

FAO GFCM meeting highlights growing profile of Mediterranean aquaculture

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At the 5th meeting of the Committee on Aquaculture (CAQ) of FAO's General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) (Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 5–7 June 2006) representatives of 11 Member countries met to review recent trends in the fish farming sector and discuss ways to promote its continued sustainable development.

FAO figures show that the aquaculture sector is of increasing importance as a food production activity, both regionally in the Mediterranean as well as worldwide. Globally, it generates around US\$63 billion of revenues per year and supplies over 35 percent of all fish consumed as food.

In the Mediterranean, aquaculture production stagnated during the 2000–2002 period but then grew by over 8 percent a year between 2002 and December 2004 and currently totals more than 1.4 million tonnes a year, according to FAO. This trend is expected to continue as demand for aquaculture products increases, particularly in North-African and Middle-Eastern Mediterranean countries due to population growth, increased tourism and lower prices for aquaculture products.

TOP PRODUCING COUNTRIES

The top Mediterranean aquaculture producers are Egypt, Spain, France, Greece, Turkey, Italy and Israel, with a combined share of 97 percent of all production. (Egypt and Spain account for 32 and 25 percent of this total, respectively including Atlantic and Red Sea production).

In Western Europe the leading producers are France, Italy and Spain, which together produce over 805 thousand tonnes of aquaculture produce per year, representing 57 percent of all Mediterranean production. Central Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia) currently produces just 2.2 percent of the total (almost 32 thousand tonnes a year). To the east, Croatia, Greece, Malta and Turkey produce about 163 thousand tonnes a year, nearly 11.6 percent of regional production. However the bulk of this production (92 percent) is from Greece and Turkey. With the exception of Egypt and Israel, North African and Middle Eastern production is low (Algeria, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia) contributing just over 15 thousand tonnes a year or 1 percent of the total.

Key species are carps and tilapia (produced in Egypt) and blue mussel (Spain and France). Flathead grey mullet (*Mugil cephalus*), European seabass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*), and Gilthead seabream (*Sparus aurata*) are important finfish species, and the profile of Atlantic bluefin tuna (*Thunnus thynnus thynnus*) in Mediterranean aquaculture is growing as well. This species is now being caught in the wild and fattened in large marine netcages.

FAO BODY PROMOTES SUSTAINABLE AQUACULTURE

The CAQ is a subsidiary body of the FAO GFCM, a regional fishery body established by FAO in 1949 which meets on a regular basis, share information on fisheries trends, conduct joint scientific studies, discuss policy and agree on recommended management strategies.

Some 20 delegates representing 11 GFCM Member countries, two inter-governmental organizations and one non-governmental organization participated in the CAQ meeting in Santiago.

During the meeting the CAQ established three *ad-hoc* working groups of experts which will undertake ongoing work related to the responsible management and development of Mediterranean aquaculture.

The first will concentrate on marketing issues, undertaking market assessments and proposing marketing guidelines and a strategy for improving aquaculture's image among consumers. The second will focus on sustainability and will try to develop guidelines for integrated aquaculture management in the Mediterranean. The third working group will focus on developing methodologies for responsible aquaculture site selection and coastal management issues.

The *ad-hoc* working groups are expected to initiate their activities during autumn 2006 with the financial support of GFCM Members. Their work will be overseen by a smaller coordinating group chaired by the newly appointed CAQ Chairperson, Mr Spyros Kilaoudatos of Greece.

GFCM Website: http://www.fao.org/fi/body/rfb/GFCM/gfcm_home.htm