

Report of the

FOURTH MEETING OF REGIONAL FISHERY BODIES

Rome, 14–15 March 2005



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PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

This is the final report approved by the Fourth Meeting of Regional Fishery Bodies held in Rome on 14 and 15 March 2005.

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ABSTRACT

The Fourth Meeting of Regional Fishery Bodies (RFBs) was held at FAO headquarters, Rome, on 14 and 15 March 2005. The Meeting reviewed the decision of the twenty-sixth session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of relevance to Regional Fishery Bodies. The Meeting discussed the role of RFBs, external factors affecting fisheries management, harmonization of catch documentation, relations between RFBs and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the status of the Fisheries Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS) and other related matters.

The Meeting reached a number of conclusions regarding matters meriting the attention of RFBs, governments and FAO.

Distribution:

Members of the Committee
Others interested nations and international organization
FAO Fisheries Department
FAO Regional Fishery Officers

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OPENING OF THE MEETING

1. The Fourth Meeting of Regional Fishery Bodies (RFBs) was held on 14 and 15 March 2005 at FAO headquarters, Rome. Participants (Appendix B) included representatives from the Secretariats and office bearers of 29 RFBs, the United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and Law of the Sea, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Chairperson of Committee on Fisheries (COFI). Representatives of the FAO Fisheries Department were also in attendance.

2. Mr Ichiro Nomura, Assistant Director-General, FAO Fisheries Department, opened the Meeting. He noted that the demands placed on Regional Fishery Bodies have become heavier in recent years as the productivity of fish stocks has dwindled and fishing pressure increased. He referred to the June, 2004 Technical Consultation to Review Progress and Promote the Full Implementation of the International Plan of Action (IPOA) to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing and the IPOA for the Management of Fishing Capacity, which noted that Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) played a key role in galvanizing regional action against IUU fishing and related activities. He recalled initiatives that were proposed during the Consultation, including the strengthening of informal and formal networks between RFBs and closing regional governance gaps that permitted IUU fishers to operate. He also noted that the September 2004 Technical Consultation to Review Port State Measures to Combat IUU Fishing highlighted that regional action should be encouraged, and that these decisions and recommendations have been reaffirmed during the recent session of COFI and the Ministerial Meeting on Fisheries. Mr Nomura stated that throughout this Meeting, FAO will pay particular attention to the discussions and, following the conclusion of the Meeting, seek to collaborate with RFBs and to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations that might be agreed. The full text of the Assistant Director-General's statement is in Appendix D.

3. The Chairperson of the Meeting, Mr Denzil Miller, thanked Mr Nomura for his encouragement and support. He noted that this was the first time the Chairperson of COFI has attended the Meeting, and reported that Mr Alejandro Anganuzzi, Secretary of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission, was unable to attend due to hospitalization. The Chairperson received the endorsement of the Meeting to communicate to Mr Anganuzzi on behalf of participants their best wishes for his recovery.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE MEETING

4. The Meeting adopted the agenda in Appendix A. A list of documents provided to the Meeting is in Appendix C. Ms Judith Swan served as rapporteur and Mr Hiromoto Watanabe coordinated logistical arrangements.

5. In addressing the nature of, and arrangements for the Meeting, the Chairperson emphasized the informal nature of the Meeting, given its purpose to provide for a full, fair and frank exchange of views. Issues relating to the scope of the Meeting (especially as it related to administrative and/or policy matters), potential observer participation, possible rules of procedure (for example for observer participation) and translation of documents were discussed in depth by participants. After discussion, it was clear that participants supported the informal nature of the Meeting, which should represent as wide a number of RFBs as possible. There was wide ranging discussion as to where the line can be drawn between policy and administration, with some delegations pointing out that they are not empowered to take policy decisions on behalf of their members. It was agreed that the general scope of the Meeting, being informal, would be information exchange and administration, as well as enhancing cooperation among RFBs. It was clear that there would be no decision making implications involved and policy may be a background but not a directive. It was recognized that the policymaking function and mandate essentially rests with the members of the organizations represented.

6. Mindful of the number of requests for observer attendance at the Meeting, some participants suggested that relevant rules of procedure be adopted. The Chairperson noted that this would change the way of doing business, but in future it could be useful to set certain standards, for example requiring requests for observer status to be submitted well in advance, or allowing a few representative observers. If necessary, the Chairperson could communicate with the participants to make a decision. There was consensus not to address rules at this stage and remain with the status quo.

7. Acknowledging the broad consultations undertaken by the Chairperson in preparing for the current Meeting, and mindful that this constituted a virtual group during intersessional periods rather than a single event every two years, the participants agreed that the title of “RFB Secretariats Network” would be more applicable than the current Meeting’s title. The new title has the advantage of emphasizing informality, yet conveying the notion of ongoing intersessional work during the two years between formal meetings.

8. Some participants requested translation of the Meeting documents in future. Mr Nomura explained that the relevant COFI documents would be available in all languages, but unfortunately a budget was not available because this was not an FAO Meeting.

REVIEW OF THE DECISIONS OF THE TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES OF RELEVANCE TO REGIONAL FISHERY BODIES

9. The Secretary of COFI, Mr Ndiaga Gueye, introduced a review of decisions of the Twenty-sixth Session of COFI relevant to RFBs. In particular, he highlighted two major issues in the COFI Draft Report.

10. The Secretary recalled that FAO was strongly requested to assist the RFMOs in their roles relating to issues concerned with biodiversity of the high seas. COFI also reaffirmed the critical role RFMOs played in improving the governance of deepwater resources in the high seas.

11. The Secretary referred to the COFI proposal to review the performance of RFMOs in meeting the objectives and principles set forth in relevant international instruments. The proposal also stressed a need to develop a process to assess the performance of RFMOs as well as to promote best practices across RFMOs. The Meeting noted that COFI had suggested that an invitation could be extended to RFMO members and other interested parties encouraging them to participate in the development of parameters for any such review process, possibly through an urgent expert consultation followed by a technical consultation. There was broad support by members but further clarification on the nature, process and use of the outcome were identified by the meeting as being priority items for future elaboration. It was clear that FAO is free to review the work of the FAO RFMOs. However, a review of the non-FAO RFMOs could only be initiated by the governing councils of the organizations concerned, although FAO may be able to provide assistance in this regard.

12. The Chairperson drew the Meeting’s attention to information items important to RFBs that appear in the COFI Draft Report as follows. (The paragraph numbers are adjusted to the ones of the final COFI Report after the meeting.)

- Discussion on illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing (COFI Report paragraphs 18 to 22). This covers issues of “flags of convenience”, new entrants and improving monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS), including vessel monitoring systems (VMS). In this context, the Statement from the Ministerial Conference in relation to IUU fishing, recognizing the strong role of RFMOs, is also important.
- The proposal to convene a joint meeting of the Secretariats of tuna RFMOs and their members in early 2007 in Japan (COFI Report paragraphs 28 and 29). There was general agreement of participants that the development is worth noting, and further information will be awaited from that process.

- Harmonization of catch documentation, noting the planned meeting of tuna organizations (COFI Report paragraph 46). The Chairperson stated that many organizations would be interested in the outcome of standardization as the aim is for global harmonization.
- Potential memorandum of understanding between CITES and FAO (COFI Report paragraph 57 to 63). The ties between FAO and CITES should be noted, and that COFI recognizes the primary competence of RFMOs to manage commercially exploited aquatic species.
- Deepwater ocean governance (COFI Report paragraphs 88, 90 and 95). COFI encouraged the RFB IV Meeting to consider the issue of deep-sea fisheries governance.
- A strong request that the effectiveness of RFMOs be enhanced (COFI Report paragraph 108(e), 111 and 112). The Chairperson encouraged participants to focus on how RFBs see themselves in this process.

13. Some participants noted other relevant matters, including:

- Formation of a Consortium to Restore Shattered Livelihood Communities on Tsunami-Devastated Nations (CONSRN) to facilitate the coordination of regional fisheries and aquaculture bodies and research institutions (COFI Report paragraph 39).
- Consideration of a Strategy on Status and Trends of Fisheries by the Coordinating Working Party on Fishery Statistics (CWP), which had made a number of recommendations to support its implementation through RFBs (COFI Report paragraph 17).
- A request that RFMOs implement guidelines for sea turtle mortality (COFI Report paragraph 99).
- COFI guidelines on ecolabelling will have an impact on RFB work in future years, but are unlikely to have an immediate impact (COFI Report paragraphs 64 to 67).

14. The meeting recognized that there are a number of perceived common deficiencies in fisheries governance at a global level, for example in areas relating to overcapacity, IUU fishing, catch allocation and the behaviour of non-contracting parties. There is a strong indication from COFI and a number of external organizations that RFMOs may require capacity building to deal with such issues, so there is a need for some form of review. Such a review could look at those issues in the context of applicable regional and global instruments like the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and various IPOAs. These would set the standard for any review. The Meeting underlined that consistency and common standards should be employed in relation to the information provided and terminology used.

15. In further discussion on COFI's proposed review of RFMOs, participants considered that the diversities of RFMOs need to be recognized, and it was accepted that some are better equipped to deal with relevant issues (e.g. IUU fishing) than others. The review could aim to better inform the international community how it can work with RFMOs to help improve their mandate and strengthen their effectiveness. It was appreciated that the proposed review is in very early stages, and the parameters of how, why and who will be involved with the review process are not entirely clear. Some participants expressed the view that the review should be independent, but should not be an efficiency assessment of secretariats.

16. The Meeting noted that there was no reservation restricting the application of the proposed review process to any specific organizations, making it applicable to the organizations as a whole. As well, it does not restrict the fact that individual members should work through RFMOs. The Meeting acknowledged that there was no further information available at this time and participants agreed to maintain a watching brief on the matter.

17. Finally, it was noted that RFBs have been overwhelmed in recent years with requests for information. The Meeting agreed that there should be some attempt to coordinate requests within the UN system. Therefore, organizations within the UN system were requested to coordinate processes of updating information. Some RFBs with no management mandate expressed the need for flexibility in questionnaires, so that RFBs could contribute accordingly.

THE ROLE OF REGIONAL FISHERY BODIES

18. Mr Jean-Francois Pulvenis described the perceived role of RFBs. He urged Meeting participants to take into account the wide variety of mandates and competences shared between different RFBs. Second, he noted that the establishment of most bodies emanates from international law, and this should not be underestimated. He reported that during COFI, many delegations insisted that we are entering into a stage of implementation of international instruments, which will enhance the role of RFBs. As such, the focus should not only be on the formal RFBs activities (i.e. meetings every two years), but also on the role of RFBs between meetings. In this respect, RFB secretariats have an important role in working towards effective decision-making mechanisms during intersessional periods between their meetings.

19. Ms Judith Swan outlined the role of RFBs, particularly as described in the following FAO Fisheries Circulars and Technical Consultations produced since the Third Meeting of RFBs in 2003:

- FAO Fisheries Circular C995 - "Decision-making in regional fishery bodies or arrangements: the evolving role of RFBs and international agreement on decision-making processes";
- FAO Fisheries Circular C996 - "International actions and responses by Regional Fishery Bodies to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing";
- "Technical Consultation to review progress and promote the full implementation of the International Plan of Action on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing and the International Plan of Action on the Management of Fishing Capacity, Rome, 24–29 June 2004", and
- "Technical Consultation to address substantive issues relating to the role of port States in preventing, deterring and eliminating illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, Rome, 31 August–2 September 2004."

20. Ms Swan emphasized that recent international instruments had moved forward the important role that RFBs are playing in fisheries management as well as provisions related to decision-making.

21. In particular, she noted that effective and timely decisions for conservation and management measures are still required from RFMOs. Key issues to be addressed include transparency and improvement of dispute prevention, as distinct from resolution, mechanisms. The diversity of rules among RFMOs on objection procedures for conservation and management measures were noted. It was agreed that time delays associated with such procedures often dilute the effectiveness of RFMO measures.

22. In reporting on the result of an RFB survey dealing with IUU fishing, Ms Swan described actions and measures taken to combat IUU fishing and the main constraints that prevented the implementation of effective measures. A clear challenge identified was the difficulty for RFBs in assessing the impact and extent of IUU fishing. The implications for RFBs in the outcomes of the two Technical Consultations above were also described, with emphasis being accorded to the increasing importance being attached to RFBs in respect of improving global fisheries governance.

23. The Meeting agreed that IUU fishing affects coastal waters, as well as inland fisheries. This is of particular concern in areas where poverty alleviation is a major issue. Several inland commissions emphasised that IUU fishing is a significant problem in inland waters, and may differ in nature from the examples in maritime fisheries.

24. In discussion, the Meeting noted the major involvement of RFBs in implementing the four IPOAs and the FAO Strategy for Improving Information on Status and Trends of Capture Fisheries (STF Strategy). It was also noted that there is a need for a more coordinated international effort to implement these IPOAs and the STF Strategy, identified above.

EXTERNAL FACTORS AFFECTING FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Global fisheries governance

25. The Meeting recognized the importance of addressing external factors such as poverty alleviation, food security, profit motives and lack of political will. In that context, fostering the ability of RFBs to raise their profiles in terms of education or information dissemination was seen as being important for addressing such factors. Several participants identified a need for RFBs to improve communications with their stakeholders and with the general public. Examples were given of profitable initiatives by some RFBs in this regard, and a number of practical suggestions were made as to how the RFBs' profiles might be raised. These include information dissemination in an accessible form, more thorough consultation, special events, transparency in RFB operations as far as attached mandates allow, and making full use of electronic media. It was agreed that RFBs should actively promote linkages among themselves, possibly by posting a contemporary page on the RFB website containing information to be shared by the network intersessionally. At an individual RFB level, it was agreed that some form of communications policy is important, especially one which allows Executive Secretaries to respond to the media in a timely and informed manner. For information exchange between RFBs, the development of website links was seen as a useful tool.

IUU Fishing

26. The Meeting reiterated that IUU fishing is a very large and complex problem which is unlikely to be solved in the near future. It has multiple drivers, ranging from criminal greed to ignorance. It is global in effect and will require global as well as multiple solutions. Some solutions identified were trade monitoring, and in artisanal, and non-industrially-based, fisheries improving the implementation of co-management. In all respects, there was strong agreement that there is still a very strong need to improve the individual, as well as corporate, accountability of all parties involved in fishing. In this context, some participants noted recent progress in developing and circulating both "positive" and "negative" vessel lists as a way to combat IUU fishing in oceanic areas.

27. Particular attention was drawn to an ongoing need to focus on the IUU fishing problem in relation to small-scale, inland and recreational fisheries, particularly the latter.

28. The Meeting recognized that IUU fishing activities undermine the RFBs' management efforts as they raise the levels of uncertainty which need to be addressed. This requires additional information for management to be effective with consequent increases in costs to ensure the obtaining of quality information. Therefore, considerable resources are required to improve global understanding of IUU fishing and to reduce attached management uncertainties. The meeting strongly recognized that whatever solutions are offered, these need to be realistic, cost-effective and long term.

29. The Meeting agreed that the Rome Ministerial Declaration on IUU Fishing (Appendix E) should be brought to the attention of all RFBs' members. In addition, it recognized the important work being undertaken by the Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) Network in combating IUU fishing. This Network is an affiliation that serves as a forum for exchanging MCS information and puts MCS specialists/practitioners in direct personal contact with each other.

30. Ms N. Kourti of the European Commission Joint Research Centre briefly outlined the recent development of monitoring capabilities based on a Vessel Detection System (VDS) and associated problems currently attached therewith. The Meeting endorsed the potential utility of using remote sensing to complement vessel monitoring systems (VMS). It was also recognized that potentially new arrangements and costs are likely to be attached to any future VDS system(s). Some participants also noted the importance of developing data communications standards in this regard.

31. The Meeting noted FAO's ongoing efforts to deal with port State control, recognizing problems caused, *inter alia*, by such considerations as the use of "ports of convenience".

Overcapacity

32. The Meeting noted clear linkages between fleet overcapacity and IUU fishing. Some participants described their work with respect to addressing the question of overcapacity. The Meeting further expressed concern about the possibility of solving fishing overcapacity problems in one geographical area only to transfer these elsewhere.

33. The Meeting therefore welcomed the Rome Ministerial Declaration on the Tsunami (Appendix F) which urged countries not to relocate excess fishing capacity as part of the tsunami relief effort.

Incorporating ecosystem considerations into management by RFBs

34. The Chairperson drew the attention of the meeting to the documented responses from some RFBs on their activities aimed at incorporating ecosystem considerations into fisheries management.

35. Mr Kevern Cochrane delivered a presentation on ecosystem approaches to fisheries management (EAF). He referred to the relevant international instruments and FAO guidelines, and noted growing public pressure for EAF. Mr Cochrane also highlighted the range of views on EAF that currently exists, and the underlying rationale, definition and principles for its implementation. In terms of implementation, which he noted should be incremental in approach, Mr Cochrane emphasized the importance of identifying priority issues and operational objectives. In this context, he drew attention to the hierarchical tree framework developed and used by Australia. He also addressed risk analysis and actions to achieve operational objectives, as well as possible threats to implementing EAF at both regional and global levels.

36. The Chairperson noted that the key message of the above presentation was the considerable pressures involved in operationalizing the difficult and complex set of circumstances attached to an EAF. Referring to the benefits of continuing EAF development, the Chairperson cautioned that it is important to remain mindful of the difficulties caused by conflicting objectives, and of the need to resolve these to the satisfaction of all concerned. Limited stakeholder participation and lack of knowledge thus go hand and hand to compromise EAF's efficacy. To address this, the Chairperson

noted that improved knowledge on, and simple explanations as to, what EAF is striving to address altogether helps people to get involved and understand the goals. In effect the issue of equity is an underlying consideration and the key to ensuring the successful application of the EAF. Consequently, stakeholder participation, education and adequate information dissemination are key considerations in ensuring that EAF is effective.

37. The Meeting also discussed EAF at length, highlighting individual RFB activities and challenges. Much of the information discussed was included in Meeting documentation and the attached information flow indicated the value to participants of remaining informed on the matter. Some of the issues raised included: (a) problems of reconciling conflicting objectives in management of different species, (b) the wide diversity of approaches and the need for workable objectives essentially based on a common sense approach, (c) the value of stakeholder involvement in various contexts, including marine protected areas, (d) the importance of applying principles of equity in respect of ensuring that equal account is taken of all relevant concerns attached to EAF aspects, (e) the parallel between the sustainable livelihoods approach and EAF, and (f) the need to take into account marine mammals and seabirds as dependent species in relation to the harvested stocks. It was acknowledged that future information exchanges should be encouraged to be as cost-effective, informed and focused as possible.

38. It was noted that most RFBs have now adopted the various fisheries instruments concluded after the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, particularly the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (Code of Conduct) and 2002 Johannesburg Political Declaration on Sustainable Development and Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD-POI). As a result, certain management initiatives have been developed to address regional specifications, needs and uniqueness. While noting such developments, the Meeting felt that EAF should continue to be viewed as a way to improve existing management practices. Consequently, it suggested that the following should be considered in future efforts to incorporate EAF principles into various RFBs' initiatives:

- Building awareness on EAF among RFB member countries and contracting parties;
- Evaluating existing management initiatives and practices which may, one way or another, have embedded EAF concerns; and
- Identifying weaknesses in existing management initiatives and practices as well as strategies to strengthen them.

HARMONIZATION OF CATCH DOCUMENTATION

39. Mr Andy Smith (formerly staff member of the FAO Fisheries Technology Service) presented the outcomes of the ninth session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade held in February, 2004. He explained events leading up to current FAO initiatives aimed at developing harmonized documents from the plethora of existing documentation schemes, and associated challenges. He explained that one of the biggest issues was identifying fish species from semi-processed products. Mr Smith noted several examples of successful catch documentation as well as the fact that an era of real-time reporting using electronic communications has begun. In this context, some Sub-Committee members had asked that the FAO should work towards the eventuality of a paperless system of documentation. There also seemed to be a need to clarify the terminology "catch documentation scheme" as raised by COFI.

40. Mr Smith indicated that the Sub-Committee had expressed the view that RFB contracting parties, not their Secretariats, should decide whether it was necessary to harmonize catch documentation schemes. It had also discussed the prospect of partial harmonization. The Sub-Committee held the view that FAO has an important role of play in ensuring that trade documentation does not develop in different directions, but it was not considered necessary to convene another Expert Consultation or Technical Consultation.

41. From an RFB point of view, the Meeting Chairperson clarified that a number of RFB secretariats have in fact called for catch documentation harmonization on behalf of their contracting parties contrary to the view reported by Mr Smith. He also expressed surprise that the Sub-Committee felt that the range of existing documentation indicated that the task would be futile, recalling that the participants in RFB IV had sought to better understand the potential range of issues associated with catch document harmonization, including future directions for any such development. The Chairperson encouraged RFBs collectively to contribute to the ongoing debate on catch documentation harmonization, and emphasized the potential importance of the outcome of the 2007 meeting of tuna RFBs proposed by Japan during COFI.

42. From a wide ranging discussion, the Meeting identified a number of common elements. These included: (a) the need to acknowledge continuing activity to advance catch documentation, including through programmes in various fora, (b) the need to acknowledge COFI's support for FAO to continue its work on the harmonization of catch documentation, and (c) the need to recognize that RFBs have different mandates with the consequence that there is a need to identify common elements that can be harmonized and *vice versa*. Mindful that the objectives of document schemes differ among organizations, it is helpful to understand how documents are being used and applied by various RFBs. Thus, a need to reflect further on the scope of documents and geographical areas was also identified. The Meeting also recognized that on-going initiatives to harmonize species tariff codes should be encouraged and expedited. In general, it was acknowledged that catch document harmonization is a complex and highly technical issue and it is also necessary to ensure that schemes are kept simple, achievable and, as far as possible, standardized.

RELATIONS BETWEEN RFBs AND THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (UNEP)

43. Mr Ellick Adler (UNEP Regional Seas Coordinator) presented various possibilities for common relations between RFBs and UNEP. He explained the concepts underlying UNEP's Regional Seas Programmes, including the respective roles of engaged partners. Mr Adler referred to the publication "Ecosystem based management of fisheries: Strengthening cooperation between UNEP and FAO, the Regional Seas Programme and the Regional Fishery Bodies", which had been prepared jointly by FAO and UNEP. Based on this paper, he proposed seven areas for positive cooperation between RFBs and UNEP.

44. In discussion, some RFBs reported on their respective cooperative activities with relevant Regional Seas Programmes. Other participants expressed various concerns of a practical nature, the majority of which addressed the need to ensure that respective competencies of RFBs as opposed to Regional Seas Programme participants were not undermined. Mr Robin Allen (IATTC) noted an opportunity for his organization to collaborate with UNEP in any development of a marine conservation corridor for the Eastern Tropical Pacific.

45. As already noted, and in general, RFBs, especially RFMOs were mindful of the primacy of their competencies, but nevertheless recognized the potential utility of information exchanges with UNEP on matters of common concern. However, participants were like-minded in emphasizing that human and financial resources available to each body remain an important consideration. Therefore, the cost efficiency of any information exchanges with UNEP constitutes a major consideration. Consequently, it was felt that it was inappropriate for the current Meeting to formally address information exchange with UNEP in any prerogative sense. In this regard, any future information exchanges should be driven by clearly defined needs as well as on a case-by-case basis in response to specific questions. The Chairperson welcomed Mr Adler's offer to serve as the key UNEP contact in an effort to ensure that any future interchanges with the RFB community are more cost-effective than at present.

THE STATUS OF THE FISHERIES RESOURCES MONITORING SYSTEM (FIRMS) AND OTHER RELATED MATTERS

46. Mr Robin Allen (former Chairperson of FIRMS) and Mr Marc Taconet (FIRMS Secretary) made a presentation under this agenda item supported by a paper on “Implementation of the Fisheries Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS) Partnership Agreement: Status and Prospects”, and by a draft of the FIRMS web-site. Mr Allen noted that FIRMS is an arrangement to provide access to a wide range of information on global monitoring of marine fishery resources and as such is part of the Strategy for Improving Information on Status and Trends of Capture Fisheries (Strategy-STF). It will address global fisheries trends and report available information in a web-based harmonized format. He noted that current FIRMS partners include a wide spectrum of RFBs, that the arrangement is open to new RFB Partners willing to join, and will later be extended to national agencies. Mr Taconet outlined various technical aspects associated with FIRMS and noted that the development of a web-based operational model is currently being undertaken and that the third FIRMS steering committee meeting will be held next year, following a meeting of the technical group which will involve FIRMS data managers from various partner organizations and RFBs. He also indicated the importance of adequate training in ensuring FIRMS’ operational efficiency.

47. In discussion, the Vice Chairperson of the Coordinating Working Party on Fishery Statistics (CWP) conveyed a message on behalf of the CWP, explaining recent developments and future challenges including electronic data communication and new data requirements for ecosystem considerations. A summary of conclusions and recommendations from the FAO Expert Consultation on Data Formats and Procedures for Monitoring, Control and Surveillance relevant to the CWP was also presented. This included details on the future adoption of the north Atlantic format (NAF) for data communications. It was noted that much of the CWP’s future work will depend on RFBs establishing common MCS objectives and standards, completing their work on catch documentation and harmonization, and identifying ways to assess compliance, including attached data needs.

48. Key information conveyed by FIRMS and the CWP is provided in the paper RFB/IV/2005/9. The Meeting expressed appreciation for FAO’s ongoing support of FIRMS’ work and stressed the need for making FIRMS prototype report accessible to the general public as soon as possible.

NEXT MEETING OF THE REGIONAL FISHERY BODIES

49. The Chairperson outlined various options relating to the structure of the next meeting. Following a thorough discussion, the following key themes were noted: (a) the diversity of meeting participants; (b) the recognition of the potential role and range of RFB involvement, (c) the need to work effectively and efficiently, (d) the importance of remaining abreast of needs, and (e) the potential benefits of maintaining some element of flexibility. In general, the Meeting expressed its preference for:

- more in-depth discussion on fewer topics as opposed to brief discussions on a broader number of a issues, in turn acknowledging time constraints in this regard;
- a consultative process that would determine key topics or themes (e.g. seeking three priority topics to be distilled into, and addressed in depth by, the agenda);
- the need to continue addressing COFI relevant issues;
- a balance of plenary and in-depth discussion to be developed by the Chairperson in consultation with RFBs intersessionally;
- preparation of an annotated agenda to enhance focus on selected topics; and

- the ongoing need to work as a group intersessionally, as implied by the designated title of “RFB Secretariats Network” in paragraph 7, above.

ELECTION OF THE CHAIRPERSON AND VICE-CHAIRPERSONS

50. Extending the number of officers to three, i.e. adding the position of a second vice-chair to better accommodate the interest of inland fisheries bodies, the Meeting acclaimed the following officers for RFB V: Chairperson - Mr Denzil Miller (CCAMLR); Vice-Chairpersons - Mr Thomas W. Maembe (Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization) and Mr Suriyan Vichitlekarn (Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center).

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

51. The Meeting adopted paragraphs 1 through 33 of the Report, and, due to time constraints, agreed that the Chairperson should circulate the remaining part of the Report for adoption by participants after the Meeting was closed.

CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

52. The Chairperson declared the Meeting closed at 16h00 on 15 March 2005.

Agenda

1. Opening of the Meeting
2. Adoption of the agenda and arrangements for the Meeting
3. Review of the decisions of the twenty-sixth session of COFI relating to regional fishery bodies
4. The role of regional fishery bodies
5. External factors affecting fisheries management
6. Approaches to incorporate ecosystems considerations into fisheries management by regional fishery bodies
7. Harmonization of catch documentation
8. Relations between regional fishery bodies and UNEP
9. The status of the Fisheries Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS) and other related matters
10. Next meeting of the regional fishery bodies
11. Election of the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson
12. Adoption of the Report
13. Closure of the Meeting

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List of documents

RFB/IV/2005/1	Provisional Agenda and Timetable
RFB/IV/2005/2	Report of the Twenty-sixth Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries, Rome, Italy, 7–11 March 2005
RFB/IV/2005/3	Compilation of Reports by Regional Fishery Bodies Secretariats on the Role of Regional Fishery Bodies concerning Global Fisheries Governance
RFB/IV/2005/4	Progress in the Implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and Related International Plans of Action (COFI/2005/2)
RFB/IV/2005/5	Compilation of Reports by Regional Fishery Bodies Secretariats on the Initiatives taken by their Bodies to Incorporate Ecosystem Consideration into Fisheries Management
RFB/IV/2005/6	Marine Protected Areas and Fisheries (COFI/2005/8)
RFB/IV/2005/7	Decisions and Recommendations of the Ninth Session of the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade (COFI/2005/3)
RFB/IV/2005/8	Ecosystem Based Management of Fisheries – strengthening cooperation between UNEP and FAO, the Regional Seas Programme and the Regional Fishery Bodies
RFB/IV/2005/9	Implementation of the Fisheries Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS) Partnership Agreement: Status and Prospects
RFB/IV/2005/Inf.1	Provisional List of Documents
RFB/IV/2005/Inf.2	Provisional List of Participants
RFB/IV/2005/Inf.3	Statement by the Assistant Director-General, FAO Fisheries Department
RFB/IV/2005/Inf.4	Annotations on Agenda Items
RFB/IV/2005/Inf.5	Report of the Third Meeting of Regional Fishery Bodies, Rome, Italy, 3-4 March 2003 (FIPL/R703)
RFB/IV/2005/Inf.6	Decision-Making in Regional Fishery Bodies or Arrangements: the Evolving Role of RFBs and International Agreement on Decision-Making Processes (FIPL/C995)
RFB/IV/2005/Inf.7	International Action and Responses by Regional Fishery Bodies or Arrangements to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (FIPL/C996)

- RFB/IV/2005/Inf.8 Report of the Technical Consultation to Review Progress and Promote the Full Implementation of the IPOA to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU Fishing and the IPOA for the Management of Fishing Capacity, Rome, Italy, 24–29 June 2004 (COFI/2005/inf.8)
- RFB/IV/2005/Inf.9 Report of the Technical Consultation to Address Substantive Issues Relating to the Role of the Port State to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU (Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated) Fishing, Rome, Italy, 31 August–2 September 2004 (COFI/2005/Inf.10)
- RFB/IV/2005/Inf.10 The Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries: Issues, Terminology, Principles, Institutional Foundations, Implementation and Outlook, FAO Fisheries Technical Paper 443
- RFB/IV/2005/Inf.11 Report of the Ninth Session of the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade, Bremen, Germany, 10–14 February 2004 (COFI/2005/Inf.12)
- RFB/IV/2005/Inf.12 Compilation of the Chairperson’s Circular Letters and Related Correspondences
- RFB/IV/2005/Inf.13 OECD Workshop on IUU Fishing Activities: Key observations and findings by the Workshop Chairs
- RFB/IV/2005/Inf.14 FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries 4, Suppl.2, Fisheries Management: 2. The ecosystem approach to fisheries

Additional documents distributed during the meeting

- ICCAT Statement to the fourth Meeting of the Regional Fisheries Bodies (ICCAT)
- ICES and the Ecosystem Approach (ICES)
- ICES Communications Policy (ICES)
- Environmental Status of the European Seas (ICES)
- ICES Newsletter Issue No. 41 (ICES)
- ICES/NASCO Symposium – Interactions between aquaculture and wild stocks of Atlantic salmon and other diadromous fish species: Science and Management, Challenges and Solutions (ICES/NASCO)
- The TAB: An Emerging (Sub-) Regional Fisheries Organization for the Mekong? Why We Need It, and What It Should Do (MRC)
- The TAB Update Issue No. 2 (MRC)
- Fisheries Working Group – Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)
- Proposed NAFO Precautionary Approach Framework (NAFO SCS Doc. 03/23) (NAFO)
- The Mandate, Structure, Functions and Programs of the Organization (LVFO)

The 2005 Rome Declaration on Fisheries and the Tsunami (FAO)

The 2005 Rome Declaration on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (FAO)

Report of the Expert Consultation on Data Formats and Procedures for Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (FIPD/R761) (FAO)

Sustainable fisheries, including through the 1995 Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks, and related instruments (A/59/L.23) (UNGA)

Tracking Ocean Wanderers – the Global distribution of albatrosses and petrels (Birdlife)

Identifying Key Elements of Success for Effective RFMO Operation (WWF)

Deep Deep Trouble! – Regional Fisheries Management Organizations, the UN Fish Stocks Agreement and the Regulation of High Seas Bottom Trawling (Greenpeace)

Constraints to the Sustainability of Deep Sea Fisheries beyond National Jurisdiction (IUCN)

**Opening statement by Mr Ichiro Nomura,
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Mr Chairman, Distinguished Representatives of Regional Fishery Bodies, Colleagues and Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to be with you today at the opening of this Fourth Meeting of the Regional Fishery Bodies. It is an immense pleasure for me, as the Assistant Director-General of the Fisheries Department, to extend to you all a warm welcome to Rome and to FAO on behalf of the Director-General.

At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretariats of all the Regional Fishery Bodies for the high level of cooperation they lend to FAO. While I acknowledge that the periodic requests for information on your respective bodies' activities create an additional workload for you, I wish to underscore that your contribution is highly valued and of significant importance to FAO in the implementation of its activities.

We are all aware that fisheries provide a major contribution to global food security, both directly as a source of food, income and employment and indirectly in the production of meal and oil for animal feed. However, we are equally aware that many key commercial fish stocks are already at their productive limits, the proportion of low value species in reported catches is increasing and that of traditional target species has declined. This is an issue that is of concern to us all and one that affects directly the work of Regional Fishery Bodies.

Regional Fishery Bodies play a pivotal role in conserving and managing fisheries resources and in generally promoting responsible and sustainable behaviour in the fisheries sector. In recent years, the demands placed on Regional Fishery Bodies have become heavier as the productivity of fish stocks has dwindled and fishing pressure increased. This reduced stock size of important commercial species has, in particular, led to widespread illegal, unreported and unregulated activities which undermine the work of Regional Bodies. The Technical Consultation to Review Progress and Promote the Full Implementation of the IPOA to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU Fishing and the IPOA for the Management of Fishing Capacity which was held in Rome, from 24 to 29 June 2004, noted that Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) played a key role in galvanizing regional action against IUU fishing and related activities. During the Consultation a number of initiatives were proposed, including the strengthening of informal and formal networks between RFBs and closing regional governance gaps that permitted IUU fishers to operate. The Technical Consultation to Review Port State Measures to Combat IUU Fishing, that was held in Rome, from 31 August to 2 September 2004, also highlighted that concerted action at the regional level should be encouraged for taking harmonized and coordinated Port State Measures to combat IUU. Those decisions and recommendations have been reaffirmed during the session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) and the Ministerial Meeting on Fisheries just held last week.

It is recognized that Regional Fishery Bodies are now facing unprecedented challenges in their efforts to facilitate sustainable fisheries management and the global fisheries governance. This has prompted certain bodies to seek new solutions to the problems they are encountering. In this respect, it is important to reaffirm the commitment agreed upon in the Plan of Implementation adopted by the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002, particularly in relation to the "ecosystem approach", as well as the definition of concrete goals with set deadlines. The need to implement these evolving management concepts further burdens the work of Regional Fishery Bodies. Are Regional Fishery Bodies delegated appropriate

responsibility to fulfill their mandate as expected? Are sufficient resources, both in terms of financing and human resources, made available to the Regional Fishery Bodies to implement management measures as required? Can Regional Fishery Bodies access the requisite scientific data and capacity to make the best scientific decision on stocks in their areas falling within their purview? Since the responsibility of and expectations from Regional Fishery Bodies are increasing, appropriate consideration of those questions becomes essential. In short, we need to further strengthen Regional Fishery Bodies and, consequently, regional and global fisheries governance as appropriate.

Cooperation and coordination among Regional Fishery Bodies is one of the ways to strengthen regional fisheries governance and one of the main objectives of this meeting. The Agenda for this Session is both highly topical and challenging. As this session is being held after the conclusion of COFI and the Ministerial Meeting, you will be well placed to review the decisions made by the Committee and Ministers and to consider how they might affect your bodies' activities. Other matters to be addressed in this meeting are also closely and directly related to the work of your bodies.

Throughout this meeting FAO will pay particular attention to the discussions and, following the conclusion of the meeting, seek to collaborate with Regional Fishery Bodies and to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations that might be agreed. I also wish to advise that staff of the Fisheries Department will be available throughout the meeting to provide technical input to discussions in the event that such input is sought.

In closing, let me express that I am fully confident that the Fourth Meeting of Regional Fishery Bodies will be marked by success and that its outcome will serve to strengthen and further promote more responsible and sustainable fisheries around the world.

I wish you well in your deliberations and thank you very much for your attention.

**The 2005 Rome Declaration on
Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing**

Adopted by the
FAO Ministerial Meeting on Fisheries
Rome, 12 March 2005

We, the Ministers and Ministers' representatives, meeting in Rome at the FAO Ministerial Meeting on Fisheries on 12 March 2005,

Bearing in mind the principles and rules of international law as reflected in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea,

Noting with satisfaction the entry into force on 11 December 2001 of the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement and the entry into force on 24 April 2003 of the FAO Compliance Agreement,

Recalling the relevant provisions of other international instruments, such as the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and Chapter 17 of Agenda 21; the 2000 United Nations Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals; and the 2002 Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation,

Reaffirming our commitment to the principles and standards contained in the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries,

Recalling the adoption on 11 March 1999 of the Rome Declaration on the Implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries at the FAO Ministerial Meeting on Fisheries, as well as the endorsement of the 2001 FAO International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IPOA-IUU),

Recalling as well the resolution on IUU fishing adopted by the FAO Conference in 2003,

Desiring to move from words to action through full implementation of various international instruments for sustainable fisheries adopted or enacted in the past decades,

Noting the harmful and worldwide consequences of IUU fishing on the sustainability of fisheries (ranging from large-scale high seas fisheries to small-scale artisanal fisheries), on the conservation of marine living resources and marine biodiversity as a whole and on the economies of developing countries and their efforts to develop sustainable fisheries management,

Recognizing that there is often a relationship between fleet overcapacity and IUU fishing and acknowledging the economic incentives that drive these phenomena,

Acknowledging the genuine development aspirations and legitimate efforts of developing countries, in particular small island developing States, toward the sustainable management and development of their fisheries sectors,

Emphasizing the responsibility of flag States under international law to effectively control and manage vessels flying their flags, as well as the responsibilities of port and coastal States in controlling IUU fishing,

Aware that effective fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) is essential to combat IUU fishing and that integrated MCS, including satellite monitoring systems (VMS), as well as a comprehensive global record of fishing vessels within FAO, are key tools in this endeavour,

Recognizing the need to strengthen international cooperation for the development of VMS so as to implement the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing and protect and assist fishermen in danger and the assistance that FAO may provide in harmonizing VMS to membe

Aware that effective fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) is essential to combat IUU fishing and that integrated MCS, including satellite monitoring systems (VMS), as well as a comprehensive global record of fishing vessels within FAO, are key tools in this endeavour,

Recognizing the need to strengthen international cooperation for the development of VMS so as to implement the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing and protect and assist fishermen in danger and the assistance that FAO may provide in harmonizing VMS to members who request it,

Recognizing the special requirements of developing countries in combating IUU fishing and, in particular, the need to strengthen their capacity for fisheries management, and

Reaffirming the commitment to enhance responsible and effective fisheries management, to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing and to strengthen, improve, and where appropriate establish, MCS programmes including VMS,

We declare that:

1. We are committed to concentrating and intensifying our efforts to implement fully all the international instruments for the sustainable use of marine living resources.
2. We reaffirm the need for FAO to play a leading role in supporting the efforts of States to implement these instruments, with particular emphasis placed on assisting developing countries.
3. We will renew our efforts:
 - to develop and implement national and regional plans of action to combat IUU fishing,
 - to adopt, review and revise, as appropriate, relevant national legislation and regulations, in particular to ensure compliance with fisheries management measures and to provide sanctions of sufficient gravity as to deprive offenders of the benefits accruing from their illegal activities and to deter further IUU fishing,
 - to ensure effective implementation of catch certification schemes through their harmonization and improvement as necessary,
 - to adopt internationally agreed market-related measures in accordance with international law, including principles, rights, and obligations established in WTO agreements, as called for in the IPOA-IUU,

- to ensure that all fisheries policy-makers and managers consider the full range of available MCS options, strategies and tools; take necessary actions to fully implement the IPOAs and any applicable MCS measures adopted by relevant regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs); and that fishers have an understanding of their role in MCS,
- to ensure that States, to the greatest extent possible, take measures or cooperate to ensure that nationals subject to their jurisdiction do not support or engage in IUU fishing, and
- to ensure that all large-scale fishing vessels operating on the high seas be required by their flag State to be fitted with VMS no later than December 2008, or earlier if so decided by their flag State or any relevant RFMO.

4. We call for the following new actions:

- to identify, reduce and ultimately eliminate the economic incentives that lead to IUU fishing and the economic drivers that lead to fleet overcapacity, at the national, regional and global levels,
- to ensure that measures to address IUU fishing or fleet overcapacity in one fishery or area do not result in the creation of fleet overcapacity in another fishery or area or otherwise undermine the sustainability of fish stocks in another fishery or area, and that such measures do not prejudice the legitimate expansion of fleets in developing countries in a sustainable manner,
- to develop a comprehensive global record of fishing vessels within FAO, including refrigerated transport vessels and supply vessels, that incorporates available information on beneficial ownership, subject to confidentiality requirements in accordance with national law,
- to work within RFMOs to facilitate, where appropriate, the exchange of VMS and observer data, subject to confidentiality requirements in accordance with national law, and
- to supplement existing MCS schemes through measures such as encouraging the fishing fleet to report any suspected IUU fishing activities they observe.

5. We agree upon the need:

- for flag States, port States, coastal States and, where appropriate, RFMOs to effectively regulate transshipment in order to combat IUU fishing activities and to prevent laundering of illegal catches,
- for States, as well as NGOs and members of the fishing industry, to exchange information on suspected IUU fishing, if possible on a real-time basis, in collaboration with FAO, RFMOs and other relevant arrangements, and by actively participating in the International MCS Network,
- to develop and ensure effective implementation of national and, where appropriate, internationally agreed boarding and inspection regimes consistent with international law,

- to strengthen coastal and port State measures for fishing vessels, consistent with international law, in order to prevent, deter, and eliminate IUU fishing,
- for further international action to eliminate IUU fishing by vessels flying “flags of convenience” as well as to require that a “genuine link” be established between States and fishing vessels flying their flags,
- to strengthen RFMOs to ensure that they are more effective in preventing, deterring and eliminating IUU fishing, and
- to fully implement vessel marking requirements in accordance with the FAO Standard Specification and Guidelines for the Marking and Identification of Fishing Vessels and any applicable RFMO requirements.

6. We urge all States:

- that have not yet done so to become parties to the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the 1993 FAO Compliance Agreement and the 1995 United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement, and abide by their provisions,
- to ensure that they exercise full and effective control over fishing vessels flying their flag, in accordance with international law, to combat IUU fishing,
- that are parties to the FAO Compliance Agreement to fulfil their obligations to submit to FAO, for inclusion in the High Seas Vessel Authorization Record, data on vessels entitled to fly their flags that are authorized to be used for fishing on the high seas, and those that are not yet parties to the FAO Compliance Agreement to submit such data on a voluntary basis, and
- to supply detailed information on fishing vessels flying their flag to relevant RFMOs, in accordance with the requirements adopted by those RFMOs, and to establish such requirements within RFMOs where they do not yet exist.

7. We further urge additional research, as well as enhanced international cooperation including appropriate transfer of technology, in remote sensing and satellite surveillance of fishing vessels to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing, particularly in remote areas with lack of deployment of MCS facilities.

8. We also urge:

- the provision of additional assistance to developing countries to help them implement their commitments in preventing, deterring and eliminating IUU fishing, as well as to participate effectively in the development and implementation of fishery conservation and management measures by RFMOs, and
- the provision of advice and training to promote the development of fisheries management regimes, at the national and local levels, to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing, including community-based fisheries management in countries where such fisheries management is practiced, recognizing, where appropriate, the role of local coastal communities in the management of near-shore resources, particularly in developing countries.

9. We resolve to provide financial and technical assistance to developing countries in the implementation of MCS capabilities, including VMS, with the support of FAO and relevant international financial institutions and mechanisms, and to consider the establishment of a special voluntary fund for this purpose.

WE REQUEST that the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations convey this Declaration to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for consideration by that organization.

The 2005 Rome Declaration on Fisheries and the Tsunami

Adopted by the
FAO Ministerial Meeting on Fisheries
Rome, 12 March 2005

We, the Ministers and Ministers' representatives, meeting in Rome at the FAO Ministerial Meeting on Fisheries on 12 March 2005,

Appreciating the initiative taken by the Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to organize the Meeting, thus providing an opportunity to address the issue of rehabilitation in relation to the Tsunami disaster,

Recalling that the massive earthquake and subsequent Tsunami waves that originated off the west coast of northern Sumatra has caused extensive loss of lives and damage to coastal communities throughout the southern Bay of Bengal and East Africa,

Acknowledging that the effects of the Tsunami have been particularly devastating for fishers and fish farmers, with heavy loss of lives and homes, damage to fisheries and aquaculture infrastructure and facilities estimated at over 500 million USD, the destruction or damage of more than 100,000 fishing vessels, and the loss of more than 1.5 million gear units,

Expressing deep concern that the scale of the damage to coastal areas and communities is threatening the livelihoods of millions of people, many of whom depend on fisheries and aquaculture for income and food,

Commending the swift and dedicated response of the peoples and governments in the affected areas, as well as the unprecedented level of assistance being offered for relief and rehabilitation from the international community, including national Governments, United Nations organizations, international financial institutions, civil society and non-governmental organizations, and recognizing the importance of coordination of these efforts for effective rehabilitation,

Recognizing the role of FAO in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in the affected areas and commending the efforts led by FAO in the aftermath of the disaster in advising and supporting the Governments of the affected nations,

Expressing concern over the medium- and long-term social, economic and environmental impact of the disaster, as well as the risk of negative impacts from rehabilitation efforts if not appropriately designed and duly coordinated,

Committed to assist with the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the damage inflicted by the Tsunami disaster and to duly account for the specific needs and requirements of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors and related coastal communities, in accordance with the three pillars of sustainable development recognized by the World Summit on Sustainable Development: environmental, social, and economic.

We declare that:

1. We are determined to ensure that the efforts, led by the international community to provide assistance to rehabilitate the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in the nations affected by the December 2004 earthquake and Tsunami, develop in synergy so that, through coordinated action, we provide an effective response to the needs of the affected fishing communities, in particular their poorest members.

2. We therefore encourage the international community, including donor countries, international financial institutions and relevant international organizations, as well as the private sector and civil society organizations, to deliver such assistance in a coordinated manner under the leadership of the countries affected.
3. We call upon donor nations and international financial institutions to fulfil the pledges that they have made in this regard so that relief and rehabilitation efforts can be sustained.
4. We emphasize the need for fisheries and aquaculture rehabilitation to focus on rebuilding the livelihoods of fishers and fish farmers, providing adequate protection from this and other environmental threats, and improving sectoral efficiency, sustainability and governance.
5. We recognize that environmental degradation of critical habitats caused by the Tsunami in affected coastal areas, such as coral reefs and mangroves, may continue to affect the productivity of inshore fishing grounds and the potential for aquaculture rehabilitation for some time.
6. We emphasize the need to protect the rights of fishers and fishworkers, particularly those involved in subsistence and small-scale and artisanal fisheries, to a secure and just livelihood, as well as preferential access, where appropriate, to fishing grounds and resources of affected areas.
7. We also emphasize the need for fisheries and aquaculture rehabilitation to be in line with the principles of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. Rehabilitation efforts, including transfers of vessels, must proceed under the leadership and control of the affected nations and must ensure that the fishing capacity that is being rebuilt is commensurate with the productive capacity of the fisheries resources and their sustainable utilization. We recognize the benefits associated with re-establishment, within affected nations, of the capacity that is required to rebuild infrastructure, including vessel building, fish processing and fishing port facilities.
8. We support the provision of greater assistance toward a coordinated assessment of fisheries resources in the affected region so that relief and rehabilitation efforts can proceed in a sustainable way, recognizing that the assessment must not delay the progress of relief and rehabilitation efforts.
9. We emphasize the need to rebuild and strengthen the capacity of the affected fisheries sectors, including in the areas of fishing abilities, data collection, scientific analysis, assessments of fisheries resources and effective fisheries management, as well as to enhance the capacity of relevant communities and stakeholders to engage in this process, to achieve sustainable livelihoods.
10. We welcome the steps taken by FAO, jointly with development and research partners from the region, for the development of a strategic framework and the creation of collaborative arrangements for fisheries and aquaculture rehabilitation and the restoration of marine habitat.
11. We support the need for FAO to play a leading role in advising and supporting the international community in matters relevant to sustainable fisheries and aquaculture rehabilitation and the restoration of marine habitat.

The Fourth Meeting of Regional Fishery Bodies (RFBs) was held at FAO headquarters, Rome, on 14 and 15 March 2005.

The Meeting reviewed the decision of the twenty-sixth session of the Committee on Fisheries of relevance to Regional Fishery Bodies. The Meeting discussed the role of RFBs, external factors affecting fisheries management, harmonization of catch documentation, relations between RFBs and the United Nations Environment Programme and the status of the Fisheries Resources Monitoring System and other related matters.

The Meeting reached a number of conclusions regarding matters meriting the attention of RFBs, governments and FAO.

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