



Brian Harvey (founder of the World Fisheries Trust) and Carmen Revenga (Senior Freshwater Scientist, The Nature Conservancy) discuss how to raise the profile of fishery genetic resources

Since the mid-1980s, FAO and partners have worked to raise the profile of aquatic biodiversity in natural resource management through consultations, workshops, publications, and research. In 1995, the FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA) expanded its mandate from plants to cover aquatic species. However, concrete action to address international policies on aquatic genetic resources has taken more than a decade. In May 2006, the CGRFA, with FAO Fisheries Department and the World Fisheries Trust (WFT) convened an expert workshop in Victoria, BC to report on the status and trends of aquatic genetic diversity and to identify key issues. The findings of the May workshop are being published and may be summarized as follows:

- Aquatic Species are highly diverse, as are their habitats.
- They are still hunted, often as common property in open access areas.
- There aren't many new species or areas left for capture fisheries to exploit.
- The resulting leveling off and over-exploitation of many wild stocks means aquaculture will continue to increase.
- Luckily, there are still many wild relatives of farmed species.
- Unfortunately, their importance is often ignored.

## SINK OR SWIM

### A roundtable discussion on aquatic genetic resources

reported by  
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- Many fisheries are based on hatchery-raised fish.
- Genetic impacts of fish culture are ignored or unknown, as are the interactions between wild and hatchery stocks.
- This is not surprising, because there is almost no awareness of the value and importance of aquatic genetic resources, which means *that fisheries managers ignore genetic diversity or don't use existing information, and they don't appreciate the urgency.*
- To make matters worse, consumers don't know where their food comes from or how it is produced.
- There are few fish icons or champions.

With the new CGRFA mandate and the results of the Victoria Workshop now being prepared for publication, the main technical issues are credibly identified. It is now imperative to translate these results into practical strategies for policy change. What's needed is action beyond the technical arena. The roundtable *Sink or Swim* began this process to explore new avenues for raising the global profile of aquatic biodiversity by examining:

- which issues to concentrate on;
- who has the power to effect change on these issues;
- what "success" with these issues will look like, and
- how to present and market the issues so that change occurs.

The roundtable was organized by WFT, funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada and held in Victoria September 26 and 27, 2006. While the list of participants included some technical experts, it also included people familiar with political power structures, with funding of global scale conservation concepts, and with modern marketing and opinion research: Hon. David Anderson, WFT President, Victoria

and former Canadian Minister of Fisheries and Minister of Environment; *Devin Bartley*, Fisheries Department, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome; *Joachim Carolsfeld*, WFT Executive Director; *Brian Davy*, IDRC, Ottawa; *Brian Harvey*, WFT Founder and Board Member, Victoria; *Suzanne Hawkes*, Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society, Vancouver; *Dierk Peters*, International Marketing Manager, Sustainability Projects, Unilever Corporation, Hamburg; *Carmen Revenga*, Senior Scientist, Freshwater Global Priorities Group, The Nature Conservancy, Arlington VA; and *Sena S. De Silva*, Director General, Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia Pacific (NACA), Bangkok.

**Effective communication** was identified as a necessary element in the conservation and use of aquatic genetic resources. Ms Suzanne Hawkes presented a communication strategy that consisted of:

- appropriate framing - the need to concentrate on winnable portions of issues;
- goal definition - ("what does success look like?");
- power mapping (who can actually change things?);
- knowing the target audience;
- developing effective messages and choosing the messengers who will spread them; and
- choosing tactics or tools.

The communication approach thus requires background research on social, cultural, political, behavioral and economic aspects of target audiences and key players. Although research has been done on technical issues of aquatic biodiversity, very little has been done on these human-related issues.

With these communication strategies in mind, efforts were made to define criteria in order to help the international community prioritize the wide range of activities/projects associated with aquatic genetic resources. The activities should be:

- Concrete
- Consumer relevant
- Able to yield results within two years
- Global, with local relevance as well
- Relates to livelihoods
- Able to attract multiple partners
- Politically opportunistic in light of other initiatives and agreements
- Yield solutions that are transferable to other places.

Two topics clearly captured a number of these criteria simultaneously:

1. *Migratory fishes* is a potential broad issue that touches on many of the important principles of communication. Many migratory species are large and potentially iconic (Mekong giant catfish, large *surubim* and other South American catfishes, Pacific and Atlantic salmon); there is an easy link to livelihoods through their value in fisheries; there is a link to ecosystems as top predators; the term "migratory species" is plain language; there already exists an international convention on migratory species; many are already cultured or about to be (thus bridging wild fisheries and aquaculture); urgency includes present threats from more dam construction.
2. The *interaction between wild and cultured stocks* generates many issues (ecosystem approach, alien species, genetic swamping, broodstock development, livelihoods, investment) and fills many of the proposed criteria.

Another topic could be international zoning for new aquaculture enterprises to stay away from *biodiversity hotspots* as presently done for plant crops by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

**Partnerships** were clearly seen as necessary because of the complexity and controversial nature of the subject area. The participants felt that there was an excellent mix of expertise and points of view present at the workshop (*i.e.*, there was a balance between development and conservation) and therefore agreed to form such a partnership. The partnership is informal at present and for ease of communication is referred to as a "consortium" for the conservation and responsible use of aquatic biodiversity. It is premature to identify a "lead organization"—certain funds, for example, would be more easily tapped through FAO, and the FAO Commission needs to consider the position it will take if a consortium is to be formalized. For now, WFT will act as a temporary facilitator of the consortium and seek to add other key partners and help develop projects.

The results of the *Sink or Swim* roundtable and the consortium will be valuable sources of information and expertise as the CGRFA and the international community begin seriously to address aquatic genetic resources.

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