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REGIONAL FISHERY BODIES ESTABLISHED WITHIN THE FAO FRAMEWORK

Executive Summary

This information paper provides an overview of developments and work implemented during the last four years by regional fisheries bodies established under article VI and XIV of the FAO Constitution. Based on comments raised by Members during the Thirty-first Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in 2014, this paper includes an introduction on the subject, a presentation of the main differences between RFBs according to their constitutive instruments, and reported information on related work, grouped according to their geographical area of competence.

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I. Introduction

1. FAO Regional fishery bodies (hereinafter referred to as 'RFBs' or 'Regional fishery bodies') are established under article VI and XIV of the FAO Constitution. Statutory bodies under article VI act as advisory bodies to their member states (hereinafter referred to as 'members' or 'member states') and, in general, depend on funding from the FAO; while those under article XIV are entitled to adopt regulatory and binding measures to their members and 'may have autonomous budgets'. These bodies are called 'Regional Fisheries Managements Organizations' (hereinafter referred to as 'RFMOs'), and their respective conventions or agreements provide obligations beyond those set out in the FAO Constitution and other Basic Texts. RFBs are a relevant regional or sub-regional mechanism through which states work together to ensure the long-term sustainability of shared fishery resources.
2. At the Thirty-first Session of the Committee on Fisheries in 2014, transparency, accountability, and related performance reviews were aspects highlighted when Members referred to RFBs. The need to present these bodies by differentiating them according to their mandate, as well as the geographical area of competence, was raised, proposing that their activities should be organized by sub-region and consider similarities, challenges and development that they are confronting.
3. Performance reviews are important tools for improving the operational work of these bodies and were carried out by several FAO RFBs. In particular, seven of the eleven FAO statutory bodies undertook this evaluation process. In general, the recommendations made in performance reviews have provided good guidance to the modernization of conventions or agreements, to address weaknesses and to make organizations more effective.
4. This information paper does not aim to provide a thorough overview of the work of FAO RFBs, it is meant to report on main current processes and related challenges these bodies face to fulfil their mandate.

II. FAO Regional Fishery Bodies, including Regional Fishery Management Organizations

5. The Regional fishery bodies established under the provisions of Article VI and Article XIV of the FAO Constitution are currently total eleven in number.

A. Regional Fishery Bodies under Article VI of the FAO Constitution.

6. RFBs established under Article VI are entrusted with drawing-up recommendations and advice for FAO Governing Bodies and the individual members and, in general, they operate with funding from the FAO Regular Programme to support core activities. They are created by a decision of the Conference, the Council, or by the Director-General under the authority of the Conference or Council.
7. FAO resources to support Article VI bodies are dedicated to different operational matters, from secretariat and administrative, to technical areas, and including, in some cases, the delivery of work-plans and related programmes that such bodies have adopted. It also comprises and covers activities of their subsidiary bodies or working groups, although these activities are frequently supported through extra-budgetary contributions and partnerships with projects.
8. Statutory Bodies under Article VI include the Commission for Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture of Latin America and the Caribbean (COPESCAALC); the Committee on Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture of Africa (CIFAA); the European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission (EIFAAC); the Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic (CECAF);

the South West Indian Ocean Fisheries Commission (SWIOFC), and the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC).

B. Regional Fishery Bodies under Article XIV of the FAO Constitution

9. RFBs under article XIV of the FAO have regulatory powers and the capacity to adopt binding conservation and management measures. They are commonly referred to as Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs). Depending on their 'level of autonomy', some of them also receive funding through resources from outside the Regular Programme, in most cases from contributions made by their members states in accordance to the respective statute. As stated by the FAO Conference, "any agreement concluded under Article XIV of the Constitution among Member Nations of the Organization should entail financial or other obligations going beyond those already assumed under the Constitution of the Organization. Failing this, there would be no grounds for such an agreement, at least not in the legal form prescribed under Article XIV of the Constitution".

10. Statutory bodies under Article XIV include the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission (APFIC); the Central Asian and Caucasus Regional Fisheries and Aquaculture Commission (CACFish); the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM); the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC); and the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI). Taking into account the differentiated nature of bodies under Article XIV, the question of the delegations of authority and a number of operational facilities to them has been under consideration in the recent past by various Governing Bodies (i.e. the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters -CCLM-, the Programme Committee -PC- and the Finance Committee -FC-). Detailed reports have been presented on actions taken by the Organization concerning the delegations of authority to Article XIV bodies and the related implementation.

III. FAO RFBs and RFMOs working progress

11. This section applies a grouping of FAO RFBs based on their geographical area of competence.

A. Inland waters

Africa

Committee on Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture of Africa (CIFAA)

12. CIFAA was established under Article VI of the FAO Constitution, as advisory body, authorized in Resolution 1/56 adopted by the Council at its 56th Session in June 1971. The Statute was amended in 1973 and 1975 to foster and promote international cooperation in the development and management, utilization and conservation of fishery resources of inland waters of Africa and the sustainable development of aquaculture in its 38 members.

13. FAO Members that have an active interest in inland fishery development in Africa and could contribute to discharge the functions of the Committee, are allowed to be associate members of CIFAA. The Secretariat is provided by the FAO Regional Office for Africa, based in Accra, Ghana.

14. CIFAA has contributed to the strengthening of national institutional capacity in inland fisheries and aquaculture research and administration, through implementing related trainings and other activities in the context of regional projects. Experience-sharing and training activities were, in most cases, sources of guidance to its members to elaborate policies and develop research agendas in the sector. Furthermore, CIFAA put in place the Aquaculture Network for Africa for the advancement

of aquaculture in the region, and contributed to the establishment of two non-FAO regional fishery organizations: the Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization and the Lake Tanganyika Authority.

15. Many issues limit the effectiveness of CIFAA, including, weak institutional structure, low and inconsistent participation of members at its sessions, inadequate financial and technical resources, insufficient collaboration with other regional fisheries bodies and the private sector, as well as the absence of a strategic plan. In 2012, a performance review of CIFAA suggested how the Committee could be strengthened and better serve its members in a climate of financial resource depletion and accelerated environmental deterioration. In this context members decided to maintain CIFAA as an Article VI body, but amended its Statute and Rules of Procedure, in order to update functions, mandate and working modalities, and set up a Working Group, under the leadership of FAO, to further elaborate a proposal to address functional needs and make the organization more effective.

16. In particular, during the CIFAA extraordinary session, held in July 2015, members evaluated necessary amendments to the Statute and Rules of Procedure to address emerging socio-cultural and economic concerns such as biodiversity conservation, climate change, pressure on resources and sustainability. These amendments were examined by the FAO Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters in its 101st Session, and approved by the Council in its 153rd Session in 2015.

17. A CIFAA Multi-donor Trust Fund was established, following a programme of work and budget in line with FAO's Strategic Framework, the related Regional Initiatives as well as FAO Country Programming Frameworks, and with the objective to achieve impact in aquaculture and inland capture fisheries development at national and sub-regional levels.

Latin America

Commission for Inland Fisheries of Latin America (COPESCAALC)

18. COPESCAALC was established in 1976 by the FAO Council, under article VI of the FAO Constitution, and act as advisory body. Its Rules of Procedure were adopted by the Commission at its First Session in 1979; they were reviewed in 2008 and approved by the FAO Council in 2009.

19. COPESCAALC comprises 21 members; its mandate includes the promotion of sustainable development and management of inland fisheries and aquaculture, according to the norms and principles of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, and covers inland waters of member states and all their related species. The Regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean in Santiago del Chile hosts the Commission and provides Secretariat services.

20. According to the report of the Fourteenth Session held in February 2016, members highlighted the progress made in the implementation of recommendations and decisions taken at the previous session. They recognized the impact of the technical assistance provided to member states in formulating national strategies, policies and programs; mostly to increase seafood consumption, to identify vulnerabilities in fisheries and aquaculture as well as in supporting climate change adaptation of communities. Several members recalled the necessity to incorporate marine artisanal fisheries matters into the competence of the Commission, thus requesting FAO to make the necessary steps towards its inclusion in the statutes of the Commission.

21. The prioritized work areas for the period 2016-2017 included the implementation of policies and programs for fisheries and aquaculture development; aquaculture and fisheries extension systems; health and safety of products; strengthening resilience of fisheries communities to climate change; support efforts to increase fish consumption and the introduction of fish in school feeding programs and public procurement schemes. Fisheries and aquaculture sectors are considered relevant for food and nutrition security as well as poverty eradication, and are linked to programs on territorial rural

development. Members highlighted the necessity of support from FAO, to assist countries in the formulation and implementation of the above-mentioned policies and specific areas of needs.

22. The cooperation system in this region includes working with other sub-regional organizations (i.e. The Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization -OSPESCA- Latin American Organization for Fisheries Development -OLDEPESCA-, the Aquaculture Network of the Americas and the Latin American and Caribbean Forum of Fish and Aquaculture Parliamentarians), civil society organizations, indigenous populations, local communities and other UN agencies. South-South Cooperation, as well as triangular cooperation among members, is key to achieve the objectives of COPESCAALC. The issue of repopulation and management of freshwater fisheries has been and will continue being relevant in the next biennium.

Europe

European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission (EIFAAC)

23. In 2008, EIFAAC changed its former name to introduce the word 'aquaculture', recognizing the importance of this sector to its member states. At the time of its creation by the FAO Council in 1957, under Article VI of FAO Constitution, it was called the European Inland Fisheries Advisory Commission (EIFAC). In 2010, new Statute and Rules of Procedure were agreed, and entered into force in April 2012.

24. The Commission promotes the long-term sustainable development, utilization, conservation, restoration and responsible management of European inland fisheries and aquaculture, consistent with the objectives and principles of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and other relevant international instruments; and support sustainable economic and social related activities. The area of competence comprises inland waters in member countries. EIFAAC members are 33 countries and the European Union.

25. EIFAAC works in collaboration with several stakeholders, ranging from international fishery organizations (e.g. the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization -NASCO- and other FAO RFBs) to management and research institutions, civil society organizations, and inland fisheries, aquaculture and environmental organizations (national and international) in the region. Cooperation is based mainly in providing scientific and technical advice and data, i.e. EIFAAC is part of the Working Group on Eel, a joint Expert Scientific Working Group between EIFAAC and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea -ICES-, which includes cooperation with GFCM and the European Community, among others, to provide relevant data on stock status.

26. A process of reform to the Commission, which started in 2012 with the objective to strengthen operational efficiency, continues. Current issues are related to a new work model that is based on regular project reviews following the priorities identified by the Commission, and includes monitoring and reporting. At the Twenty-eighth Session held in Lillehammer, Norway, from 17 to 19 June 2015 achievements were highlighted and challenges were discussed. Progress on management actions on cormorant populations, in collection, dissemination and reporting information was evidenced, while difficulties were identified in developing the dialogue for better management practices in the Baltic Sea region.

27. The Commission expressed the need to emphasise social and economic aspects of inland fisheries and aquaculture, enable riverine continuity, expand international standards of sampling techniques, protocols, catch reporting, and use citizen science to facilitate sampling for fisheries research. Operational issues identified include financial structuring, attendance at sessions and internal coordination and networking. In addition, the Commission considered that regional fishery bodies in the region might have reporting line to the respective FAO regional conference.

Central Asia-Caucasus

Central Asian and Caucasus Regional Fisheries and Aquaculture Commission (CACFish)

28. CACFish is a RFMO established within the framework of Article XIV of the FAO Constitution. The related Agreement was approved by the FAO Council, in its 137th Session in 2009, and entered into force in December 2010. The Technical Advisory Committee was established in 2011.

29. The Commission has the capacity to adopt binding management and conservation recommendations, in exercising its mandate that includes the promotion of development, conservation, rational management, and best utilization of living aquatic resources, as well as the sustainable development of aquaculture in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Its area of competence comprises inland waters.

30. The CACFish Secretariat is provided by FAO and currently based at the Sub-Regional Office for Central Asia, Ankara, Turkey. Currently, CACFish has five member states.

31. The Fourth Session of CACFish was held in May 2015, it focused on scientific and technical recommendations delivered by the Technical Advisory Committee, including: (i) fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS); (ii) inland fish hatchery management; and (iii) Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication. Invited members reiterated their interest in becoming members of the Commission.

32. In addition, the Commission recognized the progress made in implementing the first Five-Year Regional Work-Programme, but stated that activities were only partially implemented due to budget limitations. Based on lessons learned from this programme, the second term Five-Year Regional Work Programme (2016–2020) was discussed and approved.

33. The current programme includes the following topics: production technologies and systems; institutional capacity development for the use and management of fisheries resources; environmental protection; hygiene and fish safety; access to markets; fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance; compliance; use of economic incentives and fisheries research. It looks for collaboration with members and non-member states as well as key regional stakeholders; its main objective is the strengthening of institutional, scientific, technical, legal and structural capacities.

B. Marine waters

Asia

Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission (APFIC)

34. APFIC was established under Article XIV, in 1948. The biennial session of the Commission is complemented with the Regional Consultative Forum Meeting, held in the intersessional period and attended by officials of governments from member states, by projects staff, regional and inter-governmental fisheries bodies, and other UN organizations. APFIC has 21 members and its area of competence includes high seas, national waters and inland waters. The FAO regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, based in Bangkok, Thailand, hosts the APFIC Secretariat.

35. The Commission has a broad mandate that includes the promotion of sustainable utilization of living aquatic resources through economically viable and environmentally sustainable policies, practices and operations and finding solutions to emerging regional fisheries issues that has impact on member states. APFIC does not have regulatory powers.

36. The APFIC Secretariat performs a key function of coordination and acts as an FAO/APFIC liaison with RFBs and other relevant regional organizations, on a regular or ad hoc basis. In order to avoid overlaps and ensure a coordinated mechanism of cooperation, APFIC works with these organizations and arrangements and fosters collaboration with other regional partners.

37. APFIC undertakes activities ranging from awareness raising to the development of training materials and regional guidance. This is typically conducted through cooperation with extra-budgetary projects. Currently those include projects which address the integration of fisheries and aquaculture effectively into other sectoral planning, raise awareness on climate change impacts adaptation and mitigation, strengthen implementation of ecosystem approaches, promote certification; contribute to combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, promote reduction of fishing over-capacity, improve livelihoods of fishing and aquaculture communities, and culture-based fisheries in inland waters to blue growth, among others.

38. The Thirty-fourth Session of APFIC was held in February 2016. At this session, the Commission recommended options to APFIC member countries for cooperating to combat IUU fishing and noted that the 'Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Project' has provided a strong foundation for encouraging collaboration within this sub-region. The regional strategy and action-plan developed by the regional consultative workshop on 'Promotion of sustainable intensification of aquaculture for food and nutritional security in the Asia-Pacific' was endorsed.

39. Regarding the proposed idea of creating a trust fund, members agreed that this issue will be discussed at the 76th APFIC Executive Committee, to be held in September 2016.

Atlantic Ocean

Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic (CECAF)

40. CECAF was established as advisory body, within the framework of Article VI of the FAO Constitution, by the FAO Council in its 48th Session in 1967.

41. According to its statute, amended in 2003, the purpose of the Committee is to promote the sustainable utilization of the living marine resources of its area of competence, which includes high seas and national waters, by the proper management and development of the fisheries and fishing operations. CECAF has 33 members, including coastal and non-coastal states, and the European Union.

42. In addition to the Committee, there is a Scientific Sub-committee (SSC), one of the main functions of which is to study the main stocks and fisheries, to assess their status and, on the basis of the results achieved, to provide fisheries management advice to the Committee, with focus on transboundary resources. However it also discusses other issues of pertinence to fisheries management in the region, including for artisanal fisheries. The SSC is supported by three working groups, the Working Group for Small Pelagics, the Working Group for Demersal Species, and the Working Group for Artisanal Fisheries.

43. The Twenty-first Session of the Committee was held in Dakar, Senegal from 20 to 22 April 2016 with the participation of 23 member states, including the European Union, as well as observers from different regional and sub-regional fisheries organisations, cooperation agencies and non-governmental organizations.

44. The Committee endorsed the assessment and management advice from the Seventh Session of the SSC (Tenerife, Spain, October 2015), and other technical and scientific advice from the SSC while stressing the continued need to improve research and data collection in the region, to review the format of the scientific advice and the management recommendation and to enhance the dialogue

between scientists and managers. Furthermore, the Committee suggested to create an ad-hoc working group to discuss monitoring and communication issues, and the uptake of the CECAF management recommendations and endorsed the revised terms of reference for the artisanal fisheries working group, requesting the Secretariat to find means to operationalize this group. The Committee welcomed the proposed deep-sea fisheries and Vulnerable Marine Ecosystem (VME) workshop and recommended that members of CECAF should respect the South East Atlantic Fisheries Organization VME closures that are located in the overlapping area of competence.

45. Regarding the fight against IUU fishing, the Committee noted that progress is being achieved in several member states, some of which announced their interest in ratifying the Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA). The strengthening of Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance at country level was recognized as an important condition for the development of a more efficient cooperation to combat IUU fishing at sub-regional and regional levels. The need for a better evaluation of various impacts of IUU fishing, strengthening of capacities on monitoring and inspection, and increasing transparency through the exchange of information on IUU fleets were emphasized.

46. Concerning the improvement of the functioning of CECAF, the Committee recommended to implement the action plan proposed by the 2011 review, including the integration of modern principles of fisheries management, ensuring that regular meetings are held and strengthening cooperation with other regional and sub-regional fisheries organisations. The Secretariat was also requested to facilitate improved communication and dissemination of information, including through the CECAF webpage. The Committee also took up the role of Regional Steering Committee in the new Ecosystem Approach for 'Fisheries-Nansen Programme'.

Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC)

47. WECAFC is an advisory body, established in 1973 by the FAO Council, within the framework of Article VI of the FAO Constitution. The related statute was amended in December 1978 and in November 2006.

48. WECAFC comprises 34 members, including coastal states whose territories are situated within the area of the Commission, states whose vessels engage in fishing in the area of competence, and the European Union. WECAFC area of competence includes high seas and national waters.

49. The main role of WECAFC is the promotion of the effective conservation, management and development of the living marine resources in the area of competence, in accordance with the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, as well as addressing common problems of fisheries management and development faced by the respective members.

50. The Fifteenth Session of WECAFC was held in March 2014. Four regional fisheries management recommendations were adopted, on spawning aggregations of groupers and snappers, the use of fish aggregating devices, Queen Conch management and conservation and fisheries management planning. Additionally, five resolutions were adopted on IUU fishing, the Regional Strategy for the Control of Invasive Lionfish, the implementation of voluntary guidelines on small-scale fisheries and tenure, the implementation of the PSMA and the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Flag State Performance, and the Strategic Action Programme for the Sustainable Management of Shared Living Marine Resources in the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems.

51. The Commission also adopted the WECAFC Strategic Plan 2014-2020, the process of which embraced the ongoing collaboration with other sub-regional fishery bodies, fisherfolk organizations, civil society organizations, research institutions, development banks and projects, and considers information from the performance review completed in 2013-2014.

52. The Commission maintained the seven joint working groups and established three new working groups, endorsed the WECAFC-FIRMS partnership, adopted the revised Rules of Procedure and discussed the options for strategic reorientation. No decision was made on starting a transition

process of WECAFC into a RFMO, given that members required additional information on this matter.

53. Major achievements of WECAFC include building capacity among members for the effective implementation of the 1995 Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and related international fisheries instruments; providing the main platform for all countries and overseas territories in the Caribbean and Guianas-North Brazil shelf for collaboration; enabling members to produce regional fisheries management advice for the main commercially exploited marine aquatic resources in the Western Central Atlantic, advice that has been incorporated in national plans and regulations; empowering members to take the binding trade measures for conservation and better management of Queen Conch resources; introducing the first regionally harmonized closed season for Nassau Grouper fisheries in 2014, the first regionally harmonized management measure, which has been made binding by most members that have Nassau grouper fisheries; increasing the capacity of members for fisheries data and information collection, analysis and dissemination; mobilising resources from members and donors for capacity building; and creating partnerships for collaboration with other regional fisheries bodies (Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism, OSPESCA and WECAFC).

54. In addition, the 34th FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Mexico in March 2016, made a recognition to the important role of WECAFC in the region and raised comments on the transformation process into a RFMO noting its relevance to fight against IUU fishing in the related area of competence.

Indian Ocean

Southwest Indian Ocean Fisheries Commission (SWIOFC)

55. SWIOFC is an advisory body, established by the FAO Council in 2004, within the framework of Article VI of the FAO Constitution. Its Secretariat, previously located at the FAO Sub-regional Office for Southern Africa, Harare, was moved to the Fisheries Administration section of the Ministry of the Sea, Inland Waters and Fisheries of Mozambique, Maputo, in September 2015. Currently SWIOFC has 12 Members.

56. SWIOFC promotes the sustainable utilization of marine living resources by proper management and development, the application of the FAO Code of Conduct on Responsible Fisheries, including the precautionary approach and the ecosystem approach to fisheries management. Its mandate comprises national waters.

57. The Seventh Session of SWIOFC was held in October 2015; Scientific Committee recommendations related to the decline of shrimp stocks in the region and the trend in the status of fish stocks over the decade, were emphasised. Noting that initiatives to develop capacity in stock assessment and management are in place, the Commission sought for more efforts to be made to regional needs, including on capacity issues. The positive outcomes of the Working Party on Collaboration and Cooperation in Tuna Fisheries were welcomed and the continuing development of a South West Indian Ocean Fisheries Accord, the Maputo Declaration, and the draft Protocol on Minimum Terms and Conditions of Fishing Access were endorsed.

58. The Commission reviewed its Rules of Procedure, in view to encourage greater involvement, increase responsibilities of members and allow the establishment of a trust fund for voluntary contributions; aspects which were highlighted by the performance review presented in 2012 at the SWIOFC Sixth Session. Noting the Resolution 11/2015 of the FAO Conference, members wished to continue strengthening the Article VI body while awaiting a start of negotiations towards setting up an Article XIV body.

59. The incorporation of the regional component of the 'South West Indian Ocean Fisheries Governance and Growth Project' under the SWIOFC Secretariat was considered, and a Steering Committee for the project was established.

Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)

60. The Agreement for the establishment of IOTC, under Article XIV of the FAO Constitution, was approved in 1993 and came into effect in March 1996.

61. IOTC is a RFMO which has 32 Members, including coastal states or associate members situated wholly or partly within the area of competence, states or associate members whose vessels engage in fishing in this area for stocks covered by the agreement, and the European Union. The IOTC has an autonomous budget that is funded by its member states. The related area of competence includes high seas and national waters.

62. The Nineteenth Session of IOTC was held from 27 April to 1 May 2015. The Commission adopted the IOTC IUU Vessels List; granted the status of Cooperating Non-Contracting Party until the close of the 20th Session in 2016 to Bangladesh, Djibouti, Liberia, Senegal and South Africa. Eleven resolutions and one recommendation were adopted, including non-targeted species caught by purse seine vessels in the IOTC area of competence; the use of artificial lights to attract fish to drifting fish aggregating devices; procedures on a fish aggregating devices (FADs) management plan; more detailed specifications of catch reporting from FAD sets; the development of improved FAD designs to reduce the incidence of entanglement of non-target species; a FADs working group; and the implementation of capacity for fishing limitation to Contracting Parties and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties. The IOTC also adopted a resolution which includes a possibility for the IOTC Scientific Committee to use alternatives to Maximum Sustainable Yield-based reference points when they are considered as insufficiently robust.

63. The IOTC underwent in its second performance review in 2015 and 2016. This evaluation process recommended the modernisation of the IOTC Agreement, and its transformation into an independent entity from the FAO framework, which is under current consultation with the FAO related offices.

Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI)

64. The Agreement that provides the establishment of RECOFI, a regional fishery management organization, was approved in the context of Article XIV of the FAO Constitution in 1999, and entered into force in 2001.

65. According to its mandate, RECOFI promotes the development, conservation, rational management and best utilization of living marine resources, as well as the sustainable development of aquaculture within the provided area of competence, which comprises national waters. The species covered include all living marine resources in this area.

66. Current members are eight coastal countries of the Gulf and Sea of Oman. The Commission has the capacity to adopt binding conservation and management measures. It established two subsidiary bodies, the Working Group on Fisheries Management and the Working Group on Aquaculture. The Secretariat is currently provided by FAO and is based at the FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa in Cairo (Egypt).

67. The Eighth Session of RECOFI was held in May 2015. It highlighted the need for coordinated policy measures on a number of commercially important species, to ensure their sustainable fishery exploitation, and required related actions for awareness raising and education for fishers and national fisheries officers.

68. Regarding the Regional Aquaculture Information System (RAIS), the Commission decided that RAIS would include capture fisheries data collected under RECOFI Recommendation RECOFI/6/2011/1 Minimum Data Reporting in its area of competence, providing the importance and benefits of having access to information on the total aquaculture production of RECOFI members.

69. Recalling the conclusions of the performance review undertaken in 2011, successes were identified in aquaculture issues and in the quality of training, while a lack of scientific advice or recommendations was noted as consequence of absence of data collection and cooperation between member states. Funding (in-kind) is being provided by FAO, which represents the most of the costs, given that members are contributing minimally. Activities were reduced compared with previous intersessional periods.

70. FAO, as RECOFI Secretariat, has facilitated the implementation of the first two binding recommendations delivered by RECOFI on minimum data reporting for fisheries and aquaculture. The strengthening of the Commission and the possible relocation of the Secretariat in a member state are being considered.

Mediterranean and Black Sea

General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)

71. The GFCM was established in 1949, its Agreement was adopted pursuant to Article XIV of the FAO Constitution, and it has been amended four times including in 2014 following an independent performance review. The Commission, constituting a RFMO, has the capacity to adopt binding management and conservation measures for its members. Current GFCM Members are 24, including the European Union and Japan.

72. The objective of the GFCM is ensuring the conservation and sustainable use, at the biological, social, economic and environmental level, of living marine resources, as well as the sustainable development of aquaculture in its area of application, which includes all waters in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. The Commission operates during the intersessional period through its committees, the Scientific Advisory Committee on Fisheries, the Scientific Advisory Committee on Aquaculture, the Compliance Committee, the Committee of Administration and Finance and an ad hoc mechanism for the Black Sea. Sub-regional working groups have been also established for the Mediterranean Sea in order to promote a sub-regional approach to fisheries management.

73. In 2014 the GFCM has amended its constitutive agreement with a view to modernize the legal and institutional framework of the Commission according to recent UN and FAO developments (i.e. the ‘The Future We Want’ and the FAO Blue Growth Initiative). Most recently, the GFCM has launched a mid-term strategy which is consistent with the UN Sustainable Development Goals as well as with the FAO Strategic Objectives.

74. Subsequent to the recent amendment of the legal framework of the GFCM, the Scientific Advisory Committee on Aquaculture of the GFCM has been endowed with the responsibility to provide technical advice and to promote the sustainable development and responsible management of marine, brackish and inland aquaculture in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.

75. The first “State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries 2016” has just been published by the GFCM, based on data provided by contracting and cooperating non-contracting parties. This document emphasizes the pivotal contribution of fisheries and aquaculture to sustainable development and blue growth in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea .

76. Based on the scientific advice annually provided by its Scientific Advisory Committee on Fisheries, the GFCM has adopted more than 50 management and conservation measures in the form of

recommendations binding on its contracting and cooperating non-contracting parties. These address diverse areas such as sub-regional management plans, fishing restricted areas, by-catch, fishing capacity and effort, MCS, Port State Measures (PSM) and IUU fishing.

77. Most of the measures adopted by the GFCM tailor FAO global policies to the specificities of the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions, i.e. the Regional Conference on Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries held on March 2016 in Algeria which focused on strategies to implement the SSF Guidelines in the region. Work relating to PSM is also relevant, the GFCM has aligned the text of its regional scheme on PSM with that of the FAO PSMA with the aim to encourage and facilitate ratification of this agreement by its contracting and cooperating non-contracting parties.

78. Cooperation is relevant to the GFCM; more than ten memoranda of understanding have been signed with partner organizations, including with UNEP-MAP . This represents one of the important cases where formal cooperation has been established between a Regional Seas Convention and an RFMO.

79. At its thirty-ninth session in May 2015 the Commission requested the Secretariat to launch an internal process within the FAO with the aim to promote the declaration of an international day for the fight against IUU fishing at the 32nd session of COFI. On occasion of this session the Commission also approved, among others, a strategy to boost aquaculture production at the regional level as well as a technical assistance mechanism in support to compliance with measures in place.

IV. Conclusions

80. Regional fishery bodies are relevant instruments for enhancing regional collaboration to address common fisheries development and management challenges. They provide a forum for lesson-learning, discussion, negotiation and joint-action as well as an enabling environment to increase technical and scientific assistance and coordinate work with key actors existent in the same area of competence, including other RFBs and arrangements.

81. The role of RFBs is highly instrumental to mainstream FAO policies and technical support for the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. Their contribution in promoting responsible fisheries practices by implementing, for example, the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, its technical guidelines and international plans of actions, is notable.

82. Furthermore, the FAO promoted Blue Growth Initiative for the sustainable, integrated, socio-economic management of fisheries and aquaculture is already embraced by some of the FAO RFBs.

83. As stated by SOFIA 2014, “by sharing experiences of successes and failures, RFBs can improve their ways of working, become more effective and coordinate their efforts where there are mutual benefits to be gained” . Most of the RFBs established within the FAO framework demonstrate a preparedness and interest to share their activities, knowledge and experiences, working in partnership with different organizations and stakeholders.

84. RFBs are facing several challenges, most of them linked to internal functioning and lack of resources. Performance reviews on some of them have provided advice to address these concerns, and recommended the modernization of mandates, a better coordination with other organizations present in the same area of competence, increase member contributions and establish the secretariat in a member state, among others . These challenges have led in some cases to momentous achievements; thus performance reviews have provided impetus for the strengthening of RFBs. Success stories exist and point to the need for periodical assessment of the work of RFBs against the background of relevant developments within the FAO and the UN System.

85. RFBs can only be as effective as their member states permit them to be, and FAO RFBs are no exception. Whatever the level of support that RFBs may provide for the sustainable management and development of regional fisheries and aquaculture, implementation of measures agreed, where appropriate, is largely in the hands of states. Regardless, RFBs are expected to continue striving for responses to the greater demands for sustainability, given the importance to meet the targets set by the UN Sustainable Development Goals.