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REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR FISHERIES (RECOFI)

Seventh Session

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

Fisheries Management in the RECOFI Area

Executive Summary

The Fifth and Sixth WGFM meetings were characterized by an encouraging commitment to promote cooperation for regional fisheries management, notwithstanding that at both meetings the attendance of Members was not complete. The WGFM evaluated the implementation of the fisheries management recommendation on minimum data reporting in recommendation RECOFI/6/2011/1 that entered into force on 1 January 2012, and on the basis of the data submitted by the members carried out a preliminary appraisal of the status of stocks supporting fisheries of regional relevance. The WGFM jointly formulated fisheries management advice to safeguard sustainable fisheries. For the 2013-2014 biennium, the WGFM identified a suite of prioritized projects to support the management of common fisheries in the region.

The Commission is invited to:

- note the progress made at the WGFM's Fifth and Sixth meetings and endorse the WGFM's reports;
- consider the fisheries management advice formulated by the WGFM and provide guidance accordingly;
- consider the list of prioritized projects agreed by the WGFM (Appendix 3) and determine which projects should be executed in the 2013-2014 biennium;
- note the concern expressed by the WGFM in relation to the need to consolidate and strengthen RECOFI and to ensure that it has adequate financial resources to undertake its programme of work.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Since the Sixth Session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) (Rome, Italy, 10-12 May 2011) two meetings of the Working Group on Fisheries Management (WGFM) were convened. The Fifth meeting¹ of the WGFM was held in Tehran, Iran (Islamic Republic of), 9-12 October 2011 and the Sixth meeting² in Doha, Qatar, 5-8 November 2012.

2. Both the Fifth and Sixth WGFM meetings were characterized by an encouraging commitment to promote cooperation for regional fisheries management. At both meetings the attendance of Members was never complete and ranged from 63 to 75 percent of the RECOFI constituency. However, it was evident that representatives desired a strengthened and empowered Commission that would play an important role in promoting long-term sustainable development in fisheries. It was also clear that Members would need to promote harmonized approaches to the management of fish stocks of common interest in order to achieve tangible results.

3. Over the biennium, an increasing number of Members had volunteered to undertake specific tasks and follow-up actions. The importance of Members to be pro-active should be emphasized in order to make progress in resolving many issues and concerns that the Commission must address.

FIFTH MEETING OF THE WGFM

4. The Fifth meeting of the WGFM was held in Tehran, Iran (Islamic Republic of), from 9 to 12 October 2011. The meeting was attended by 16 delegates from five Members of the Commission and 12 observers. Three RECOFI Members (Bahrain, UAE, and Saudi Arabia) were absent. At this meeting the WGFM addressed, and made recommendations on, a range of issues including prioritized regional projects, including their anticipated implementation location and dates, as follows:

- i) Workshop on social and economic aspects of small-scale fisheries (February 2012);
- ii) Workshop to develop regional management plans with agreed operational objectives for fisheries management (June 2012); and
- iii) Pilot joint assessment of narrow-barred Spanish mackerel and workshop on the utilization of fishery dependent data (February 2013).

5. Moreover, Members agreed that they should carry out a survey on the status and extent of Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing in their respective countries.

6. Following a request by the sixth session of the Commission to consider the necessity of establishing a scientific expert group, the participants in the fifth meeting of the WGFM deemed the creation of a scientific, technical and economic committee to be appropriate. The delegate from the Islamic Republic of Iran agreed to draft ToRs for a multidisciplinary scientific expert group to be submitted for consideration at the sixth meeting of the WGFM.

7. The WGFM approved a road map in connection with RECOFI's possible membership in the Fishery Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS). It was also agreed that that two RECOFI representatives will attend the thirteenth session of FIRMS in 2013 as observers.

SIXTH MEETING OF THE WGFM

8. The sixth meeting of the WGFM was held in Doha, Qatar, from 5 to 8 November 2012. The meeting was attended by 15 delegates from six Members of the Commission. Two RECOFI Members (Iran and Iraq) were absent. The WGFM addressed and made decisions on matters concerning relevant

¹ FAO. 2011. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Report, No. 986. Report of the Fifth Meeting of the RECOFI Working Group on Fisheries Management. FAO. Rome. 60 p.

² FAO. 2013. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Report. No. 1034. Report of the Sixth Meeting of the RECOFI Working Group on Fisheries Management. FAO. Rome. 93p.

follow-up to the fifth meeting of the RECOFI WGFM and to the sixth session of RECOFI (May 2011).

9. The sixth meeting:

- Evaluated the implementation of the fisheries management recommendation on minimum data reporting in recommendation RECOFI/6/2011/1 that entered into force on 1 January 2012;
- Formulated fisheries management measures on the basis of the data submitted by the Members;
- Discussed the report on the RECOFI Workshop on Social and Economic Aspects of Fisheries in the RECOFI Region as well as the progress of the *ad hoc* Task Group.
- Outlined the key-components of regional fisheries management plans with agreed operational objectives.
- Considered the main outcomes of the Near-East and North Africa Regional Consultative Meeting on Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries and its relevance to RECOFI.
- Discussed RECOFI participation in the FIRMS Steering Committee meeting and the national inventories of fisheries were considered.
- Reviewed the status of RECOFI's financial situation and the work plan of the WGFM, and consequently revised and updated the programme of work and budget for the biennium 2013–2014.

10. Based on the above, the WGFM:

- Formulated fisheries management advice for key-fisheries of regional relevance;
- Agreed on the importance of including socio-economic considerations in management decisions.
- Reviewed, updated and expanded the list of fisheries species of common interest (Appendix 1).
- Addressed the problem of IUU fishing in the region and noted international developments and initiatives to combat IUU fishing, including the benefits of implementing the 2009 FAO Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA).
- Agreed that the consolidated inventory of RECOFI fisheries was comprehensive and could be published in FIRMS, following the formal endorsement by the Commission.
- Noted that some decisions taken at its fifth meeting could not be implemented either due to lack of action by the Members or insufficient funds.
- Noted that without an increase in the contribution of Members to the agreed amount of \$15,000, activities in the WGFM work plan would have to be drastically reduced, undermining the efforts and progress made so far.
- Re-elected Mr Abdul Karim H. Al-Radhi as chairperson to serve until the seventh meeting of the WGFM. Mr Nabil Ibrahim Fita (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) was elected as Vice-chairperson.

11. The next meeting of the WGFM will possibly be held in Kuwait in 2013.

PROGRAMME OF WORK AND BUDGET FOR THE 2013–2014 BIENNIUM

12. The programme of work and budget was scrutinized and refined at both the WGFM's Fifth and Sixth meetings. All activities and projects requested of the WGFM by the Commission at its Fifth Session and revised at the Fifth WGFM meeting, have been completed with the exclusion of the pilot joint assessment of narrow-barred Spanish mackerel (Appendix 2).

13. In addition, for the 2013-2014 biennium, the WGFM's sixth meeting identified a suite of prioritized projects to support the management of common fisheries in the region (Appendix 3). The prioritization exercise was based on scientific considerations and, particularly, the current financial constraints. The total indicative cost of the six prioritized projects is USD 125 000.

STOCK STATUS REPORTING AND FISHERIES MANAGEMENT ADVICE

14. The Regional Workshop on Stock Indicators and Stock Status Reporting held in the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2009 identified three broad objectives relating to fisheries sustainability as follows:

- 1) Minimising the negative impacts of shrimp trawling;
- 2) Maintaining stocks of coastal finfish at sustainable levels with grouper and emperor snapper as potential indicator species; and
- 3) Maintaining the stock of narrow-barred Spanish mackerel (*Scomberomorus commerson*) at a sustainable level.

15. In consideration of the above and of the Recommendation RECOFI/6/2011/1³, the WGFM reviewed the data compiled according to the Recommendation in order to evaluate the three broad objectives and to develop more concrete operational objectives and corresponding management plans. Preliminary analysis on the current status of the fisheries resources in the region consisted of the examination of the overall catch trends, relative occurrence of target species group in the catch, and CPUE trends for shrimps, groupers, emperors and coastal finfish resources.

16. The analysis indicated that the coastal finfish resources as a whole, not only groupers and emperors that are considered more sensitive to fishing pressure due to their biological characteristics, are under high fishing pressure, and are probably already in over-exploited conditions. In the case of groupers and emperors, their stock condition was considered to have fallen to levels that require immediate remedial action. On the other hand, the analysis did not identify any indications of declining shrimp stocks, regardless of the continuous increase of fishing effort of the shrimp trawl fishery.

17. The WGFM noted that the results of preliminary analysis corresponded with recent scientific research suggesting a decline in most of the key commercial species in the Gulf, especially for stocks of groupers, emperors and snappers. Particularly, it was noted that the maximum extent of decline indicated by commercial CPUE data for groupers and emperors (approximately a 70 percent decline over seven years), is consistent with the results obtained from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) demersal fish survey that showed a 90 percent decline in abundance between 1978 and the early 2000s⁴ over around 25 years.

18. The WGFM emphasized that the potential impacts of shrimp trawling on coastal finfish resources is a persistent and serious concern due to the large quantity of by-catch and discards, composed mainly of juveniles of finfish, as well as possible physical destruction of finfish nursery area habitats. Despite the fact that the need for a ceiling and reduction of shrimp trawling has for a long time been generally accepted as a priority for fishery management in the region, the WGFM recognized with concern that the actual effort of the shrimp trawl fishery has continued to increase substantially. Fishing capacity is generally considered to have reached a level far beyond optimal, to the level that some fishers find staying at port to be a more economically viable option than conducting fishing operations.

19. Accordingly, the WGFM agreed that better control to prevent further expansion of fishing effort in general, but especially in the shrimp trawl fishery, should be given top priority among the regional operational objectives. Considering the importance of the management of the narrow-barred Spanish mackerel stock in the region, on-going efforts by GCC countries to develop an agreed management plan, and the critical need to apply commonly agreed management measures throughout the Gulf, the

³ “Recommendation on minimum data reporting in the RECOFI area” adopted at the Sixth Session of RECOFI and entered into effect 1 January 2012.

⁴ Fishery statistics for the Gulf Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf 2006-2009. Cooperation Council for the Arab Gulf States. Secretariat. 2012. 78 pages. (Arabic)

WGFM proposed that the regional management plan of narrow-barred Spanish mackerel should be discussed at the seventh session of RECOFI. In this regard, the WGFM recommended that GCC countries should submit a specific proposal for the regional management plan for the consideration by the Commission at its seventh session, including a proposal on a closed fishing season and minimum capture size with suitable supporting evidence.

20. The WGFM recommended the implementation of the following actions along with corresponding monitoring indicators:

- 1) No new fishing licences should be issued and steps should be taken to reduce the total number of licences, in a way agreeable by fishing communities and taking advantage of fishers who want to retire and retiring older vessels in order to reduce licenses. The implementation should be monitored with the actual number of fishing licenses issued for individual fisheries that should be reported by Members.
- 2) Fishing effort of individual fisheries, and particularly of shrimp trawling, should be reduced by the means most appropriate for each Member and fishery (e.g. limiting number of trips each month, limiting gear quantities or type, appropriate closed seasons). The implementation should be monitored considering the actual extent of fishing effort that will be reported according to the Recommendation on minimum data reporting.
- 3) Integrated region-wide management measures should be established for the management and conservation of narrow-barred Spanish mackerel, taking into account the on-going work and its results obtained by GCC countries. These measures should be discussed and coordinated at the regional level through RECOFI. The Secretariat should monitor and report on the progress to the WGFM.
- 4) Each Member should ensure all existing regulations and management measures are effectively implemented, and should take remedial steps when identifying difficulties in applying regulations and measures, problems in effectiveness of measures, or significant gaps and weaknesses. Each Member should report the progress in implementation of this action at the annual meeting of the WGFM, including a list of national regulations and measures, general overview on implementation status, specific problems identified and actions taken.

ESTABLISHMENT OF A RECOFI MULTIDISCIPLINARY SCIENTIFIC EXPERT GROUP

21. The WGFM appreciated the draft Terms of Reference that the Islamic Republic of Iran had volunteered to draft and considered the document as an initial contribution. It noted, in particular, the technical issues highlighted in the document including those on shared stock fisheries which are of prime concern to RECOFI. However, the WGFM concurred that additional work would be needed to develop more detailed Terms of Reference.

22. Concerning the necessity to establish a multidisciplinary scientific expert group, the WGFM unanimously agreed that in the current phase of RECOFI there was no need to create an additional advisory entity, the functioning of which would require additional human and financial resources that at the moment are not available. The current WGFM and Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA) were recognised as adequate mechanisms to address most of the scientific issues to be dealt with by the Commission.

Appendix 1

List of key species supporting main reference fisheries in the RECOFI area

FAO name	ASFIS code	Common name	Scientific name
Green Tiger Prawn	TIP	Green Tiger Prawn	<i>Penaeus semisulcatus</i>
Blue swimming crabs	SCD	Blue swimming crab	<i>Portunus pelagicus</i>
Pharaoh cuttlefish	IAH	Cuttlefish	<i>Sepia pharaonis</i>
Stolephorus anchovies	STO	Anchovies	<i>Stolephorus</i> spp.
Indian oil sardine	IOS	Indian oil sardine	<i>Sardinella longiceps</i>
Bludger	NGY	Jacks	<i>Carangoide gymnotethus</i>
Golden trevally	GLT	Golden trevally	<i>Gnathanodon speciosus</i>
Indian mackerel	RAG	Indian mackerel	<i>Rastrelliger Kanagurta</i>
Snubnose emperor	LBW	Orange finned emperor	<i>Lethrinus borbonicus</i>
Pink ear emperor	LTS	Redspot emperor	<i>Lethrinus lentjan</i>
Spangled emperor	LHN	Spangled emperor	<i>Lethrinus nebulosus</i>
Coral hind	CFI	Coral grouper/Bluespotted grouper	<i>Cephalopholis miniata</i>
Orange-spotted grouper	ENI	Orange-spotted grouper	<i>Epinephelus coioides</i>
White-spotted spinefoot	SCN	Rabbitfish	<i>Siganus canaliculatus</i>
Narrow-barred Spanish mackerel	COM	King mackerel/Narrow-barred Spanish mackerel	<i>Scomberomorus commerson</i>
Longtail tuna	LOT	Longtail tuna	<i>Thunnus tonggol</i>
Kawakawa	KAW	Kawakawa	<i>Euthynnus affinis</i>
Requiem sharks nei	RSK	Sharks	Carcharhinidae

Appendix 2

RECOFI regional projects to be undertaken in the 2011–12 intersessional period

Working Group	Regional projects	Date	Location	Duration (days)	Indicative RECOFI cost (USD)	Status
Joint (with RECOFI WGA)	Capacity building for spatial planning and management (WGA/WGFM training)	Early 2012	Doha, Qatar	4–5	40 000	Approved
WGFM	Preparatory exercise for implementation of minimum data requirements and establishment of a regional database and information network to support management of major fisheries	Ongoing till mid-2012	N/A	N/A	20 000	Approved. Number 1 priority for WGFM
WGFM	Workshop to develop regional management plans with agreed operational objectives	June 2012	United Arab Emirates	3–4	15 000	Approved. Number 2 priority for WGFM
WGFM	Pilot joint assessment of kingfish and workshop on the utilization of fishery-dependent data	TBD	Oman	4	30 000	Approved. Number 3 priority for WGFM
WGFM	Workshop on social and economic aspects of small-scale fisheries	February 2012	Manama, Bahrain	3–4	10 000	Approved. Number 4 priority for WGFM.
WGFM	Regional workshop on bycatch reduction and management and evaluation and promotion of options of gear types with lower ecosystem impacts	May 2012	Kuwait	TBD	15 000	Approved
WGFM	Applied training programme for data collectors for the identification of priority species	TBD	TBD	TBD	25 000	Postponed
WGFM	Pilot joint assessment of ecosystem impact of shrimp fisheries	TBD	TBD	TBD	30 000	Postponed
WGFM	Review of national fisheries monitoring programmes	TBD	TBD	TBD	40 000	Postponed

Working Group	Regional projects	Date	Location	Duration (days)	Indicative RECOFI cost (USD)	Status
WGFM	Feasibility study to review development of regional databases of violations, establish a list of vessels authorized to fish by Members and the establishment of an MCS information exchange scheme.	TBD	TBD	TBD	30 000	Postponed
WGFM	Workshop to consider regional standards for fish exports and imports as a means of promoting better cooperation and trade	TBD	TBD	TBD	15 000	Postponed
WGFM	Evaluation of certification and related schemes to be investigated together with the relationship between IUU fishing and trade and the estimated value of IUU fishing in the region	TBD	TBD	TBD	20 000	Postponed
WGFM	Annual regional meetings of MCS officers to exchange information of common interest and consider the possibility of promoting a harmonized MCS approach	TBD	TBD	TBD	15 000	Postponed
WGFM	Project to implement regionally VMS: phase I to ascertain feasibility	TBD	TBD	TBD	30 000	Postponed
WGFM	A study to evaluate and promote options to improve utilization of bycatch	TBD	TBD	TBD	15 000	Activity to be absorbed by the regional workshop on bycatch reduction and management and evaluation and promotion of options of gear types with lower ecosystem impacts
WGFM	Comparative analysis of certain legal issues to promote further harmonization of legislation, building on initial work undertaken by RECOFI and taking into consideration other relevant work	TBD	TBD	TBD	20 000	Project removed from list because of possible duplication with GCC work

Appendix 3

RECOFI regional projects to be undertaken in the 2013–2014 intersessional period

Working Group	Regional projects	Date	Location	Duration (days)	Indicative RECOFI cost (USD)	Status (priority approved by RECOFI)
WGFM	Follow-up and monitoring of a regional fisheries management framework				15 000	Approved by WGFM as high priority
WGFM	Development of a regional programme to address IUU fishing on the basis of the outcome of the FAO/RECOFI workshop on IUU fishing that was held in the Sultanate of Oman in 2009				20 000	Approved by WGFM as high priority
WGFM	Development of a monitoring programme for socio-economic parameters for use in fisheries management (follow-up to the outcome of the socio-economic workshop held in Bahrain in 2012)				20 000	Approved by WGFM as high priority
WGFM	Pilot joint assessment of narrow-barred Spanish mackerel and workshop on the utilization of fishery-dependent data	Feb 2013	Muscat, Oman	4	30 000	Approved by WGFM as high priority
WGFM	A study to evaluate and promote options to improve utilization of bycatch				15 000	Approved by WGFM as high/medium priority
WGFM	Applied training programme for fish data collectors for the identification of priority species				25 000	Approved by WGFM as high/medium priority