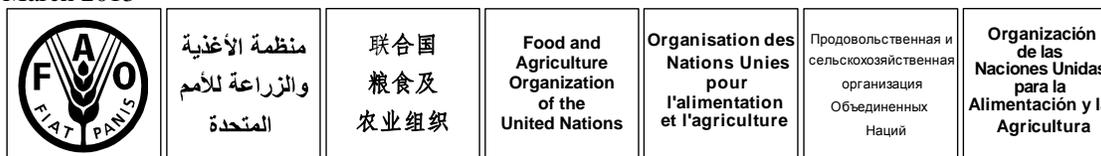


March 2013



International Rice Commission

Special Session

Rome, Italy, 13-14 June 2013

Discussion and decision of the future of the International Rice Commission (IRC)

I. Executive Summary

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat in order to facilitate a discussion and decision on the future of the International Rice Commission (IRC).

When the IRC was established in 1948 it was the only international mechanism for collaboration amongst countries and institutions on matters pertaining to rice. Since then the range of fora, networks, organizations and programmes on rice at the international, regional and national levels has grown exponentially. At the same time, participation by member countries in sessions of the Commission has steadily declined since 1994, with only 19 of the 62 member countries participating in its 21st session in 2006. In the light of this and the broad range of other global and regional fora, organizations and programmes dealing with the same issues for which the IRC was established the continued relevance of the Commission has been questioned.

2. At its 22nd Session in November 2012 the Commission struggled to reach a quorum and was unable to reach a decision on its future. It agreed to establish a working group to develop a proposal on its future that would be considered at a special session of the Commission in June 2013 immediately prior to the 38th FAO Conference.

3. This paper provides brief background information on the working group including: its composition, how it operated, the information it considered and a brief rationale or background to the key political and technical issues that were taken into consideration in preparing the draft resolution.

II. Suggested action by the Commission

4. The Commission is invited to consider the draft resolution on its future developed by the working group established at its 22nd Session.

III. Introduction

5. The 22nd Session of the International Rice Commission agreed to establish a working group (WG), representative of the seven FAO Regions, to develop a proposal on its future that would be considered at a Special Session of the Commission. This paper has been prepared by the Secretariat in order to facilitate the discussion and decision-making on the future of the Commission at its Special Session. It outlines the composition of the WG, its mode of operation and provides a brief rationale or background to the key political and technical issues that were taken into consideration in preparing the draft resolution.

IV. Operation of the IRC Working Group (WG)

6. The terms of reference for the WG as well as its composition may be found in Annex I to this document. The WG met six times between 19 December 2012 and 11 March 2013 under the leadership of Mr Lupino Lazaro of the Philippines. Observers from Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Iran, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand and the Chair of the Committee on Agriculture (COAG) participated in one or more of these meetings. Representatives of the Secretariats of the Committee on Commodity Problems (CCP) and COAG were also invited to address the WG.

7. At its first meeting the WG established a time line for its work and requested that the report of the Expert Meeting in July 2012¹ and associated information documents be made available to them for review. Following an intensive round of discussions an initial draft resolution, along with an explanatory PowerPoint presentation, was made available to members of the WG to facilitate their consultation with members of their regional groups. The feedback from the regional groups was reviewed and based on this discussion the draft resolution revised. The revised draft resolution was further discussed within the regional groups and the feedback provided is reflected in the final draft of the resolution on the future of the IRC agreed by the members of the Working Group.

V. Rationale or background to the resolution

8. There were both political and technical concerns raised by some members of the WG regarding the future of the IRC.

i) technical concerns

9. The only technical concern raised in support of continuing the IRC was a perceived role in “coordination and information dissemination”. In response to this the WG noted that: i) it was not feasible for the IRC, composed of 62 member countries, many of whom do not participate in Commission meetings, to fulfill this role; ii) the global environment on rice has changed since 1948 and it was unrealistic to see a role for the IRC in information dissemination particularly as it was not

¹ Global Rice Roundtable 3-4 July 2012 Montpellier France

generating knowledge; iii) the relatively small number of “active” countries within the IRC could not feasibly coordinate international work on rice.

10. It was also noted that since 1948 the number of global and regional initiatives that worked on generating and disseminating technical and policy information on rice had grown exponentially² including the CGIAR system (GRiSP, IRRI, Africa Rice Centre - 17/18 African IRC Members), Coalition for Africa Rice Development (CARD 16/18 IRC Members), International and Regional Rice Congresses, as well as the work of FAO, that has continued to grow even though the IRC has not had a quorum since 1994 or had essentially ceased to exist in 2006. It was further noted that at the FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific in 2012 rice was identified as a priority leading to FAO’s support to the development of a regional rice strategy. In view of the fact that the governing board of the Africa Rice Centre is composed of Ministers of Agriculture, linking the deliberations of this forum with the FAO Regional Conference for Africa would ensure that important technical or policy issues of regional concern are addressed.

ii) political concerns

11. The political concerns included, on the one hand, that termination of the IRC could be perceived as FAO downgrading its work on rice or its importance to global food security while, on the other hand, the regular sessions of the IRC had failed to reach a quorum in almost 20 years and effectively ceased to operate in 2006. Furthermore, it had been recommended for discontinuation by the Independent External Evaluation (IEE) of FAO in 2007 and the lack of doing so could be seen as an example of the United Nations unable to close a commission that had outlived the purpose for which it had been established.

12. In responding to these political concerns, the WG agreed that FAO needed to better communicate its ongoing work on rice. It also agreed that existing committees, in particular the Committee on Commodity Problems (CCP) and the Committee on Agriculture (COAG) were in a position to address any issues of concern that might arise related to rice³ and that there were several advantages in having them do so instead of the IRC. The WG agreed to recommend to both COAG and CCP that rice be included as a standing item on the agendas of their sessions. This would serve to raise the profile of rice in FAO as it would involve a broader number of countries (COAG has 125 Members and CCP has 109 versus the 62 of the IRC) and at a more senior level than the IRC. In addition, considering such issues within these existing Committees would contribute to a more “targeted or focused” approach to FAO’s work on rice, it would be cost effective as it builds on the existing Secretariat services, as well as provide an opportunity for a greater frequency of meetings (every 2 years versus 4 years for the IRC).

13. The suspension of the Commission would be effective immediately while it would be up to individual member countries as to whether or not they submitted their individual instruments of withdrawal. In line with Article XIII of its Constitution the Commission will be considered terminated if and when the number of members of the Commission drops below ten. Until such time the Commission shall remain in a state of suspension.

² IRC 2012/4 – paragraphs 29-31 and Annex 2 – Information on selected programmes, initiatives, institutions, networks and information sources related to sustainable rice production

³ Annex 2- Mandate of the Committee on Agriculture (COAG) and Committee on Commodity Problems (CCP)

VI. Decision on the future of the International Rice Commission

14. Taking into account the deliberations of the 22nd Session of the IRC, the information that was available to the Expert Meeting in July 2012, and in consultation with member countries through the regional groups, the WG agreed to a draft resolution to suspend the operation of the IRC with a recommendation that rice be included as a standing item on the agendas of the Committee on Commodity Problems (CCP) and the Committee on Agriculture (COAG). It was also understood that member countries who wish to do so could submit their notices of withdrawal in line with Article XIII of its Constitution.

15. A draft resolution on the future of the IRC and a template for an instrument of withdrawal by individual countries is available in Annexes III and IV respectively.

ANNEX I

THE MEMBERS OF THE IRC, AT ITS 22nd SESSION, DECIDED TO ESTABLISH A WORKING GROUP TO DEVELOP A PROPOSAL ON ITS FUTURE – excerpt from IRC 2012/Report

- a) The Working Group (WG) will have the following features:
- The Working Group will be open to Observers from IRC Member States and interested stakeholders.
 - It will be composed of seven IRC Members nominated by each Regional Group, among Permanent Representatives to FAO in Rome;
 - It will elect the Chairperson from among its Members at its first meeting;
- b) The WG will review, taking into account the documents presented at the 22nd Session of the IRC, the operation of the IRC as the basis for a proposal on its future to either:
- phase out the IRC based on the identification of existing bodies within FAO that might assume the objectives/functions of the Commission; or
 - develop a proposal that identifies a specific role for the IRC in the current global environment on Rice; or
 - Propose an alternative to the aforementioned proposals.
- c) If legal, programme or funding issues which could affect the Organization arise, they should be identified in accordance with Rule X, paragraph 4 of the IRC Rules of Procedure, in a timely manner.
- d) The WG shall have English as its working language and take decisions by consensus;
- e) Timeline will be as follows:
- Regional Groups shall notify the IRC Secretariat of their respective representatives to the WG by December 10, 2012 in order to allow its first meeting as soon as possible;
 - Final report of the WG shall be available by 15 March 2013 (to be sent for translation);
 - Agenda for Special Session shall be circulated by the end of March 2013;
 - Final report shall be circulated in all IRC languages to IRC Members by 1 May 2013.
 - Final report of the WG shall be presented at a Special Session of the IRC, which will take place immediately before or during FAO Conference of June 2013 (pending approval of FAO Director-General).
- f) The outcomes and any decision taken at the Special Session of the IRC will be reported to the FAO Conference in June 2013.

The Working Group was composed of the following members:

Mr Nii Quaye-Kumah (Africa-Ghana); Mr. Lupino J. Lazaro Jr., Chair (Asia-Philippines); Mr Alain G.E.Derevier (Europe-France); Mr. Luiz Maria Pio Correa (GRULAC-Brazil); Mr Magdy Anwar (Near East-Egypt); Mr Michael Michener (North America-USA) and Mr Matthew Worrell (South West Pacific-Australia).

ANNEX II

Terms of Reference for the Committee on Commodity Problems (CCP) and the Committee on Agriculture (COAG)

Pursuant to Article V of the FAO Constitution, the FAO Council shall be assisted by a Committee on Commodity Problems (CCP) and a Committee on Agriculture (COAG).

CCP⁴ has 109 member countries and its terms of reference, as laid down in Rule XXIX of the General Rules of the Organization, include the following:

- To keep commodity problems of an international character affecting production, trade, distribution and consumption, and related economic matters under review;
- To prepare a factual and interpretative survey of the world commodity situation, which would be made available directly to Member Nations; and
- To report and submit suggestions to the Council on policy issues arising out of its deliberations, and to avail these reports and those of its Subsidiary Bodies to Member Nations for their information.

COAG has 125 member countries and its terms of reference, as laid down in Rule XXXII of the General Rules of the Organization, include the following:

- Conduct periodic reviews and appraisals, on a highly selective basis, of agricultural and nutritional problems, with a view to proposing concerted action by Member Nations and the Organization;
- Advise the Council on the overall medium- and longer-term work programme of the Organization relating to agriculture and livestock, food and nutrition, with emphasis on the integration of all social, technical, economic, institutional and structural aspects dealing with agricultural and rural development in general;
- Review, with similar emphasis, the biennial work programmes of the Organization and their implementation in areas falling within the competence of the Committee;
- Review specific matters relating to agriculture, food and nutrition referred to the Committee by the Conference, the Council or the Director-General, or placed by the Committee on its agenda at the request of a Member Nation in accordance with the Rules of Procedure of the Committee, and make recommendations as may be appropriate;
- Report to the Council and tender advice to the Director-General, as appropriate, on any other matter considered by the Committee.

⁴ The Intergovernmental Group (IGG) on Rice is a subsidiary body of the CCP

ANNEX III**DRAFT RESOLUTION****Future of the International Rice Commission****THE INTERNATIONAL RICE COMMISSION,**

CONSIDERING that the International Rice Commission (IRC) was established under Article XIV of the FAO Constitution, through a Resolution approved by the FAO Conference, at its Fourth Session in 1948, with the purpose of promoting national and international action with respect to production, conservation, distribution and consumption of rice, except matters relating to international trade;

NOTING that the Constitution of the IRC came into force on 4 January 1949 upon acceptance by ten Member Nations of the Organization, and that at present 62 Member Nations have deposited instruments of acceptance of the Constitution, thus becoming Members of the Commission;

RECOGNIZING that the Commission has assiduously pursued and fulfilled the objectives for which it was established in 1948

ACKNOWLEDGING that there are currently two centres of the CGIAR Consortium, as well as a wide range of fora, programmes, specialized meetings, networks and regional strategies dealing exclusively with rice;

BEING AWARE OF the declining trend in the number of Members that participate in Regular Sessions of the Commission, and, in particular, the fact that since 1994 no Regular Session has obtained the necessary quorum;

RECALLING recommendations that the IRC should be wound up and that, subsequently, a process of reassessment of the need for the Commission was launched within FAO and by its Members;

HIGHLIGHTING that winding up the IRC should not be construed as a reduction in FAO's commitment to its Members with respect to increasing sustainable rice production and consumption;

RECOGNIZING that rice is the staple food of more than half of the world's population and its importance to global food security is acknowledged by FAO and its Members;

- 1) **EXPRESSES ITS APPRECIATION** for the work accomplished over the years by the Commission, its Members and FAO;
- 2) **DECIDES** that the International Rice Commission shall suspend all its activities and operations;
- 3) **RECOMMENDS** that a standing item on rice be included in the agenda of the regular sessions of COAG and CCP, as appropriate, to consider issues of global significance on rice production, conservation, distribution, consumption or trade;
- 4) **FURTHER RECOMMENDS** that in the event an issue of global significance on rice production, conservation, distribution, consumption or trade arises that cannot be addressed by a body within FAO, the Director General, within his authority, convene a meeting with all stakeholders;
- 5) **CALLS UPON** Members who so wish to submit notices of withdrawal from the Commission under Article XII paragraph 1 of the Constitution of the IRC so that under Article XIII of the Constitution it shall be terminated if and when the number of Members of the Commission drops below ten. Until such time the Commission shall remain in a state of suspension.

ANNEX IV

SAMPLE



Instrument of Withdrawal

Date.....

Sir,

I have the honour to refer to the Constitution of the International Rice Commission which was approved by the Fourth Session of the FAO Conference in November 1948 and to inform you that the Government of [country] hereby withdraws from the Constitution, pursuant to the provisions of Article XII, paragraph 1.

Accept, Sir, the assurance of my highest consideration.

[Signature by one of the following authorities]

- Head of State
- Head of Government
- Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Minister of the Department concerned

[SEAL]

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