

Report of the

**FOURTH SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMISSION
FOR FISHERIES**

Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 7–9 May 2007



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PREPARATION OF THIS DOCUMENT

This is the final version of the report of the fourth session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) held in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, from 7 to 9 May 2007.

FAO Regional Office for the Near East.

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ABSTRACT

The fourth session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) was held in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, during the period 7 to 9 May 2007. It was attended by delegates from seven Members of the Commission and by observers from international, regional and national fishery bodies and institutions. The meeting was organized to evaluate the progress of intersessional activities relating to recommendations of earlier sessions, address regional fisheries and aquaculture issues of concern and review plans for short- and medium-term activities. The Commission endorsed the work plan of its Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA), stressed the importance of developing and implementing national plans of action to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU), fishing noted the increasing importance of fish food safety, and urged RECOFI Members and FAO to increase their efforts in improving fisheries information systems and methods of reporting of stock status in the region. In examining its role, responsibilities and future challenges, the Commission decided to expand its current Working Group on Statistics to a wider Working Group on Fisheries Management. Further, the Commission made recommendations concerning the organizational arrangements for its next session, agreed on its programme of work and adopted its budget for 2007–2008.

Distribution:

Participants in the session

RECOFI Mailing List

Other interested nations and international
organizations

FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department

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OPENING OF THE SESSION

1. The fourth session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) was called to order by the outgoing Chairperson, Mr Mohamad R. Al Sulaiti (Qatar).
2. The outgoing Chairperson invited the representative of the host country to open the session.
3. His Excellency, Mr Saad Bin Ibrahim Al Fayadh, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Agriculture (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia), welcomed all delegations and underlined the importance of the activities of RECOFI in the promotion of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture in the region. He wished the delegates all success in their deliberations.
4. Mr Ndiaga Gueye, Head of the FAO delegation delivered a speech on behalf of the Director General of the FAO, Dr Jacques Diouf, and conveyed his wishes for a successful meeting. He also transmitted the greetings of the Assistant Director-General, Mr Ichiro Nomura, Head of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Department at FAO.
5. The head of FAO delegation expressed his gratitude to the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi-Arabia for their hospitality and welcomed all participants and observers to the meeting, underlining the importance of their contribution to the success of RECOFI activities.
6. Mr Talal Lotfi Abou Shousha (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) was unanimously elected as Chairperson of the fourth session of the Commission. Bahrain and Oman were elected as Vice Chairpersons and Mr Seyed Aminollah Motlagh (Islamic Republic of Iran) as Rapporteur. The list of participants appears in Appendix B.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE SESSION

7. The Agenda of the session (RECOFI/2007/1) was adopted (Appendix A). The list of the session documents appears in Appendix C.

GENERAL DISCUSSION ON REGIONAL ISSUES OF CONCERN

8. The Chairperson invited participants to make presentations of summary statements emphasizing issues of common concern, such as status of major stocks, aquaculture activities, joint operations, current and envisaged fisheries management measures, and constraints currently encountered. Purpose of the presentations was to highlight fisheries sectors requiring cooperation among RECOFI countries and to stress the importance of research and studies at both national and regional levels.
9. The delegate from the Islamic Republic of Iran presented geographic and climatic charts, statistical time series and management measures, implemented or envisaged, for sustainable fishing. The basic elements of management measures were:
 - reliable statistical programmes for capture fisheries and aquaculture;
 - implementation of MCS by satellite for trawlers and purse seiners;

- management based on research activities such as fish stock assessment, fish ecology, population dynamics and fish biology, and different aspects of aquaculture;
- application of norms for all fishing methods;
- decreasing fleet size and regulating vessel replacement;
- closed seasons and areas;
- improved design of fishing gear to achieve increased selectivity;
- cooperation with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain for strengthening fisheries cooperation for protection and management of common fisheries resources.

10. Oman presented the status of major stocks, the status of aquaculture, a brief description of joint operations, general references to regional studies and research activities, issues relating to data harmonization, and national plans to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU. It also proposed the following issues to be addressed by RECOFI:

- proposal for regional management of shared stocks and highly migratory species;
- application of ecosystem approach in fisheries management;
- application of modern techniques, tools and instruments in fisheries monitoring for management purposes (e.g. GIS);
- harmonization of species classifications to facilitate exchange of data among RECOFI countries and the application of research studies;
- placing high emphasis on issues of fisheries development and management.

11. Kuwait made a presentation illustrating the overall state of fisheries, the typology of the fishing fleet and statistics on production from capture fisheries and aquaculture. Regarding conservation of resources, he presented the measures currently being implemented, namely:

- closure season for shrimp (since 1980);
- regulation of mesh size;
- banning of fishing in certain areas;
- prohibited use of certain gears and/or fishing methods;
- discontinuing issuance of new fishing licences (since 1985);
- reduction of fishing fleet (to 50% and up to 75%) for certain boat categories;
- canceling of licenses and compensation of owners.

12. Regarding measures of regional concern and impact, Kuwait believes that uncontrolled fishing activities by other country vessels in the international waters represent a new challenge to fisheries management, as these could result in serious repercussions on fin fish and shrimp stocks. Kuwait will assess the impact of these activities on its fisheries and pursue the matter in order to restrict such activities. Kuwait will also oversee the continued application of measures aiming at the protection of nursery grounds, monitoring of by catch, and restricting illegal fishing in its waters.

REVIEW OF INTERSESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

13. The Secretariat presented document RECOFI/IV/2007/2 describing intersessional activities.

14. General follow-up activities:

- national presentations as well as regional issues of concern were included in the Agenda of the Fourth Session;
- comprehensive financial budget report and financial statement were prepared by the RECOFI Secretariat.

15. Regarding the standing demand for a RECOFI biannual publication, the Secretariat informed that consultation with FAO Fishery Information Officers revealed that the current RECOFI web page would be suitable for accommodating a more dynamic information repository in the near future.

16. Follow-up activities relating to fisheries statistics included:

- a regional workshop on fisheries statistical development, held in Cairo in November 2006;
- further development of the RECOFI capture production database;
- inclusion in the Commission's Programme of Work for 2007–2008 of technical assistance activities involving field visits and regional studies;
- two meetings of the Working Group on Statistics (WGS) programmed for 2007 and 2008.

17. Aquaculture activities were:

- two meetings of the Working Group on Aquaculture [second WGA meeting (Muscat, Oman, 29–30 November 2005), third WGA meeting (Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 5–6 May 2007)];
- development of the Regional Aquaculture Information System (RAIS);
- progress on the funding of the “aquaculture legal and policy framework” project;
- participation in the preparation of technical guidelines for the control and responsible use of alien species in aquaculture;
- provision for discussions on marine stock enhancement and artificial reefs;
- preparation of National Aquaculture Sector Overviews (NASO's) for all RECOFI members and regional aquaculture review.

18. In the discussion that followed, several delegates observed that FAO ought to place more effort in assisting RECOFI countries to evaluate and improve the fisheries statistical programmes. Such assistance should include field missions aiming at closing existing data gaps and improving the performance of national data collection systems. It was generally recognized that without accurate knowledge of the exploitation status and trends of certain important species it would be difficult for countries to implement stock protection and/or enhancement measures. It was also understood that some countries ought to expand their range of data with the view of facilitating the formulation of exploitation and other useful indicators, which at present cannot be derived.

19. Harmonization of statistical data was also debated at some length. It was recognized that a satisfactory degree of regional comparability, particularly in species nomenclatures, ought to be reached by the RECOFI member countries and that this issue should be brought

forward at the next meeting of the RECOFI Working Group on Statistics (WGS). In this respect some countries expressed concern that such a harmonisation may interfere with the operations of their respective national systems and cause disruption to historical data and time series. At this point it was clarified that regional harmonisation does not require the introduction of a single statistical system but rather the establishment of logical links between national species and gear classifications with the view of making national fisheries statistics comparable at a commonly agreed level of detail. The Commission agreed that such issues should be regularly reviewed by the WGS.

20. The Islamic Republic of Iran generously offered to host the next WGS meeting.

21. Some countries expressed the view that the WGS's role and functions ought to be described more accurately. It was also proposed that the WGS role should be expanded to handle not only statistical but also evaluation, assessment and management aspects, particularly in the case of shared resources as originally envisaged when the Working Group was established. The need for accurate data was stressed as well as the importance of well-targeted assessment studies for threatened species.

22. The progress in the establishment of the Regional Aquaculture Information System (RAIS) was met with considerable interest and the Commission acknowledged the valuable contribution of Kuwait in sponsoring its development and hosting.

23. Stock enhancement and the use of artificial reefs, already discussed at earlier meetings, was debated at length. Some members observed that stock enhancement issues were not closely linked to the functions and mandate of the WGA, though recognizing that the Commission recommended the WGA to look into the issue. It was agreed that the WGA should take into consideration matters involving production of fingerlings for stock enhancement and collaborate with fishery experts that could be part of a proposed ad hoc Working Group on Stock Enhancement.

24. It was further noted that there are other means of enhancing production using conventional practices such as closed seasons and/or areas. The Commission welcomed the offer of Bahrain to host a working group meeting on this topic as well as the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran to organize a regional seminar to present the results and current findings from their national artificial reef programme.

25. With respect to artificial reefs, it was noted that the WGA did not have the opportunity to undertake a meeting as it has not been able to host suitable international experts. Earlier concerns were repeated as to whether artificial reefs increased fish production or merely concentrated it, as well as to the role of artificial reefs in protecting fry after release. The Commission recommended the WGA to examine the issue of artificial reefs as suitable nursery areas for releasing hatchery produced fingerlings of selected species of commercial interest in the region.

26. Regarding the introduction of exotic species, and acting upon the request of the Third RECOFI Session, the WGA addressed the risks from introduction of exotic species, and noted that their control is required even though some species had enabled commercial developments. Guidelines based on the recommendations of several organizations were noted and the WGA proposed precautionary approach procedures.

AQUACULTURE IN THE RECOFI AREA

27. The Secretariat, on behalf of the WGA Chairman, Mr Dawood Suleimann Al-Yahyai, Sultanate of Oman, presented the outcome and recommendations from the Third meeting of the WGA held from 5 to 6 May 2007 in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and invited the Commission to provide its views and comments on the activities, and to endorse the proposed work plan and budget. The summary report of this meeting was made available at the Session and is attached as Appendix E.

Regional Aquaculture Information System (RAIS)

28. The WGA commended the work of the Secretariat in the preparation of the first version of the Regional Aquaculture Information System (RAIS) and provided feedback to enable FAO to proceed with its further development. Also, the WGA agreed to make it possible for private companies to advertise on the RAIS website. Such opportunity would generate funds to support further development of the system and provide financing to information activities of regional interest, such as production statistics analysis, marketing studies, and regional aquaculture reviews.

29. The WGA acknowledged the generous contribution of US\$30 000 received from the Government of Kuwait as extra-budgetary funds for the development of the information system and for hosting the Regional Centre.

30. The Secretariat reported the future steps agreed by the WGA to finalize the information system by the end of 2007, which include web site development, establishment of the Regional and National Centres, training of the system administrators, preparation of the user manual and, official launching and promotion of the RAIS. The Commission endorsed the RAIS work plan and timeframe as presented.

Aquaculture legal and policy framework project proposal

31. With reference to the funding of the project proposal for “aquaculture legal and policy framework” it was recalled that the Commission, at its Third session (Doha, Qatar, 9–11 May 2005), requested the WGA to look for alternative funding sources for the project other than FAO. The Commission was also informed that the WGA further proposed at its Second meeting (Muscat, Oman, 29–30 November 2005), to explore the possibility for all RECOFI members to contribute to the project budget in equal parts.

32. At the Third WGA meeting the Focal Points of Bahrain, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates reported that their Governments had agreed to contribute to the budget. During the discussions that followed, the delegates of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kuwait and Oman confirmed that in principle they had no objection in contributing their share and indicated that they would officially inform the Secretariat of their position as soon as possible and not later than the end of August 2007. The Secretariat was also invited to send an official letter to the member countries requesting them to confirm their commitment in supporting the project and the date when the funds could be transferred to the RECOFI account. Due to the difficulty of securing the funding within the current financial year, the Commission acknowledged that the funds may only be available by April 2008.

33. The Secretariat recalled that the aquaculture legal and policy framework project document is available in Appendix H of the Report of the Second meeting of the WGA made available at the session as document RECOFI/IV/2007/Inf.8.

WGA work plan and budget proposal

34. The Commission was informed that the WGA discussed a number of aquaculture activities of regional importance and agreed to include the following as part of its proposed work plan to be endorsed by the Commission:

- *Regional strategy on aquatic animal health* – The following activities are proposed in order to initiate the process of developing a regional strategy: (i) assessment of institutional and human resource capacities on aquatic animal health at national level that will form the basis for a regional synthesis, and (ii) organization of a regional workshop to present the assessment synthesis, to undertake a brainstorming/inception exercise aimed at developing a further proposal in consideration of the assessment synthesis outcome and, a technical seminar as part of capacity building to raise awareness on the various issues and concepts concerning aquatic animal health management.
- *Regional workshop on sustainable marine cage aquaculture development* – This activity was endorsed in view of the growing importance of this aquaculture sub-sector across the region. The outputs of the workshop would include among others a regional status review of cage culture, policy guidelines and regulatory framework recommendations, standardized licensing procedures, site selection criteria, best management practices and a common Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) methodology.

35. The Commission endorsed a work plan of the WGA of the above two activities, along with the finalization of RAIS and the implementation of the aquaculture legal and policy framework project for the next inter-sessional period. In terms of budget the proposed two priority activities would be covered by the RECOFI regular budget. The Commission also acknowledged that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Oman will host the workshops on aquatic animal health and marine cage aquaculture, respectively.

36. The Commission finally acknowledged the excellent work done by the outgoing Chairman of the WGA, Mr Abdulredha J. Shams, and welcomed the nomination of Mr Dawood Suleiman Al-Yahyai as the new Chairman.

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL MEASURES TO ADDRESS IUU FISHING

37. The Secretariat introduced Document RECOFI/IV/2007/4. It recalled the main outcomes of the discussions on the ways and means of combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing during the twenty-seventh session of the Committee on Fisheries of FAO.

38. The Commission commended the Secretariat for highlighting the need of addressing IUU in the RECOFI area. It reviewed the nature and scope of IUU fishing and its implication in the region.

39. The smaller-scale nature of the fleet in most of the member countries was noted and that, were problems to occur, they would be of a transboundary rather than straddling nature.

40. Several Members noted the apparent emphasis of the plan for countries bordering high-seas areas – which was not the case for most Members of the Commission. Most Member countries would have target fleets of small vessels, fishing on the order of a few kilometres and there were several questions as to the availability of appropriate technology for the monitoring of small vessels and what technological and financial constraints may exist.

41. The Commission stressed the importance of developing and implementing National Plans of Action to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU and two member countries, namely the Islamic Republic of Iran and Oman, reported having NPOAs for IUU. Oman thanked FAO for the support provided for the elaboration of its NPOA.

42. The Commission took note of the outcomes of the FAO regional workshop on the elaboration of NPOA-IUU in the Near East region held in Cairo in December 2005 (RECOFI/IV/Inf.10). Given that due to budgetary and logistical constraints it was not possible invite all countries of the Near East to the Cairo workshop, the Commission requested the FAO to consider the possibility of organizing a workshop for all its members.

43. The Commission noted the low percentage of acceptance by its members of certain international instruments that are important for the fisheries governance and a tool to improve enforcement globally. It urged all members, who have not done it yet, to ratify or accept these instruments.

GUIDELINES FOR REPORTING STOCK STATUS

44. The Secretariat presented document RECOFI/IV/2007/5 containing guidelines and descriptions on data to be collected and analyzed for formulating indicators on the status of fish stocks exploited in the RECOFI area. Two types of reporting formats were suggested: (i) A table summarizing fish stock status and, (ii) a table describing detailed stock assessment indicators. The principle in proposing the above reporting scheme was that RECOFI countries should regularly report to the Commission stock status information in a comprehensive and standard format.

45. During the discussion some countries expressed concern as to their capability to fully implement the proposed format and level of detail. It was suggested that it would be more realistic for such reporting to be undertaken at a more general level, at least during the initial stage. There was a general agreement that though the reporting format was simple and well-conceived, reporting procedures would involve lengthy, and at times difficult, studies at species level, an undertaking that not all members would be able to achieve.

46. It was generally agreed that the proposed reporting formats contained technical issues that should better be analysed by a more technical group, such as the WGS, and it was suggested that reporting of stock status by Commission countries be further evaluated at the following meeting of the WGS.

47. During the discussion the Secretariat informed the Commission that the database for the 1977 trawl survey was available on request. This would provide a basis for comparing changes in fish biomass that have occurred since then.

REPORT ON THE REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON FOOD SAFETY

48. The Secretariat gave a brief account of the proceedings and major outcomes of the regional workshop on food safety that was held in Abbassa, Egypt, 15–19 April 2007. The workshop was organized jointly by the FAO Regional Office for the Near East and the WorldFish Center. It was attended by participants from 18 countries, including all RECOFI countries. The purpose of the workshop was to provide useful and updated information on quality and safety of fish and fish products.

49. The Commission noted with satisfaction the organization of this regional activity that combined training with discussions and exchange of views and experiences among the participants. It was pointed out that such meetings are particularly useful in this period of increased public concern on health issues related to food in general and fish and fish products in particular. In the RECOFI region compliance with norms and standards that have been set-up by major importers has become a highly important issue with direct implications to the international trade of its members. In this respect it was suggested that more specialized courses on fish food safety should be organized in the region with the purpose of enhancing the technical capacity of those working in the various fields of fish handling, processing and trade.

50. It was generally recognized that in considering follow-up training activities in fish food safety, attention should mainly focus on quality rather than traceability aspects, given that the latter (mostly related to high seas fishing), does not constitute a major problem in the region. However, there was also a view that traceability would at times be important also in local markets that trade fish from small-scale fisheries. At this point it was suggested that the issue of traceability be examined through contacts with the expert groups concerned.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNICATIONS AND NETWORKS IN THE SECTOR OF FISH MARKETING AND TRADE

51. This Agenda sub-item stemmed from a recommendation of the twenty-eighth Near East Regional Conference (NERC – March 2006), by which all countries of the Near East are encouraged to promote the use of currently available mechanisms and instruments that facilitate the dissemination of information. Near East countries will be invited to provide feedback concerning the extent of use of such mechanisms and indicate areas in which improvements are needed.

52. As a first approach to meet the above request the Secretariat invited INFOSAMAK to attend the 4th Session of RECOFI and provided member countries with information material and guidelines relating to INFOSAMAK's role and functions in the region. The Commission expressed its appreciation for the valuable contribution of INFOSAMAK and noted the increasing importance of communications and information networks in the sector of fish marketing and trade.

REPORT ON THE REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON FISHERIES STATISTICS

53. The Secretariat presented document RECOFI/IV/2007/6 that summarized the proceedings of the regional workshop on statistics held in Cairo, Egypt, from 20 to 22 November 2006, which was attended by most RECOFI Members.

54. In the discussion that followed it was recognized that accuracy in sample-based fisheries systems is of major importance as it affects interpretation of estimators used in fisheries assessment and management.

55. It was also suggested that further effort should be undertaken by member countries to improve the cost-effectiveness and reliability of their statistical programmes. In this respect use should be made of reference material and expertise available from the FAO.

56. Regarding issues relating to harmonization of national data for establishing regional statistical data sets, it was noted that this would mainly concern species naming practices and classification practices of boat types and fishing gears.

57. The finding of the workshop that best use should be made of available statistics was endorsed by the Commission. The need for systems, such as GIS, to disseminate data was also emphasized.

58. The Secretariat gave a presentation that illustrated the functions of a statistical system (RECOFI SAMAC) to handle catch and effort sample data for use by RECOFI countries. This system would allow countries, where appropriate, to improve data handling or to cross check existing applications.

REPORT ON THE RECOFI CAPTURE PRODUCTION DATABASE

59. The Secretariat presented the RECOFI capture production database which in its April 2007 release was updated with 2005 catch data. CD-ROMs containing software and data were distributed. The database contains catch time series organized by country, species and the RECOFI sub-areas 51.2.0–51.3.1. A brief summary document prepared by the Fishery Information, Data and Statistics Unit (FIES) was circulated to provide participants with tabular data and illustrated catch trends.

60. The database and the accompanying Fishstat+ software can provide users with powerful and flexible data management and reporting functions and it was suggested that guidelines for its effective use be a subject of the next WGS meeting. It was also noted that the utility of the database should much be increased if catch data were combined with fishing effort to enable formulation of trends of CPUs and other exploitation indicators.

61. In a discussion of the data it was noted that the sub-areas 51.2.0–51.3.1 show inverse trends in reported landings with a much higher reported catch of tuna-like species from the Gulf of Oman. Some countries expressed some concern regarding the disaggregation of the data and it was acknowledged that further work remains to be done in this regard.

REBUILDING AND REHABILITATING OF FISHERIES INFRASTRUCTURE AND INSTITUTIONS IN IRAQ

62. The Secretariat introduced this agenda item and gave some background information on the matter. In this respect, the Secretariat stated that the twenty-eighth Near East Regional Conference (NERC – March 2006) had called upon FAO to encourage RECOFI countries to promote measures for rebuilding and rehabilitating the fisheries infrastructure and institutions in Iraq.

63. The Commission expressed its support to all efforts taken to rebuild and rehabilitate the fisheries institutions in Iraq and regretted in this respect the absence of the Iraqi delegation from this Session.

64. The Commission hoped that Iraq will resume participating at the future sessions of RECOFI and stressed that it would welcome further information from Iraq on the most immediate needs concerning the efforts taken to rebuild and rehabilitate its fisheries institutions.

STRATEGIC ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FOR RECOFI

65. The Secretariat presented document RECOFI/IV/2007/7 containing principal issues relating to the role of RECOFI and its future. The presentation highlighted the importance and *raison d'être* of the Commission, addressed current and future challenges, and pointed out short- and medium-term activities that would strengthen its impact on the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in the region. The presentation was concluded by inviting the Commission to comment on the analysis made, review the suggestions presented, examine the current Status and Rules of procedures and, provide guidance to member countries and FAO on how to improve its efficiency and effectiveness.

66. The meeting expressed its appreciation for the quality and relevance of the document which brought forward highly important issues concerning the Commission's very role in the region. It was recognized that a number of reflections and actions were necessary in order to improve the Commission's performance and relevance.

67. A number of standing problems were identified that negatively affect the Commission's functions, such as: (i) continuing absence of an active RECOFI Secretary; (ii) insufficient public awareness of its role and activities; (iii) limited funding; (iv) lack of strong commitment on the part of member countries; (v) few projects being formulated combined with slow implementation and, (vi) limited scope of the functions of WGS.

68. On the other hand several positive remarks were made concerning the establishment of RECOFI and its unique role in the region, the successful formulation and implementation of projects despite serious and chronic budget limitations, and the indication of its gaining momentum in addressing important issues of capture fisheries and aquaculture in the region.

69. The meeting noted with interest the proposal made by the Secretariat for the establishment of a RECOFI Scientific Committee and the formulation of Working Groups according to regional needs (e.g. for aquaculture, fisheries management, statistics, etc.). It was recognized; however, that prior to embarking on drastic re-structuring actions the Commission would first attempt to strengthen the scope, role, and functions of the existing WGS which in the future would operate under a more appropriate name. In this respect the Commission recommended that a meeting be organized by FAO in the near future with the purpose of setting-up the new role, functions and title of the current WGS. The Commission agreed to change the name of the Working Group to Working Group on Fisheries Management.

70. The meeting noted with satisfaction the assurance by FAO that the position of the RECOFI Secretary would be filled soon and that much attention will be given for expediting the distribution of working documents for the Commission's future sessions.

PROGRAMME OF WORK AND BUDGET FOR 2007–2008

71. The Secretariat presented document RECOFI/IV/2007/8 with the purpose of providing the Commission with a plan of intersessional activities for 2007 and 2008, including budget allocations and intended expenditures for this period. The Commission was invited to review the proposal and provide guidance for its implementation.

72. The Commission approved the allocation of US\$90 000 for 2007 and US\$70 000 for 2008, leaving an opening balance of US\$33 226 for 2009. Considering the standard salary costs for RECOFI secretarial assistance (US\$20 000 per annum), this would provide RECOFI with operational funds of US\$120 000 to be spent on technical assistance activities during 2007 and 2008.

73. Regarding the 2nd and 3rd meetings of the Working Group on Statistics (WGS), planned for 2007 and 2008 respectively, the Commission decided that such meetings should not be programmed at this stage, on the ground that the working group should first be re-structured in line with the suggestion concerning its title, role and functions. The Commission further recommended that a meeting be organized by the Secretariat in the near future with the purpose of preparing concrete proposals for the Working Group's new structure, role, functions and title.

74. With respect to inter-sessional activities for 2007 and 2008, the Commission endorsed the implementation of outstanding activities previously recommended by the Commission and those stemming from the fresh proposals made by the third meeting of the Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA). In this respect the Secretariat clarified that there was no present budget limit by category of activities (aquaculture, fisheries, management, statistics, etc.), and that all activities would operate within the total budget available.

ANY OTHER MATTERS

75. The Secretariat informed the Commission that a new Senior Fisheries Officer will be posted very soon in the FAO Regional Office for the Near East and will act as Secretary of RECOFI. The Commission acknowledged the job of Mr Abdullah Mohammad Saif, former secretary. It expressed its sincere gratitude and thanks to him for the contribution given throughout his term.

76. A summary report listing the decisions and recommendations was prepared and distributed to all delegates and is attached as Appendix D.

DATE AND VENUE OF THE FIFTH SESSION

77. The Commission agreed to hold the fifth session of RECOFI in the United Arab Emirates during the second week of May 2009. The United Arab Emirates will confirm the place of the next session in due time.

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

78. The report was adopted on Wednesday 9 May 2007.

Agenda

1. Opening of the session
2. Adoption of the agenda and arrangements for the session
3. General discussion on regional issues of concern
4. Review of intersessional activities
5. Aquaculture in the RECOFI area
6. National and regional measures to address IUU fishing
7. Guidelines for reporting stock status
8. Report on the Regional Workshop on Food Safety
9. Strengthening communications and networks in the sector of fish marketing and trade
10. Report on the Regional Workshop on Fisheries Statistics
11. Report on the RECOFI capture production database
12. Rebuilding and rehabilitating of fisheries infrastructure and institutions in Iraq
13. Strategic issues and challenges for RECOFI
14. Programme of work and budget for 2007–2008
15. Any other matters
16. Date and venue of the fifth session
17. Adoption of the report

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RECOFI/IV/2007/Inf. 11	Regional review on aquaculture development. 2. Near East and North Africa – 2005. FAO Fisheries Circular No.1017/2

Decisions and recommendations

REVIEW OF INTERSESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

1. The Commission *observed* that FAO ought to place more effort in assisting RECOFI countries to evaluate and improve their fisheries statistical programmes.
2. The Commission *agreed* that harmonisation of statistical data should be regularly reviewed by the WGS and welcomed the generous offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran to host the next WGS meeting.
3. The view was expressed that the WGS's role and functions ought to be described more accurately. It was *recommended* that the WGS role should be expanded to handle not only statistical but also evaluation, assessment and management aspects, particularly in the case of shared resources, as originally envisaged when the Working Group was established
4. The Commission *agreed* that the WGA should take into consideration matters involving production of fingerlings for stock enhancement and collaborate with fishery experts that could be part of a proposed ad hoc Working Group on Stock Enhancement.
5. The Commission *welcomed* the offer of Bahrain to host a working group meeting on this topic as well as the Islamic Republic of Iran to organize a regional seminar to present the results and current findings from their national artificial reef programme.
6. The Commission *recommended* the WGA to examine the issue of artificial reefs as suitable nursery areas for releasing hatchery-produced fingerlings of selected species of commercial interest in the region.

AQUACULTURE IN THE RECOFI AREA

Regional Aquaculture Information System (RAIS)

7. The Commission *endorsed* the decision of the WGA to make it possible for private companies to advertise on the RAIS website in order to generate funds to support further development of the system, as well as to finance information activities of regional interest such as production statistics analysis, marketing studies, and regional aquaculture reviews.
8. The Commission *endorsed* the RAIS work plan and timeframe as presented.

Aquaculture legal and policy framework project proposal

9. The Secretariat *was requested* to send an official letter to the Member countries requesting confirmation of their commitment to support the project and of the date when the funds could be transferred to the RECOFI account. Due to the difficulty of securing the funding within the current financial year, the Commission *acknowledged* that the funds may only be available by April 2008.

WGA work plan and budget proposal

10. The Commission *endorsed* the work plan of the WGA on Regional Strategy on aquatic animal health and regional workshop on sustainable marine cage aquaculture development, along with the finalization of RAIS and the implementation of the aquaculture legal and policy framework project for the next intersessional period.

11. The Commission *acknowledged* the excellent work done by the outgoing Chairman of the WGA, Mr Abdulredha J. Shams, and *welcomed* the nomination of Mr Dawood Suleiman Al-Yahyai as the new Chairman.

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL MEASURES TO ADDRESS IUU FISHING

12. The Commission *stressed* the importance of developing and implementing National Plans of Action to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing.

13. The Commission took note of the outcomes of the FAO regional workshop on the elaboration of NPOA-IUU in the Near East region held in Cairo in December 2005 (RECOFI/IV/Inf.10) and *requested* FAO to consider the possibility of organizing a workshop for all its members.

14. The Commission *noted* the low percentage of acceptance by its members of certain international instruments that are important for the fisheries governance and *urged* all members, who have not done it yet, to ratify or accept these instruments.

GUIDELINES FOR REPORTING STOCK STATUS

15. The Commission *agreed* that the proposed reporting formats contained technical issues that should better be analysed by a more technical group, such as the WGS, and *suggested* that reporting of stock status by Commission countries be further evaluated at the following meeting of the WGS.

REPORT ON THE REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON FOOD SAFETY

16. The Commission *suggested* that more specialized courses on fish food safety should be organized in the region with the purpose of enhancing the technical capacity of those working in the various fields of fish handling, processing and trade.

17. The Commission *noted* the increasing importance of traceability and *suggested* that this issue be examined through contacts with the expert groups concerned.

REPORT ON THE REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON FISHERIES STATISTICS IN ABBASSA, EGYPT, 20–22 NOVEMBER 2006

18. The Commission *suggested* that further effort should be undertaken by Member countries to improve the cost-effectiveness and reliability of their statistical programmes. In this respect use should be made of reference material and expertise available from the FAO.

19. Regarding issues relating to harmonization of national data for establishing regional statistical data sets, the Commission *agreed* that this would mainly concern species naming practices and classification practices of boat types and fishing gears.

20. The Commission *endorsed* the finding of the workshop that best use should be made of available statistics.

REPORT ON THE RECOFI CAPTURE PRODUCTION DATABASE

21. The Commission *suggested* that guidelines for the effective use of FishStat Plus software be a subject of the next WGS meeting.

REBUILDING AND REHABILITATING OF FISHERIES INFRASTRUCTURE AND INSTITUTIONS IN IRAQ

22. The Commission *expressed* its support to all efforts taken to rebuild and rehabilitate the fisheries institutions in Iraq.

STRATEGIC ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FOR RECOFI

23. The Commission *recommended* that a meeting be organized by FAO in the near future with the purpose of setting-up the new role, functions, work programme and terms of reference of the current WGS. The Commission *agreed* to change the name of the Working Group on Statistics to Working Group on Fisheries Management. It was however agreed that the new WG should maintain its statistical role and functions.

PROGRAMME OF WORK AND BUDGET FOR 2007–2008

24. The Commission *approved* the allocation of US\$90 000 for 2007 and US\$70 000 for 2008, leaving an opening balance of US\$33 226 for 2009.

25. Regarding the third meeting of the Working Group on Statistics (WGS), planned for 2008, the Commission *decided* that the meeting should not be programmed at this stage, on the grounds that the working group should first be re-structured in line with the suggestion concerning its title, role, functions, work programme and terms of reference.

26. The Commission *endorsed* the implementation of outstanding activities during the inter-sessional period for 2007 and 2008 as previously recommended by the Commission and those stemming from the fresh proposals made by the 3rd meeting of the Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA).

DATE AND VENUE OF THE FOURTH SESSION

27. The Commission *agreed* to hold the fifth session of RECOFI in the United Arab Emirates during the second week of May 2009. The United Arab Emirates will confirm the place of the next session in due time.

Outcomes and recommendations of the third meeting of the Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA)

Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 7–9 May 2007

Introduction

The Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA) National Focal Points (FPs) held their third meeting in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, from 5 to 6 May 2007. During this meeting the participants provided and exchanged information on the status, current constraints and development opportunities in the aquaculture sector. The FPs deliberated on the recommendations of the last Commission session and discussed activity achievements and the programme of work for the next intersessional period.

Regional Aquaculture Information System (RAIS)

1. The WGA National Focal Points fully endorsed the work so far achieved by the FAO Secretariat in the preparation of the first version of the Regional Aquaculture Information System (RAIS).
2. The FPs acknowledged with thanks the contribution of US\$30 000 received from the Government of Kuwait as extrabudgetary funds for the development of the RAIS and the future hosting of the system (RAIS Regional Centre).
3. Feedback on the information system was received and changes were proposed to improve the system layout and functionalities in order to better respond to national and regional requirements.
4. The WGA agreed to enable private companies to advertise on the RAIS site and to use the funds generated to support further development of the system as well as to finance information activities of regional interest such as production statistics analysis, marketing studies, regional aquaculture reviews, etc.
5. The WGA agreed on the next steps that would lead to the finalization of the RAIS including activities and timeframes as indicated below:
 - Submission from all the FPs of the initial information required to feed the system - End May 2007.
 - Secretariat to finalize the first version of RAIS and send the Internet address to the FPs – End June 2007.
 - FPs to review and comment the website and its contents – Mid-July 2007.
 - Secretariat to finalize the RAIS web site and production of the user manual – End July 2007.
 - The RAIS Regional and National Centres established following previous receipt from the Secretariat of minimum technical requirements to be sent by the end of May – End July 2007.
 - Terms of Reference of the RAIS Regional and National administrators prepared and made available to the FPs – End June 2007.

- Handing over of the RAIS to the Regional Centre in Kuwait and training of the FPs and Regional Centre staff – Early September or second half of October 2007.
- Official launching of RAIS and promotional strategy to be decided in Kuwait during the handing over of the system – Early September or second half of October 2007.

Aquaculture legal and policy framework project proposal

6. The FPs of four RECOFI Member countries (Bahrain, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates) reported that their Governments agreed to contribute to the budget of the regional project.

7. The FPs of Oman and Kuwait reported that their authorities had yet to take a decision on the matter, but would most likely express their position during the forthcoming RECOFI session (Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 7–9 May 2007).

8. In the absent of the FP from the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Secretariat informed that no official communication had been received regarding the matter and that follow-up would be necessary.

9. Should all the RECOFI Member countries agree during its Fourth Commission session to contribute in equal amounts to the project budget, the FPs recommended that the funds be transferred at the earliest and preferably not later than end of July 2007.

10. Receipt of the project funds would enable the Secretariat to activate the project, update the work plan and, start identifying and recruiting the envisaged project experts.

WGA work plan and budget proposal

11. The WGA discussed a number of aquaculture activities of regional importance and agreed to include the following as part of its proposed work plan to be endorsed by the Commission:

- *Regional strategy on aquatic animal health* – The following activities are proposed in order to initiate the process of developing a regional strategy: (i) assessment of institutional and human resource capacities on aquatic animal health at national level which will form the basis for a regional synthesis, and (ii) organization of a regional workshop to present the assessment synthesis, to undertake a brainstorming/inception exercise aimed at developing a further proposal in consideration of the assessment synthesis outcome and, a technical seminar as part of capacity building to raise awareness on the various issues and concepts concerning aquatic animal health management.
- *Regional workshop on sustainable marine cage aquaculture development* – The following activity was endorsed by the WGA in view of the growing importance of this aquaculture sub-sector across the region. The outputs of the workshop would include among others a regional status review of cage culture, policy guidelines and regulatory framework recommendations, standardized licensing procedures, site selection criteria, best management practices and a common Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) methodology.

12. The WGA agreed that the above two activities, along with the finalization of the RAIS and the implementation of the aquaculture legal and policy framework project would constitute the proposed work plan of the WGA for the next intersessional period.

13. In terms of budget requirements the proposed two priority activities (excluding the RAIS and the aquaculture legal project) could be covered by the RECOFI regular budget. The FPs further agreed that the countries hosting the workshops on aquatic animal health and marine cage aquaculture could be the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Oman, respectively.

14. The WGA discussed the proposals of the two regional workshops on marine stock enhancement and artificial reefs as instructed by the Commission during its third session (Doha, Qatar, 9–11 May 2005) and a number of other important issues related to regional aquaculture development and agreed, in view of the limited budget available, not to include such activities in the current work plan unless additional funds are made available.

Nomination of the WGA Chairman

15. The meeting participants nominated the FP of Oman, Mr Dawood Suleiman Al-Yahyai, as the new WGA Chairman and unanimously acknowledged the excellent work carried by the outgoing Chairman, Mr Abdulredha J. Shams, in launching the WGA.

The fourth session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) was held in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, during the period 7 to 9 May 2007. It was attended by delegates from seven Members of the Commission and by observers from international, regional and national fishery bodies and institutions. The meeting was organized to evaluate the progress of intersessional activities relating to recommendations of earlier sessions, address regional fisheries and aquaculture issues of concern and review plans for short and medium-term activities. The Commission endorsed the work plan of its Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA), stressed the importance of developing and implementing national plans of action to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU), noted the increasing importance of fish food safety, and urged RECOFI Members and FAO to increase their efforts in improving fisheries information systems and methods of reporting of stock status in the region. In examining its role, responsibilities and future challenges, the Commission decided to expand its current Working Group on Statistics to a wider Working Group on Fisheries Management. Further, the Commission made recommendations concerning the organizational arrangements for its next session, agreed on its programme of work and adopted its budget for 2007–2008.

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