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REPORT ON THE WORKING GROUP ON AQUACULTURE (WGA)

INTRODUCTION

1. The aim of this document is to report on the intersessional period work of RECOFO Working Group on Aquaculture
2. The seventh meeting of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA) was held in Doha, the State of Qatar, from 26 to 28 April 2016. Nine delegates attended the meeting from six Members of the Commission.
3. The WGA reviewed the discussions held and decisions taken at the sixth meeting of the WGA (2014). Furthermore, the Meeting was briefed on the main outcomes of the Eighth Session of the Commission (2015). A brief on was provided to the Meeting

Review of the WGA 2014-15 intersessional programme of work

4. The meeting was informed about the activities that had taken place since its sixth meeting (Muscat, Oman, 21–23 October 2014). The WGA noted that the major 2014-15 intersessional activities organized in the intersessional period were the joint back-to-back training workshop on aquaculture risk analysis for aquatic animal introductions and a round-table meeting on the RECOFI regional aquatic biosecurity programme. The group was informed that the approved technical workshop on aquaculture recirculation technologies (RAS) did not take place as the commercial RAS companies showed little interest in joining the workshop.
5. The meeting noted the outcomes of the activities organized during the 2014-15 intersessional period. Among others, the WGA discussed the results and recommendations of the risk analysis training course and round-table meeting. The WGA agreed on the necessity to establish an ad hoc biosecurity task force which would provide technical follow-up on all the aquatic animal health issues and WGA recommendations, decide on priority items that should be addressed first, and activate the proposed biosecurity strategy. The meeting also noted that the aquatic animal health-related activities organized by the WGA, both in the 2014-15 intersessional period and the one preceding it, produced

good outcomes. It was recognized however that many activities still needed to be implemented in the region, including the development of regional standards for imports/movements of non-endemic aquatic species, and that further technical assistance would be required, including closer interregional collaboration.

6. The WGA Focal Points agreed on the necessity to establish an *ad hoc* biosecurity task force (team), which would provide technical follow-up on all the aquatic animal health issues and WGA recommendations, decide on which priority items should be addressed first, and activate the proposed biosecurity strategy. It was also noted that the task force dealing with biosecurity issues should eventually become a permanent one, working under the auspices of the WGA, due to the specific and technical competencies required.

7. In view of the regional interest and expanding marine cage culture sector in the region, the WGA accepted the kind offer received from Norway, also discussed during the eighth session of the Commission (Muscat, Oman, 12–14 May 2015), to present a seminar on the Norwegian experience in relation to the development of its cage aquaculture industry.

8. A presentation on the development of the Norwegian cage aquaculture was delivered at the meeting as discussed at the eighth session of RECOFI (2015).

Status review of aquaculture development by country

9. The meeting was briefed on recent aquaculture developments, including emerging issues and national priorities in RECOFI countries. Revised copies of the National Aquaculture Sector Overview (NASO) were updated at the meeting for their publication in the dedicated FAO and RAIS web pages. It was noted that the last update of NASO had been undertaken in October 2010 on the occasion of the fifth meeting of the WGA. The WGA also reiterated the importance of updating NASO for all of the RECOFI countries and to undertake such updating every two years prior to the session of the Commission. The NASO updated for the 9th Session of the RECOFI is provided in the Appendix I.

Implementation of the RECOFI recommendation on minimum data reporting on aquaculture

10. The WGA acknowledged endorsement of the RECOFI Recommendation on minimum data reporting on aquaculture (RECOFI/8/2015/1) by the Commission at its eighth session (2015). A discussion took place on how to move forward with the implementation of the Recommendation. Key issues discussed included: (i) the status of reported aquaculture statistics by the countries; (ii) the use of existing international standards and globally accepted references on aquaculture statistical data collection and reporting; (iii) comparison with national statistics reporting systems; (iv) identification of capacity building needs; (v) assessment of appropriate resource needs allocation; and (vi) definition of a roadmap for the implementation of activities. The meeting agreed on a series of preliminary actions deemed necessary for the timely implementation of the recommendation, which included the preparation, testing and adoption of a tailored questionnaire.

Marine spatial planning for the RECOFI Area

11. The meeting was informed that at its seventh session (2013) the Commission recognized the knowledge base established by the Secretariat for spatial planning in the RECOFI region and concluded that to move forward, the next phase of the spatial planning development programme should be to proceed with an “operational phase” and, within available resources, provide the necessary support for its implementation. The WGA appreciated the efforts of the Secretariat in drafting a technical paper on marine spatial planning for the RECOFI area, and agreed that the paper responded to the needs of the countries in providing a framework for marine spatial planning.

12. In view of the growing interest in cage aquaculture, the WGA recommended that a regional set of cage site-selection criteria be prepared before the Eighth Meeting of WGA for adoption as RECOFI

guidelines. The WGA Focal Points agreed to prepare a spatial inventory of aquaculture for their respective country with attributes including species, culture systems and production using FAOs National Aquaculture Sector Overview (NASO) map collection.

RECOFI Regional Aquaculture Information System (RAIS)

13. In view of the growing interest in cage aquaculture, the WGA recommended that a regional set of cage site-selection criteria be prepared for adoption as RECOFI guidelines. The WGA took note of the offer by the Islamic Republic of Iran to fund and host a technical workshop on marine spatial planning (MSP), with a focus on marine cage aquaculture, and open for attendance to all RECOFI Members. With reference to the RAIS, the meeting noted that stronger efforts are urgently needed to ensure that the information system effectively provides the intended services to the sector. Further discussions focused on the updating of the various RAIS directories and the expansion of the system comprising RECOFI regional capture fisheries and aquaculture data and information system as recommended by the Commission.

14. The WGA agreed to move toward one integrated RECOFI Web site noting that the Commission had already endorsed two binding recommendations: RECOFI/6/2011/1 on capture fisheries data and RECOFI/8/2015/1 on aquaculture data. Therefore, the establishment of the regional database and information centre was seen as a core undertaking for RECOFI and an essential step to strengthen the Commission in supporting fishery management and aquaculture development. The WGA noted that the Secretariat had recently submitted to the authorities in Kuwait a project proposal in support of the RAIS for their consideration and funding.

Product and services updates

15. The WGA agreed that all WGA meetings should have a standing agenda item on innovative commercial products and services of particular interest to the development of the aquaculture sector in the RECOFI area. Presentations of any product and service would be short and factual with the full understanding that neither the Secretariat nor the WGA Focal Points were promoting the firm offering the service and/or product over other commercial companies. Secretariat provided the meeting with information on bioreactor product developed in Canada. The Meeting highlighted the importance of sharing information on products that have been successfully tested and used in the region as well as technical services that have been delivered professionally.

Functioning of the WGA

16. For more national-level functioning of the WGA, particularly in terms of information and data reporting, and to fulfill its regional obligations, the WGA recognized the importance of the role and responsibilities of the officially nominated Focal Points. In view of this and to ensure adequate management support and recognition, the WGA adopted specific terms of reference for the WGA Focal Points as only terms of reference for the National RECOFI Focal Points had been developed and adopted by the Commission at its fifth session (2009). The Terms of Reference for RECOFI WGA Focal Points was further reviewed and approved by the Commission at its Eighth Session (2015) in addition to the Terms of Reference for RAIS Regional Centre staff. .

17. The WGA recalled the important role played by the WGA Chairperson, particularly during the intersessional periods, and recalled that the Chairperson was in practice the connection between the RECOFI Secretariat and the member countries.

18. The WGA noted that the importance of the timely collection, submission and sharing of accurate aquaculture statistics and other relevant aquaculture information had been repeatedly raised by the WGA and endorsed by the Commission. It also noted that the RECOFI aquaculture statistics available in FAO did not adequately correspond to real aquaculture production in the countries.

WGA programme of work for 2017-18 intersessional period.

19. Details on the WGA work programme for the next intersessional period are presented separately under agenda item RECOFI/IX/2017/8.

Nomination of WGA Chairperson.

20. The WGA Chairperson, Dawood Suleiman Al-Yahyai (Oman), was nominated for a further term. The WGA made no nomination for vice-chairpersons.

SUGGESTED ACTION FOR THE COMMISSION

21. In view of all of the above, the Commission is invited to consider the following points and any other aspects deemed relevant:

- Note this report and provide further general guidance; and
- Approval of the Chairperson nomination made by the Seventh Meeting of WGA.

Appendix 1

Status review of aquaculture development by country

Oman	At present, one shrimp farm (<i>P. indicus</i>) (annual average of 170 tonnes) is in operation 600 km south of Muscat and 13 small-integrated freshwater tilapia farms. The production of Tilapia has increased from 5 ton in 2014 to 30 tonnes 2016. The government is finalizing a project that is identifying suitable cage farming sites in the northern area of Musandam. The project is also studying issues related to carrying capacity and identification/suitability of farmed species. There is one private tilapia hatchery operating efficiently. There are numerous commercial aquaculture projects and Nile tilapia farm applications currently under evaluation. The current annual national tilapia market is estimated at around 1 500 tonnes and the government has identified an export demand from neighbouring countries of an additional 1 500 tonnes. Other aquaculture commercial projects that are likely to start in 2017 is two marine finfish cage culture projects of European seabream (<i>Sparus aurata</i>), RAS facility for grouper and abalone, a second RAS farm for finfish (grouper – <i>Epinephelus</i> sp. being the main target species) and one shrimp farm.
UAE	The United Arab Emirates is prioritizing sustainable aquaculture development as a contributor to food security, economic diversification, employment generation and the reduction of fishing pressure on wild resources. The first phase of the Sheikh Khalifa Marine Research Centre has been completed, a marine finfish hatchery, with a production target of 10 million fingerlings per year of local species. Construction of the second phase of the marine research complex as well as expansion of the hatchery resulting in capacity of 15 million fingerling, will commence soon on the site in Umm Al-Quwain. At present, 12 commercial farms are registered, eight commercial species are being cultured producing 1240 tonnes per year or about 1 present of the estimated national seafood market.