

March 2013

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REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR FISHERIES (RECOFI)

Seventh Session

Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 14–16 May 2013

Regional Aquaculture Information System (RAIS): Performance and Future Outlook

Executive Summary

This document provides a summary of the activities carried out in the Region, under the *aegis* of the RECOFI Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA), in strengthening the RECOFI Regional Aquaculture Information System (RAIS) since its launching in 2009. The main constraints affecting the consolidation of the system are presented along with follow-up actions recommended.

The Commission is invited to:

- provide guidance on the future of RAIS and to consider which of the recommended options indicated below are appropriate to ensure the delivery of the services expected from the information system:
 - (i) keeping the RAIS as it is, but ensuring that the RECOFI Members reaffirm their responsibilities in regular feeding the system and the country hosting the RAIS Regional Centre confirm its availability in providing adequate human resources for the maintenance and operation of the system;
 - (ii) establishing a new regional information system under the umbrella of RECOFI covering both capture fisheries and aquaculture.

1. This document provides a concise summary on the activities carried out by the Focal Points (FPs) of the Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA) and staff of the RAIS Regional Centre (Kuwait) on the strengthening the RECOFI Regional Aquaculture Information System (RAIS) since its launching in 2009, including the discussions held on management issues and future development of the system. Options on the further development of RAIS, including funding for its maintenance and consolidation, are provided for discussion and decision by the Commission.

2. The establishment of RAIS was requested by the RECOFI Members as a response to the development and interest in the aquaculture sector in the Region also as a regional repository system for storing and sharing information including that generated from RECOFI and other technical workshops/meetings. During the Third session of the Commission (Doha, Qatar, 9–11 May 2005) the State of Kuwait offered to host the RAIS in the premises of the Public Authority of Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAFR) and allocated extra-budgetary funds to develop the regional information system. The Commission subsequently requested the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department to develop the system along with a bilingual (Arabic and English) “RAIS User Manual” to facilitate data submission by authorized RAIS users.

3. Although the RAIS has been designed applying the most up-to-date information technology and conceived as a user-friendly tool, the system has been managed and hence most likely used well below its potential. Several factors have limited the original scope of the information system which was conceived to be the tool used by FPs as well as all other relevant and interested regional and national aquaculture stakeholders to timely disseminate and retrieve aquaculture information. The insufficient dedication from the RECOFI Member countries along with an inadequate management of the RAIS Regional Centre, are probably the two main issues which have stalled the consolidation and effectiveness of RAIS as an updated and reliable regional source of information on the status and development of aquaculture in the Region.

4. Three *ad hoc* technical trainings on RAIS have been organized by the Secretariat to consolidate the information system and to strengthen the input capacities of the data owners and data managers. The first technical training was for the staff of the RAIS Regional Centre and the WGA FPs on how to use the system and perform data entry, was organized in Kuwait (November 2007). A second training was organized for the staff of the RAIS Regional Centre (February 2009) to strengthen their capacities in performing the duties required as in the agreed and adopted Terms of References. A third and final training session was organized in Kuwait (March 2011) for the staff of the RAIS Regional Centre to (i) upgrade the Typo3 Content Management System and (ii) to discuss the main management and maintenance issues encountered by the staff since the launching of the system. Furthermore, a template for the generation of a Web analysis report was elaborated together with the Regional Centre staff. Regrettably, since then no Web analysis reports have been produced and circulated to enable the RECOFI Members to evaluate the use of the Web-based information system.

5. The only Web analysis report generated by the RAIS Regional Centre in 2010 clearly indicated that there was a growing interest in RAIS with a strong geographical coverage from the Arabic speaking countries (Northern Africa countries and Gulf Region). At that time (October 2010), the total number of visits were just under 8 000 from 154 countries. The number of pages viewed were 47 537 with an average time spent on the Web site of 3:09 minutes. It was also noted that numerous and relevant international aquaculture Web sites had established a link to the RAIS home page. The Secretariat is not in the position to present an updated RAIS Web analysis as this, following a number of solicitations, was not provided by the RAIS Regional Centre.

6. Over the intersessional period, the Secretariat has continuously fed the system by uploading relevant aquaculture news and publications of interest as one authorized users. The bilingual (Arabic and English) RAIS User Manual was prepared and distributed to the WGA FPs to facilitate the use of the system and to expand the number of authorized users for data entry purposes. Press releases and flyers have been produced to promote RAIS during and after its official launching. Furthermore, a document entitled “RAIS regional communication strategy” was elaborated to guide the FPs and Regional Centre staff in promoting the information system at both the national and regional level and

to ensure an effective flow of data and information. These activities, including in-country missions of the FAO Rome-based staff, were mainly funded by the FAO Regular Programme.

7. The insufficient communication exchanges among the RAIS administrators (RAIS Regional Centre staff and FPs) has certainly impacted the visibility of the system in the Region and beyond. Since RAIS was conceived and launched, it was agreed that an increasing number of national aquaculture users and authorized staff would be needed to provide information particularly with regards to aquaculture news and events and ongoing projects in the Region. The system in fact will not provide the service intended if only a limited number of persons are responsible in feeding the system. More efforts are required to increase the number of RAIS authorized users with editing right to enter data into the system.

8. The most important data set in the system is the aquaculture production statistics which are needed to monitor the status and trend of aquaculture at the national and regional level. So far these data have not been timely reported hence not allowing the generation of regional aquaculture status reviews. The Commission should consider to request the WGA to investigate on the possibility of establishing binding recommendation on the minimum aquaculture data and information reporting as adopted by the RECOFI Working Group on Fisheries Management for capture fisheries data. This should generate more commitment by Member states that, once the binding recommendation is adopted, will have the obligation to provide information on national aquaculture production statistics.