



REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR FISHERIES (RECOFI)

Fifth Session

Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 12 – 14 May 2009

REVIEW OF INTERSESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

I. INTRODUCTION

This document is a summary of the work of RECOFI's subsidiary bodies: the Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA) and the Working Group on Fisheries Management (formerly Working Group on Fishery Statistics, WGFM). Progress achieved and activities conducted with guidance from the RECOFI are included.

II. ACTIVITIES OF THE WORKING GROUP ON AQUACULTURE (WGA)

Regional strategy on aquatic animal health

Improvements in aquatic animal health capacity are considered essential if regional aquaculture production is to achieve the hoped for levels of growth projected by RECOFI countries. The Commission, during its Fourth session in Jeddah, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), in May 2007, endorsed the implementation of activities towards the preparation of a “regional strategy on aquatic animal health” as proposed by the WGA. The activities include: (i) assessment, through a questionnaire survey, of institutional and human resource capacities on aquatic animal health at the national level; and (ii) organization of a regional workshop to present the results of the survey including a technical seminar on issues and concepts of aquatic animal health management. The preparatory work for the strategy development was finalized in Kuwait in November 2007, and included:

- (i) Implementation, analysis and finalization of the questionnaire survey (December 2007 to March 2008);
- (ii) Implementation of a regional technical workshop in Jeddah, KSA (April 2008); and
- (iii) Preparation and finalization of a proposal for a regional aquatic animal health development programme.

The RECOFI Regional Technical Workshop on Aquatic Animal Health was held from 6 to 10 April 2008 Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) and was attended by 19 professionals representing official participants and observers from five RECOFI Members (Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates), plus representatives from the FAO and including one international consultant.

The Proposal for a Regional Programme for Improving Aquatic Animal Health Capacity in RECOFI member countries was developed by the workshop participants using the results of the survey questionnaires and the draft outline of possible contents of the regional programme. The draft regional programme was further discussed and elaborated by the participants of the Jeddah workshop, who endorsed the revised programme components, elements and activities.

Regional Aquaculture Information System (RAIS)

The Technical Meeting on the Regional Aquaculture Information System (RAIS) under the *aegis* of the RECOFI was held in Kuwait City, Kuwait, from 6 to 9 November 2007. The meeting was attended by 12 experts from six RECOFI member countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates), three observers and the FAO/RECOFI Secretariat.

The main objectives of this meeting were to:

- (i) Inform the WGA Focal Points (FPs) on the progress made in the RAIS since the Third meeting of the WGA (Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 5–6 May 2007);
- (ii) Train the FPs and/or the nominated RAIS National Coordinators on how to use the system and perform data entry;
- (iii) Receive feedback on the RAIS homepage and functions; and
- (iv) Discuss the WGA activities to be implemented in 2008 as endorsed by the Commission during its Fourth session (Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 7–9 May 2007).

RAIS have been successfully installed and is hosted on the server of the Kuwait Public Authority for Agriculture and Fisheries. The Working Group on Aquaculture during its Fourth meeting, dedicated a full day (27 January 2009) on issue related to the RAIS development and consolidation. In February 2009, the Regional Centre staff has undergone additional hands-on training in order to effectively support and manage the regional information system (Kuwait City, 15–16 February 2009). At the time of the preparation of this document the official launching of the RAIS was planned for March 2009.

The Secretariat was invited by the Committee on Aquaculture of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean to present RAIS at the Tenth annual meeting of the SIPAM (Information System for the Promotion of Aquaculture in the Mediterranean) which was held from 15 to 16 December 2008 in Tirana, Albania.

Sustainable Marine Cage Aquaculture Development

During its Fourth session (May 2007), the Commission endorsed the proposals made by the RECOFI WGA to organize a “Regional technical workshop on sustainable marine cage aquaculture development” in view of the growing interest of this aquaculture sub-sector in the region. The expected outputs of the workshop included among others, the:

- i) Regional status review of cage culture;
- ii) Policy guidelines and regulatory recommendations; and
- iii) Draft licensing, site selection, and environmental impact assessment (EIA) procedures.

The development of specific protocols, which may require additional activities other than the scheduled workshop, will provide the RECOFI region with standardized procedures that may be adapted to local needs and conditions. These protocols will enable the relevant authorities to evaluate commercial cage culture proposals adequately, grant licences and eventually monitor the performance of a farm in terms of its environmental impact. Furthermore, a clear understanding of the institutional requirements will enable the private sector (both local and foreign) to directly apply for marine finfish cage culture

licences and be fully aware of the information required by the authorities prior to the establishing of a fish cage facility and during its subsequent operations.

The workshop was held from 25 to 26 January 2009 in Muscat (Oman) and was attended by 27 experts and professionals from seven RECOFI Member countries (Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) and the FAO/RECOFI Secretariat, including two international consultants.

Fourth Meeting of the Working Group on Aquaculture

The Fourth meeting of the RECOFI Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA) was held in Muscat, Oman, from 27 to 28 January 2009 attended by representatives of seven RECOFI Member countries (Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) in addition to the FAO/RECOFI Secretariat. The participants reviewed the work performed by the WGA during the intersessional period, identified priorities and formulated follow-up activities to be submitted for consideration by the Fifth RECOFI Session.

III. ACTIVITIES OF THE WORKING GROUP ON FISHERIES MANAGEMENT (WGFM)¹

Second Session of the Working Group on Fisheries Management (formerly the Working Group on Fishery Statistics)

As agreed in paragraph 69 of the report of the Fourth session of RECOFI (May 2007), the Working Group on Statistics has been re-named as the Working Group on Fisheries Management. This change has been made by RECOFI as a means to expand and strengthen the Working Group's scope, role and functions.

The Second meeting of the RECOFI Working Group on Fisheries Management (WGFM) was held at the FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa, Cairo, Egypt, from 27 to 30 October 2008. This meeting marked the transition from the Working Group on Statistics to the Working Group on Fisheries Management. The meeting was attended by 11 representatives of seven RECOFI member countries (Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates), plus the FAO Secretariat of the Commission.

The Working Group on Fisheries Management agreed to terms of reference for the working group, terms of reference for the national focal points and to a programme of work that includes strategy, priorities, activities and including their indicative financial requirements. It also agreed on two activities related to statistics follow-up and a programme of work for stock assessment and stock status reporting. Additionally the Meeting agreed about the convenience of organizing a regional workshop on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing including port state measures.

Focusing on the sustainable management of the region's fish stocks, many of which are shared among RECOFI members, the WGFM is expected to provide an appropriate mechanism to promote greater regional fisheries cooperation and, importantly, to address and resolve fisheries problems of common concern. The Working Group on Fisheries Management will also have the opportunity to address emerging international fisheries on issues that impact management in the region such as the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries, the implementation of the Precautionary Approach, the role of port States in combating IUU fishing. In broadening the scope of the Working Group, fisheries management will be considered in a more comprehensive framework. It will address, as appropriate, biological, statistical, developmental, economic and social aspects of management.

¹ Formerly the Working Group on Fishery Statistics

Improving the utility and diffusion of fisheries statistical data among RECOFI members

At its Fourth session in May 2007 the Commission recommended that members continue their efforts to improve the cost-effectiveness and reliability of their national statistical programmes, increase the diffusion and utility of existing data and take further steps towards harmonization and integration of national fisheries statistical data at regional level. Acting upon these recommendations the RECOFI Secretariat initiated a number of follow-up actions among which the preparation of a desk study and a modern Information Technology tool (Fishery Landing Visualizer) for easy access and preliminary scrutiny of trends and pattern of RECOFI capture fisheries production from 1986 to 2006.

The report of the desk study on the utility and diffusion of RECOFI fishery statistics is a comprehensive technical document that examines existing difficulties in fisheries statistics. The study proposes simple methodological procedures with the view of increasing the utility of existing databases and underlines the need for feedback information on statistical quality to be provided by members. It proposes short- and medium-term follow-up actions to be considered by the Commission for the general improvement of national and regional data and for the promotion of cooperation and synergy in fisheries statistical activities among RECOFI members.

The stand-alone IT package, entitled “Trends and Pattern of RECOFI Capture Fisheries Production” allows the easy visualization and preliminary analysis of the nominal landing data that were extracted from the 1986-2006 RECOFI capture production data set, using FishStat Plus (Version 2.32). This application package facilitates retrieving and compiling the RECOFI landing time series by species (i.e. the most important ten species landed), families and group category, and by country and statistical areas. Simple indicators are elaborated and displayed.

Combating Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing in the RECOFI region

At the Fourth session (May 2007) the Commission addressed the issue of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing in its waters and stressed the importance of developing and implementing national plans of action to combat IUU fishing. The Commission requested the FAO to organize an IUU fishing workshop for Members. As a follow-up to this request the FAO/RECOFI Workshop on Combating Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing in the RECOFI region was held in Muscat (Oman) from 30 March to 2 April 2009.

The primary objective of the Workshop was to develop national capacity and promote regional coordination so that countries will be better prepared to combat IUU fishing. This would require development and implementation of relevant national fisheries instruments, and the creation of appropriate measures at the regional level.

IV. SUGGESTED ACTION BY THE COMMISSION

The Commission is invited to review the activities performed by the Working Group on Aquaculture and the Working Group on Fisheries Management during the intersessional period and to provide guidance on issues of particular relevance expressed by concerned subsidiary bodies, including any follow-up actions that might be deemed necessary.