

Aquatic Genetic Resources to be part of FAO Commission's Programme of Work

In 1995, the FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA) broadened its mandate from plant genetic resources to include all genetic resources for food and agriculture. Since that time however, the issue of aquatic genetic resources has not been addressed by the Commission. The time has now come to address aquatic genetic resources and in 2004, the Commission agreed that its Secretariat, in cooperation with FAO's relevant services, should submit to its Eleventh Session a Multi-Year Programme of Work; the Secretariat was asked to document the status and needs of the various sectors, including fisheries. In response, FIMA with support of the Commission Secretariat and in collaboration with the World Fisheries Trust (WFT)¹, convened in 2006 a workshop of internationally recognized experts to review the status of and trends in genetic resources for aquaculture and capture fisheries; in 2007 Dr Roger S.V. Pullin was commissioned to draft a background paper for the 11th Session. These reviews² pointed out, *inter alia*,

- that genetic information on the world's fishery and aquaculture stocks is incomplete, scattered in a variety of formats and is very seldom used in management;
- given the tremendous increases in production from genetic improvement in the crop and livestock sectors, comparative very little use has been made of genetic improvement technologies in aquaculture;
- that genetic technologies are improving dramatically and becoming easier to use and more affordable and
- that policies and international instruments, including the CCRF, are not sufficient to address the complexities of genetic resource management and can be improved.

Given the need for improved management of many capture fisheries, the increasing role of aquaculture and the threatened state of many fish stocks and habitats, improved knowledge on and use of fishery genetic resources will be necessary to address critical concerns on the world's fisheries and aquaculture facilities. The CGRFA's 11th Session, held from 11-15 June 2007 at FAO in Rome, Italy decided that key elements to be incorporated into their programme of work would be:

- Review of the information base on aquatic genetic resources with a view to improving it and making the information more accessible and useable;
- Preparation of the *State of the World's Aquatic Genetic Resources*; and
- A policy analysis based on the CCRF to see how international policies can be created or improved in order to promote responsible use of aquatic genetic resources.

It is good news indeed that the importance of genetic resources in fisheries and aquaculture has been acknowledged by the CGRFA. However, funding for this increased work was a contentious issue and the 11th Session – many delegates felt that this area was so important that it should be funded from core regular programme resources, while other delegates recognized the current constraints on regular programme resources and recommended external budget support. In practical terms, FI must seek donor assistance to address fully the mandate of FI and the CGRFA in regards to aquatic genetic resources.

The report of the 11th Session and background documents can be downloaded at <http://www.fao.org/ag/cgrfa/cgrfa11.htm>. Additional information may be obtained from the responsible officer, DM Bartley at devin.bartley@fao.org.

¹ www.worldfish.org

² CGRFA-11/07/15.2 The world's aquatic genetic resources: status and needs; Background Study Paper 37. *The Status and trends in aquatic genetic resources: a basis for international policy: Report of a Workshop*. Both documents can be downloaded at <http://www.fao.org/ag/cgrfa/cgrfa11.htm>