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REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR FISHERIES

Fifth meeting of the Working Group on Fisheries Management

Tehran, Iran (Islamic Republic of), 9-12 October 2011

INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS AMONG RECOFI MEMBERS

INTRODUCTION

1. At the fourth meeting of the Working Group on Fisheries Management (WGFM) in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, it was agreed that a special meeting of the WGFM should be convened on 9 May 2011 immediately prior to the sixth Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) session. The purpose of the meeting was to consider the findings of a consultant's report pertaining to the integration of catch and effort data to support the implementation of Recommendation RECOFI6/2001/1. Regretably, on 9 May 2011 there was not a quorum and the WGFM was unable to meet. However, taking advantage of the presence of three RECOFI Members, an informal consultation was held to review the report.

2. This report of this informal consultation was presented to the sixth RECOFI session as document RECOFI:VI/2011/6 Add.1, entitled "Record of informal consultation among RECOFI members to consider the Consultant's draft report relating to integration of catch effort data in support of draft Recommendation RECOFI6/2011/1". There was no recorded discussion of the document in the report of the sixth session of the Commission.

REPORT OF THE INFORMAL CONSULTATION

3. Delegates from the Islamic Republic of Iran, Sultanate of Oman and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia met at FAO Headquarters on 9 May 2011 to consider the consultant's draft report on the integration of catch and effort data in the RECOFI area (document RECOFI:Special meeting WGFM/2011/Inf.2). Lacking a quorum, the Working Group on Fisheries Management (WGFM) was unable to convene and it was decided that the meeting should informally consider the draft paper prepared by the consultant.

4. The Secretary of RECOFI reminded the meeting that the integration of catch and effort data was fundamental to sound fisheries management and that the work undertaken by the consultant would support the draft Recommendation on minimum data reporting in the RECOFI area (RECOFI6/2011/1). The meeting was informed that the consultancy was conducted in the period from February to May 2011. The main purpose of the exercise was to identify eventual data availability problems and to assess the needs of further improvement with effort and cost implications. The consultant travelled to six RECOFI Members prior to the meeting on 9 May 2011 and was expected to visit the remaining two RECOFI Members in near future to complete the exercise. The draft Recommendation would be addressed at the sixth session of RECOFI.

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5. The consultancy concluded generally that RECOFI Members would be able to meet data requirement indicated in the draft Recommendation with their existing national data collection and collation system. It identified several minor problems that were described briefly with their tentative solution as follows:

- Information on discards and bycatch reduction device (BRD) uses: Most Members reviewed did not collect information on discards and the utilization and impacts of bycatch reduction devices. This was optional reporting items and the WGFM should continue its efforts to identify a suitable and practical way to address the concern.
- Handling of species aggregate: In some cases, catch information was only available as species group (e.g. shrimps, groupers, emperors, etc) in statistical data collection. Such data should be kept as catch in the species group. Disaggregation among species could be conducted as scientific analysis, with additional information such as species composition obtained from independent surveys and appropriate assumptions.
- Effort data: There were cases where the system of collecting efforts had not been well established. One of the most important roles of effort data was to provide stock indicators (i.e. catch per unit of effort (CPUE)) and it was essential to collect both catch and effort data from the same segment for this purpose. For the purpose of stock indicators, partial data, e.g. CPUE from limited gears, could still serve its role. If it was necessary to prioritize, full coverage of effort data was less important than that catch and effort data originated from one segment.
- Timing of data reporting: National schedules of statistics processing could conflict with the request of data provision before the end of August in the following year (Article 6 of the draft Recommendation). The meeting agreed to seek the Commission's special consideration to allow the reporting of preliminary statistics that were not yet finalized for use by the WGFM.
- Biological and ecological information: Biological and ecological information should be considered as inventories but not as statistical data that required regular reporting. The consolidation of information should also include those made in the past.

6. Taking into account the on-going process of implementing new fisheries statistical programmes and/or upgrading data collection procedures and databases in some of RECOFI Members, the availability and quality of data in the RECOFI region would be improved even more after the finalization of such activities.

7. The meeting noted the importance of maintaining the current momentum to materialize the consolidated dataset as soon as possible. Such dataset would become the basis in agreeing to the structure and format of the finalized RECOFI database as well as serve as the temporary solution to support WGFM activities. There was consensus that the meeting recommend to RECOFI to place the highest priority in setting up such a temporal consolidated dataset and to initiate planning on structure, maintenance scheme, and financial and human resources to maintain the RECOFI database as well as to support improving national data collection capacity.

SUGGESTED ACTION BY THE WORKING GROUP

8. The WGFM is invited to review the report of the informal consultations and to comment on it, as appropriate.