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# FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR EUROPE

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### Report on the work of the Central Asian and Caucasus Regional Fisheries and Aquaculture Commission (CACFish)

#### Executive Summary

The Central Asian and Caucasus Regional Fisheries and Aquaculture Commission (CACFish)<sup>1</sup> is a regional fisheries management organization established in 2009 under Article XIV of the FAO Constitution. The objectives of CACFish are to promote the development, conservation, and rational management and utilization of living aquatic resources and to support the sustainable development of aquaculture in Central Asia and the Caucasus. The commission currently has one subsidiary body, the Technical Advisory Committee. During its first decade, this committee generated scientific and technical recommendations, guidelines and best management practices for consideration by CACFish. The technical support addressed a broad range of inland fisheries and aquaculture sector development issues. Focus was placed on promoting sustainable management and conservation practices and enhancing regional food security. The commission has made a significant contribution to strengthening regional institutional capacity development through the synchronized collaboration of fisheries and aquaculture programmes and projects implemented as a component of the ongoing FAO-Türkiye Partnership Programme.<sup>2</sup>

Since its establishment, the commission has invited countries that are not members of CACFish to all its activities. While this approach has made a significant contribution to regional collaboration and networking, increasing CACFish membership to formally include non-CACFish members remains a key strategic priority for the commission.

Since 2016, the commission has met every two years in regular sessions, developing and adopting two-year intersessional work programmes during the meetings. The commission's latest active work programme was established at its Seventh Session, held in October 2021, and lasted until the Eighth Session, held in December 2023. The work delivered during the intersessional period of 2021-2023 focused on the following thematic areas: (i) regional code of practice to support safety in the aquaculture and fisheries sectors; (ii) species diversification in aquaculture; (iii) regional data

<sup>1</sup> For more information on CACFish, please visit <https://www.fao.org/fishery/en/organization/cacfish>.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on this programme, please visit <https://www.fao.org/europe/work-in-the-region/programmes-and-projects/fao-turkiye-partnership-programme/en>.

Documents can be consulted at [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)

collection system for fishing gear; (iv) gender issues in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors; (v) stocking fish in inland water bodies; (vi) cataloguing fish genetic resources from the Caucasus and Central Asian region; and (vi) climate change adaption and the implementation of the ecosystems approach to aquaculture and fisheries management. Furthermore, several activities were conducted at the national level.

The CACFish work programme for 2023-2025 includes the following additional thematic areas: a) integrated aquaculture systems; b) shellfish aquaculture; c) algal production and biotechnology; and d) digitalization systems in fisheries and aquaculture management.

#### **Suggested action by the Regional Conference**

The Regional Conference for Europe is invited to:

- a. Note the CACFish work programme activities that have been undertaken, completed or remain as ongoing deliverables during the intersessional period of 2021-2023.
- b. Recognize the considerable technical and institutional capacity-building support that has been provided by CACFish during its first decade of establishment and the wide range of issues that have been supported. These include the management and protection of inland fisheries and aquaculture resources, as well as the development of the inland fisheries and aquaculture sectors, which have contributed to supporting the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Blue Transformation for more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable aquafood systems.
- c. Take note of the increasing achievements of CACFish and the leading role it plays in addressing the growing challenges being faced by the inland fisheries and aquaculture sectors in the Central Asia and Caucasus regions, and in taking forward appropriate management and conservation recommendations.

The Regional Conference for Europe is invited to call upon FAO to:

- d. Encourage new members to join the commission.

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## I. Introduction

1. The Central Asian and Caucasus Regional Fisheries and Aquaculture Commission (CACFish) is a regional fisheries management organization established under Article XIV of the FAO Constitution. In 2009, the CACFish Agreement was approved at the 137th Session of the FAO Council<sup>3</sup>, and upon the receipt of the third instrument of acceptance, it came into force on 3 December 2010. The agreement empowers the commission to impose binding management and conservation measures in the convention area (namely, the inland waters of the states of Central Asia and the Caucasus). While taking cognizance of the best scientific evidence available, the commission applies precautionary and ecosystem approaches to fisheries conservation and management. Currently, the commission has one subsidiary body, the Technical Advisory Committee, established in December 2011, which provides technical and scientific advice to the commission and its work.
2. CACFish's competence area covers inland waters and areas within the territorial boundaries of the states of Central Asia – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – and of the Caucasus – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Türkiye; with respect to inland fisheries, it covers other waters within the transboundary water basins bordering the territories of the states of Central Asia and the Caucasus.
3. The objectives of CACFish are to promote the development, conservation, and rational management and utilization of living aquatic resources and to support the sustainable development of aquaculture in Central Asia and the Caucasus.
4. During its first decade, the Technical Advisory Committee generated scientific and technical recommendations, guidelines and best management practices for consideration by the commission. Its technical support addressed a broad range of issues related to inland fisheries and aquaculture sector development. Focus was placed on promoting sustainable management and conservation practices and enhancing regional food security. It is also worth noting that the commission has made a significant contribution to strengthening regional institutional capacity development through the synchronized collaboration of fisheries and aquaculture programmes and projects implemented as a component of the ongoing FAO-Türkiye Partnership Programme. Over the past decade, the commission has delivered multiple outputs, including workshops, trainings, technical reports and better management practice manuals. It is noteworthy that, since its establishment, the commission has invited states that are not members of CACFish to all its activities. While this approach has made a significant contribution to regional collaboration and networking, increasing CACFish membership to formally include those FAO Members that are not members of CACFish remains a key strategic priority for the commission.
5. At its Eighth Session, held in Baku, Azerbaijan, from 19 to 20 December 2023, the commission noted its increasing level of functionality and performance.<sup>4</sup>
6. Since 2016, the commission has met every two years in regular sessions, developing and adopting two-year intersessional work programmes that consider proposals from the Technical Advisory Committee and key thematic issues that have been raised by the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) for the attention of the regional fisheries bodies.

## II. Work programme activities conducted following the Seventh Session of CACFish (11-13 October 2021, Istanbul, Türkiye)

7. The intersessional work programme activities conducted following the Seventh Session of CACFish<sup>5</sup> focused on the following thematic areas:

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<sup>3</sup> The full Report of the Council is available online at <https://www.fao.org/3/k5962e01/k5962e01.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> For documents from the Eighth Session of CACFish, please visit <https://www.fao.org/fishery/en/meeting/41412>.

<sup>5</sup> The report of the Seventh Session of CACFish, including the work programme, is available at <https://www.fao.org/3/cb8226b/cb8226b.pdf>.

**a. Development of a regional code of practice to support safety in the aquaculture and fisheries sectors**

Globally, workers in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors continue to experience unacceptably high incidence levels of accidents. In 2019, FAO amended its global estimate of the number of fatalities in the fisheries sector to 32 000 casualties per year, while according to a 1999 estimation by the International Labour Organization, annual fatalities in the fisheries sector were recorded at 80 fatalities per 100 000 active fishers. It should be noted that the amended FAO global estimate is likely to be an underestimation, and new research suggests that that more than 100 000 fishers die each year in the sector. Despite the adoption of mandatory safety schemes and top-down management approaches, safety practitioners propose engendering a more holistic approach to workers' safety and health. The code of practice that has been developed promotes safe working practices for the most common activities encountered in the aquaculture and inland fisheries sectors. The promotion of safe working practices is supported by focused awareness programmes. The code specifically targets the Central Asian and Caucasus region and represents the first example of its type. The draft code was submitted to the Eighth Session of CACFish, held in Baku, Azerbaijan, from 19 to 20 December 2023.<sup>6</sup> A regional workshop will be held in 2024 to present and finalize the code.

**b. Species diversification in aquaculture**

The multiplicity of global climate and environmental conditions has given rise to a rich and diverse number of species that can be used in aquaculture. As the global aquaculture sector grows, species diversification is increasingly being viewed as a mechanism to promote sustainability. A survey of species diversity in the Central Asian and the Caucasus region revealed that across the region, more than 40 species of fish, bivalves, crustaceans and annelids are cultured (commercial or pilot scale production). The findings of the survey were submitted and reviewed at the Sixth Meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee in 2023<sup>7</sup> and at the Eighth Session of CACFish in 2023. In 2024, a CACFish workshop will be convened for technical experts to review the survey findings and identify those species that show the greatest potential for development in and adoption by the countries in the region. Based on the findings and recommendations of the workshop, CACFish will develop a regional road map for species diversification in aquaculture.

**c. CACFish regional data collection system for fishing gear**

A regional data collection system to characterize the use of fishing gear is being developed. The system is designed to improve data collection, analysis and information dissemination, and it will assist countries in the CACFish competence area to meet international data collection obligations. The system will also support countries in implementing key international management instruments related to capture fisheries, such as the *Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries* and the *Voluntary Guidelines on the Marking of Fishing Gear* used in inland fisheries. The data collection system will be accompanied by a set of guidelines, and the components and design of the system will be finalized at a regional workshop scheduled for 2024.

**d. Preparation of a regional synthesis report regarding gender issues in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors**

A synthesis report outlining gender issues in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors was developed from case studies from CACFish members (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Türkiye). The analysis was undertaken as a collaboration between the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia and the CACFish Secretariat. In Armenia, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan, the study was the first of its kind to explore gender dimensions in these production sectors. The synthesis report, which was submitted both to the Sixth Meeting

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<sup>6</sup> For more information please see <https://www.fao.org/3/cc5969en/cc5969en.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> For more information, please see <https://www.fao.org/3/cc5976en/cc5976en.pdf>.

of the Technical Advisory Committee<sup>8</sup> and the Eighth Session of CACFish in 2023, includes study findings and recommendations to address gender inequalities across the region.

**e. Development of guidelines for stocking fish in inland water bodies**

- f.** From 15 to 17 November 2022, a CACFish regional training workshop on inland stock assessment in selected large water bodies was held in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. Guidelines for stocking fish in inland water bodies are being developed based on recommendations from the workshop. Undertaken in collaboration with the European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission (EIFAAC), the work is expected to be finalized by June 2024. **Cataloguing fish genetic resources from the Caucasus and Central Asia**

A catalogue of fish genetics from the Caucasus and Central Asia is being generated. The study is being undertaken in collaboration with the Gene Bank of the Central Institute for Fisheries, located in Trabzon, Türkiye. The study provides an opportunity to preserve and store aquatic genetic material from the region, including those of endangered aquatic species. The project is expected to be completed by June 2024.

**g. Institutional capacity building to support climate change adaptation and the implementation of the ecosystems approach to aquaculture and fisheries management**

Support for the development of aquaculture and fisheries sectors through the implementation of ecosystem approaches to management and support for development strategies and actions that promote climate change adaptation in inland fisheries and aquaculture are among the core principles of CACFish. At a regional workshop held from 28 February to 2 March 2023 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, aquaculture and fisheries managers from across the region were trained in the principles of ecosystem approaches to aquaculture and fisheries management and taught how to incorporate ecosystems and climate change approaches into management planning frameworks.

8. In addition to the above-mentioned regional activities, the CACFish work programme for the intersessional period (2021-2023) included the following national-level activities:

- a. one ad hoc training on sturgeon aquaculture in Türkiye;
- b. a study on the development of bioeconomic and management approaches to culture-based fisheries development in Lake Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan; and
- c. three ad hoc trainings – held in the Bokhtar, Khujand and Vahdat districts of Tajikistan – on inland aquaculture production systems and biological, environmental and social influences on the development of the Tajik inland fisheries and aquaculture sectors.

### **III. CACFish work programme for 2023-2025**

9. The CACFish work programme for 2023-2025 (Annex A), which was adopted by the Eighth Session of CACFish in December 2023, includes the following additional thematic areas:

- a. integrated aquaculture systems;
- b. shellfish aquaculture;
- c. algal production and biotechnology; and
- d. digitalization systems in fisheries and aquaculture management.

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<sup>8</sup> For more information, please see <https://www.fao.org/3/cc6220en/cc6220en.pdf>.

**ANNEX A: Adopted CACFish work programme for 2023–2025**

	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Estimated budget (USD)</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Location</b>
1	Regional workshop to develop a CACFish data collection system for fishing gear use and catches	40 000	May 2024	Azerbaijan
2	Regional workshop to promote the CACFish Safety Code of Practice for Aquaculture and Fisheries	35 000	2024	Kyrgyzstan
3	Certification and traceability for fish and fish products – a case study from Kyrgyzstan	20 000	2024	Kyrgyzstan
4	Regional workshop on integrated aquaculture systems	40 000	2025	Uzbekistan
5	Regional workshop on guidelines on the stocking of fish into inland water bodies	40 000	2024	Uzbekistan
6	Regional technical expert meeting to promote species diversity in aquaculture	40 000	2024	Türkiye
7	One-person attendance at the Thirteenth Session of the COFI Sub-committee on aquaculture	10 000	2025	Türkiye
8	One-person attendance at the European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission (EIFAAC) seminar in 2024	10 000	2025	Croatia
9	Shellfish production in Türkiye (national-level study for Türkiye)	40 000	2024–2025	Türkiye
10	Regional workshop on algal production and biotechnology	40 000	2024	Türkiye
11	Regional workshop on digitalization systems in fisheries and aquaculture management	40 000	2024	Kazakhstan
12	Regional ad hoc training at the Gene Bank of the Trabzon Research Institute for Fisheries in Türkiye	40 000	2024	Türkiye
13	Study on gender in fisheries and aquaculture (national-level study for Tajikistan)	35 000	2024	Tajikistan
14	Preparation of a document on best management practices for private- and public-sector partnerships (desk study)	15 000	2025	
15	Seventh Meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee	40 000	May 2025	Azerbaijan
16	Ninth Session of CACFish	45 000	September 2025	Kazakhstan