructured data sources (e.g. PDFs, spreadsheets), which hinder full automation and broad scalability without a more systematic approach to data capture.

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Future challenges and strategic direction

Achieving widespread adoption and fully realising the advantages of Regulatory Technology (RegTech) across the Australian seafood sector faces a considerable barrier: a diverse and often limited understanding of the interplay between compliance, traceability, and technology. The prevailing emphasis on basic regulatory fulfilment, rather than leveraging data for deeper insights and operational enhancements, represents a fundamental shift in perspective required.

Unless a collective and sustained transformation in industry thinking occurs, moving beyond simple compliance towards a unified, data-driven methodology, the expansive implementation of these RegTech components will remain constrained. This necessitates a clear, long-term innovation blueprint, integrating targeted capability building, strategic pilot programmes, and collaborative leadership from government and industry associations to foster standardisation and make digital adoption more accessible and economically viable over the coming decade.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the continuous connection of First Nations Traditional Owners and Custodians to the lands, seas and waters of Australia. We recognise their care for and cultivation of Country. We pay respect to Elders past and present, and recognise their knowledge and contribution to the productivity, innovation and sustainability of Australia's agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries.

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