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## ASIA-PACIFIC FISHERY COMMISSION

### Thirty-sixth Session

[Virtual] Thailand, 5-7 May 2021

### Overview and report of the APFIC Regional Technical Webinars

1. APFIC acts as a Regional Consultative Forum that works in partnership with other regional organizations and arrangements and members. It provides advice, coordinates activities and acts as an information broker to increase knowledge of fisheries and aquaculture in the Asia Pacific region to underpin decision making.
2. The biennial session of the Commission is preceded by the Regional Consultative Forum Meeting (RCFM) whereby member countries and regional partners discuss regional issues and propose approaches to address opportunities and concerns through the APFIC process. The outcomes and recommendations of the RCFM are forwarded to the Commission for deliberation and endorsement.
3. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a particular impact on the work of APFIC during 2020, preventing the convening of the Session and RCFM and the regional consultative workshops that form a major part of the Commission's workplan.
4. In place of the eighth APFIC Regional Consultative Forum Meeting (8th RCFM), APFIC Secretariat convened a series of technical webinars using a virtual format.
5. The APFIC webinar series was the APFIC Secretariat's effort to restart the activities of the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission in the context of post-COVID new-normal of virtual events, webinars and workshops. The APFIC Secretariat developed a series of webinars, based on the work programme and the priorities of APFIC, as a replacement for the traditional face to face Regional Consultative Forum Meeting that could not be convened in 2020.
6. The webinar series commenced end of January 2021 and largely take place prior to the virtual 36th APFIC Session.
7. The APFIC webinar series have covered the following themes:
  - Inland fisheries connectivity, irrigation and water management
  - Review of illegal fishing in APFIC region
  - Antimicrobial resistance is simple to understand, yet it is often misunderstood
  - Multispecies Stock assessment for management
  - Pushing the frontier of aquaculture development with innovation
  - Subsidies and the Current Negotiations at the WTO
  - Information and communication technologies for small-scale fisheries (ICT4SSF)

- Characteristics and performance of co-management in Asia
8. The themes, presented and short summaries of each webinar are presented in APFIC/21/INF6.

### **ADVANTAGES OF THE VIRTUAL WEBINARS**

9. The principal advantage of the APFIC webinars was that the virtual format allowed a much broader participation in the knowledge sharing opportunity. APFIC Member countries were contact formally, to disseminate the schedule with staff and stakeholders in their respective countries. APFIC and INFOFISH also undertook to disseminate and publicize the webinars through technical networks.
10. The modality enables the typical number of participants at the RCFM (around 50-75) to be substantially increased to between 150-350, per thematic session. The participation of researchers, civil society organizations and private sector was also notable.
11. An associate aspect of the broad participation is that this is achieved at low cost. The costs to convene the webinars are primarily related to the organizations of technology and webinar facilitation. There are no travel costs and presenter provided their input on a voluntary basis.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE VIRTUAL WEBINARS**

12. The virtual format is an excellent way to showcase work that has been completed, and disseminate the findings and recommendations.
13. A major limitation of increasing the number of participants, is that there is no practical scope of verbal questions and answers. Selected written questions were answered by the presenters and some were addressed in plenary.
14. The large number of participants also prevents viable workshop formats and breakout groups and thus the canvassing of opinion and recommendations. Thus there is only limited specific feedback to the Commission, based on the outcomes of the webinars.
15. The virtual format also tends to be shorter than a normal workshop, although each webinar lasted for between 2.5 – 3.5 hours, which is longer than an equivalent technical session as the APFIC RCFM.
16. Whilst many presenters are willing to provide their input at no-cost, this situations of attracting volunteers is somewhat unpredictable. The authors of studies or work commission by the Commission would normally be expected to provide this type of dissemination as part of their contract and it is typically include in the terms of reference.
17. With the increasing amounts of professional personal time being requested as inputs to this type of online event, it may be that presenters become far more selective with what they will support at no cost and APFIC will find it increasingly challenging to attract presenters.
18. The webinar format can be adapted to workshop format with a limited number of participants (as would occur with an APFIC workshop.) The primary limitation of this format compared with a physical workshop, is that sessions can take place all day and breakout groups tend to be more challenging to organize, and the typical workshop participation tools such as notecards and whiteboards cannot be used.

### **SUGGESTED ACTION BY THE COMMISSION**

19. The Commission is invited to comment on whether the APFIC technical webinar format should be continued, as a means to maximize participation, even though it is less viable as a means of eliciting feedback.
20. Based on the lessons learned of the webinars, the Commission may reflect on the potential for APFIC virtual workshops as a partial or complete replacement for APFIC physical events, providing the relevant formalities regarding invitations and procedure are observed.