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ELECTRONIC OPTIONS FOR MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FAO CODE OF CONDUCT FOR RESPONSIBLE FISHERIES

1. Every two years, FAO Members, regional fisheries bodies (RFBs) and civil society are asked to complete a self-assessment questionnaire on the implementation of the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (the Code). Information collected from the questionnaires is consolidated and a report is presented to the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI), for consideration and action, as appropriate.
2. Currently, the biennial survey questionnaire is distributed in the form of an MS Word document. FAO sends the questionnaire by e-mail. Respondents are requested to complete the questionnaire either electronically or in hand-written format and return it to FAO by a set date. While many of the returns are in electronic MS Word format, some are completed by hand and sent back by either fax or through the postal service.
3. To facilitate the analysis of information contained in questionnaires, individual responses are manually inputted into an MS Excel spreadsheet. This step is done for questionnaires returned as MS Word files as well as those filled in by hand. A report summarizing the results of the survey presents aggregated information.
4. The purpose of this circular¹ is to provide an assessment of the technical practicability, advantages, constraints and cost of using electronic reporting as part of the biennial reporting on the Code. In this context, electronic reporting is defined as conducting a survey (questionnaire) electronically in a format that enables statistical analysis and reports to be generated without re-

¹ Bueno, P, Hosch, G. and P. Macgillivray. 2009. Electronic Options for Monitoring Implementation of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. FAO Fisheries Circular NoXXX. Rome, FAO (In preparation).

entering the survey information manually. Two types of electronic reporting are investigated -- spreadsheet-based surveys and web-based surveys.

5. This project was initiated by FAO based on an interest in exploring cost-effective options for collecting and analyzing information on Code implementation, taking full advantage of electronic technology. In conducting this work, it is understood that the biennial questionnaire will continue to be based on self-assessment and that FAO Members, RFBs and civil society will continue to have the option of reporting in the current paper format. Accordingly, the option of electronic reporting as part of the biennial survey on Code implementation should be viewed as complementing the current reporting approach rather than as replacing it.

6. Our findings and recommendations are presented below:

- Consistent with recent COFI direction, the main tool used to monitor implementation of the Code is and should remain a biennial survey.
- There are three inter-related elements associated with conducting such a survey: (a) overall planning and questionnaire design; (b) information gathering; and, (c) analysis and reporting.
- As specified in the terms of reference for this project, we have dedicated most of our effort to the information gathering element. However, we provide some observations on the other two elements as well.
- There are potential benefits associated with allowing electronic reporting, in particular, improving data quality, automating data analysis and generating statistical reports automatically.
- At this time, providing the option of spreadsheet-based reporting has clear advantages over the web-based approach. The latter is considered not practical at this stage. MS Excel provides the spreadsheet best-suited for use by the majority of FAO members. Over time, as technology evolves and access to the internet improves, many of the constraints associated with web-based surveys may be addressed.

7. The following specific recommendations are presented to address issues related to information gathering, analysis and reporting, and questionnaire design.

Recommendation 1: Respondents to the biennial survey on Code implementation should have the option of reporting in either the current format or in an electronic format that enables returns to be analyzed without being re-entered manually. A proposal to enable this enhancement of the current survey should be developed by FAO for consideration by COFI.

Recommendation 2: The proposed electronic survey option should be made available on a voluntary basis using MS Excel.

Recommendation 3: The proposed electronic survey option should be pre-tested with at least five FAO Members before being introduced. This will allow potential problems to be identified and adjustments made, where warranted.

Recommendation 4: The user-interface in the electronic survey option should contain an introductory page that identifies the specific thematic areas of the questionnaire (*e.g.*, aquaculture,

fisheries management, trade, etc.) and allows a respondent to go directly to questions related to each theme.

Recommendation 5: A set of instructions and guidelines should be developed to make the task of completing the questionnaire as easy as possible, thereby encouraging greater participation in the survey. This information could include sharing “best practices” used by respondents (*e.g.* identifying a person to coordinate responses with inputs from several subject experts).

Recommendation 6: Consider the use of incentives to boost the rate of FAO Member responses to the survey and ensure regular follow-up by FAO field representatives during the reporting period to encourage FAO Members to respond within the stated deadline.

Recommendation 7: Before the proposed electronic survey option is made available, the system for data input, storage and automated analysis must be built, using the pre-tested version described in Recommendation 3. This will allow the standardized set of summary tables currently attached to the biennial report to COFI to be generated automatically.

Recommendation 8: Provide feedback to respondents, through an automated and customized country report containing graphs and tables showing the country’s situation relative to the regional and global situations. These individual FAO Members situation reports would remain confidential. This would become feasible if an electronic reporting and analysis system, designed to undertake this task, was introduced, and may help increase the response rate.

Recommendation 9: Future reports on Code implementation should continue to focus on progress in the previous biennium but should also include trend analysis, where appropriate and useful.

Recommendation 10: In light of Code monitoring activities currently being undertaken within the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture and the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade, a strategy should be developed by FAO to coordinate these information-gathering initiatives and avoid duplication with the biennial survey.

Recommendation 11: If changes are to be made to the biennial questionnaire, these should precede the introduction of an electronic reporting option.