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Продовольственная и
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COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

SUB-COMMITTEE ON AQUACULTURE

Ninth Session

Rome, 24–27 October 2017

PROGRESS REPORTING ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TECHNICAL GUIDELINES ON AQUACULTURE CERTIFICATION AND THE EVALUATION FRAMEWORK TO ASSESS CONFORMITY OF AQUACULTURE CERTIFICATION SCHEMES WITH THE GUIDELINES

Executive Summary

Responding to the request made by the Sub-Committee during its last session, the Secretariat prepared an Information Paper (COFI/AQ/IX/2017/Inf.12), which is made available to the 9th Session of the Sub-Committee. FAO has engaged in further work on aquaculture certification during the last intersessional period, which is reported in this working document. The Sub-Committee is requested to discuss and prioritize work for the next intersessional period. Members and interested donors are invited to pledge support for future work on aquaculture certification.

BACKGROUND

1. Production of certified seafood has grown rapidly over the past decade and now represents a significant portion of global production. Between 2003 and 2015, certified sustainable seafood (both aquaculture and wild catch) grew from 500,000 metric tons (0.5 per cent of global production) to 23 million metric tons (14 per cent of global production) at a rate of 35 per cent per annum (10 times faster than the growth of global seafood production over the same time). Eighty per cent of certified

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seafood is wild catch, and only 4.5 million metric tons of aquaculture production (6 percent of the global aquatic animal production) was certified in 2014.¹

2. Aquaculture is an industry still dominated by small-scale farmers and farming systems and nearly 70 percent of the global aquaculture production originates from small-scale farming sector. Main reason for the low level of certification of aquaculture produce at global level is the nature of its produce, predominantly from small-scale farming sector. Certification of small-scale aquaculture has been an issue, mainly due to the unbearable cost of certification as well as difficulties in complying to the required certification standards.

3. Many small-scale farmers find it difficult to comply with the standards set by the certifiers, mainly due to lack of finance, technical knowledge and organizational capacity. It is also evident that necessary state support, including appropriate national policy and legal environment, does not exist in some countries.

4. Therefore, there is a timely need for improving the technical knowledge of small-scale aquafarmers on how to comply with certification standards, as well as to identify national policy and regulatory gaps supporting small-scale aquaculture certification.

5. FAO has been involved in aquaculture certification related activities over a decade. Responding to the requests made by the Members, FAO developed two major documents: (a) Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification,² which were approved by the 5th Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture (COFI SCA) and subsequently endorsed by the 29th Session of the COFI, and (b) an Evaluation Framework for assessing the conformity of public and private certification schemes with the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification (Evaluation Framework), which was approved by the 7th Session of COFI SCA and subsequently endorsed by the 31st Session of COFI.³

6. At the 8th Session of COFI SCA, held in Brasilia, Brazil in October 2015, the Secretariat presented a working document⁴ which introduced the Global Seafood Sustainability Initiative (GSSI) and its Benchmarking Tool. Responding to the comments made by the Members, the Secretariat has developed an Information Paper (COFI:AQ/IX/2017/Inf.12) detailing (a) the GSSI Global Benchmark Tool, (b) the interaction between the Technical Guidelines for Aquaculture Certification, the Evaluation Framework and the GSSI Global Benchmark Tool, and (c) details on the GSSI partnership, with the finalized Evaluation Framework as an Annex.

7. The FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification call for special and preferential assistance to the small-scale farming sector and to the developing countries to implement aquaculture certification. Assistance to small-scale aquaculture and to the developing countries is one of the fundamental principles of the FAO technical guidelines on aquaculture certification.

¹ Jason Potts, Ann Wilkings, Matthew Lynch, Scott McFtridge. 2016. State of Sustainability Initiatives Review: STANDARDS AND THE BLUE ECONOMY. International Institute for Sustainable Development. Canada. 209 pp. www.iisd.org/sites/default/files/publications/ssi-blue-economy-2016.pdf

² FAO. Technical guidelines on aquaculture certification/Directives techniques relatives à la certification en aquaculture/Directrices técnicas para la certificación en la acuicultura. Rome/Roma, FAO. 2011. 122 pp. Link to the full document: www.fao.org/docrep/015/i2296t/i2296t00.htm

³ While approving the Evaluation Framework, some Members attending the 7th Session of Sub-Committee expressed some concerns [para 38 of COFI SCA VII Report]

⁴ COFI/AQ/VIII/2015/6, Progress reporting on the implementation of technical guidelines on aquaculture certification and the evaluation framework to assess conformity of aquaculture certification schemes with the guidelines. Link to the full document available at: www.fao.org/cofi/311550c90de3b64f6200c08041e479255c9bcf.pdf

ACTIVITIES DURING INTER-SESSIONAL PERIOD

8. During the intersessional period since the last session of the COFI SCA, FAO continued its engagement in aquaculture certification work. With financial assistance from the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries of the European Commission, FAO embarked on developing a series of Compliance Manuals for Small-scale Aquaculture Certification, with the objective of providing targeted technical assistance and knowledge to small-scale aquaculture farmers on how to comply with certification standards based on the four minimum substantive criteria of the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification.

9. The manual series development process began with developing the structure and contents of a manual series, and with the elaboration of the Volume 1 of the series; Health and Welfare. This volume is expected to be followed by the remaining two volumes; Volume 2 – Food Safety, and Volume 3 – Environmental Integrity and Social Aspects. However, development of volumes 2 and 3 will require additional financial resources.

10. A final workshop on Health and Welfare was held in Manila, Philippines in March 2017 with the participation of 10 experts. The workshop report, including an outline of the structure and contents of the compliance manual series and the detailed contents of the Health and Welfare Manual is presently being compiled.

11. Volume 1 of the compliance manual series will provide appropriate advice to farmers, service providers and the state authorities, on compliance to certification standards, based on the Health and Welfare minimum substantive criteria of the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification.

GUIDANCE SOUGHT

12. The Sub-Committee is requested to:

- discuss the requirements for further work on aquaculture certification at national and regional levels and advise the FAO on the areas to be prioritized during the next intersessional period, noting that certification is also discussed at the COFI Sub-Committee on Trade.
- invite Members and interested donors to pledge assistance for future work on aquaculture certification, as considered important by the Sub-Committee.