



REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR FISHERIES (RECOFI)

Sixth Session

Rome, Italy, 10 – 12 May 2011

REVIEW OF INTERSESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

INTRODUCTION

1. This document is a summary of the work of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) subsidiary bodies: the Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA) and the Working Group on Fisheries Management (WGFM). Progress achieved and activities conducted with guidance from RECOFI are included.

ACTIVITIES OF THE WORKING GROUP ON AQUACULTURE (WGA)

Regional strategy on aquatic animal health

2. The Regional Technical Workshop on Aquatic Animal Health of RECOFI, held in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, from 6 to 10 April 2008, was attended by 19 delegates from five member countries of RECOFI and representatives from FAO. The workshop achieved three objectives: (i) it presented the results and analysis of the “RECOFI regional aquatic animal health capacity and performance survey”; (ii) it prepared and finalized a “Proposal for a regional programme for improving aquatic animal health in RECOFI Member countries” based on the survey outcomes and workshop deliberation and discussion; and (iii) it created awareness and initiated capacity building through a technical seminar on basic concepts and emerging issues concerning aquatic animal health.

3. The long-term vision of the regional programme for improving aquatic animal health capacity in the RECOFI Member is: “To develop and maintain aquatic animal health capacity in the RECOFI region that will be able to support the sustainable development and management of the aquaculture sector while protecting regional biodiversity and aquatic ecosystems from the impacts of exotic pathogens and epizootic disease”.

Regional Aquaculture Information System (RAIS)

4. RAIS has been successfully installed and is hosted on the server of the Kuwait Public Authority for Agriculture and Fisheries. The official launching of the RAIS was on 2 March 2009.

5. On occasion of the fifth meeting of the WGA (Doha, Qatar, 27 October 2010) the RAIS Regional Centre in Kuwait produced and presented the RAIS Web analysis report. The report indicated that as of 16 October 2010 there had been 7,908 total visits and that the experts' database

was the most visited. It is worth noting that numerous relevant international Web sites had established a link to the RAIS home page.

6. The analysis further indicated a steady interest in RAIS, particularly following the fourth WGA meeting (Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, 27–28 January 2009) with Web site visits and follow-up communications mainly from Arabic speaking countries (Northern Africa and the Gulf Region). This trend clearly demonstrates the importance on regularly promoting the information system along with the timely updating of its contents in order to further attract and retain the maximum number of visitors.

7. It was further agreed at the fifth WGA meeting that the Secretariat, along with the Head of the Information Technology Section of the Iranian Fisheries Organization, would lend assistance to the RAIS Regional Centre to create a standard reporting template with information on how to interpret the Web site data and a glossary of technical terms.

8. The RAIS Regional Centre in Kuwait continued to play a vital role in the functioning of the information system with an important coordination responsibility in verifying the data provided by the WGA Focal Points and in stimulating data entry and information sharing through the information system. The other main function of the Centre includes (i) data analysis and preparation of regional reports on the status and trend of aquaculture in the Region; (ii) maintenance and upgrading of the Web site according to requests from the Members; (iii) liaising with FAO, the RECOFI Secretariat and the National RAIS Centres; (iv) promoting RAIS to potential users; (v) preparation of annual activity and progress reports for the WGA; (vi) drafting an annual work programme and budget for RAIS in coordination with National Focal Points and the WGA Chairperson; and (vii) soliciting external funding, particularly from the private sector, for the strengthening of RAIS. In March 2011, the RAIS Regional Centre staff will undergo additional hands-on training in order to effectively support and manage RAIS (Kuwait City, 14–17 March 2011) and to better perform its duties.

9. The Secretariat in strict collaboration with FIRA ensured technical assistance to RAIS as well as other regional aquaculture information systems (e.g. GFCM-SIPAM). These systems, when functioning properly, are a valuable source of information also for FAO to use in the preparation and updating of its National Aquaculture Sector Overviews (NASO), regional and global aquaculture reviews. The Secretariat and FIRA aimed at further consolidation partnership with all RECOFI Members to facilitate the flow of aquaculture information at national and regional levels for the mutual benefit of the Organization itself and its Members.

Sustainable Marine Cage Aquaculture Development

10. The RECOFI Regional Technical Workshop on Sustainable Marine Cage Aquaculture Development, held from 25 to 26 January 2009 in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, was attended by 27 experts and professionals from seven RECOFI Member countries and the FAO/RECOFI Secretariat, including two international consultants. The workshop was organized in view of the growing importance and interest of this aquaculture sub-sector across the region.

11. The workshop's focus was on environmental impact assessment and monitoring, and aquaculture licensing for marine aquaculture cage systems. It also aimed at identifying constraints and shortcomings that need to be dealt with to support the development of the cage industry and facilitate investments from the private sector. The technical document that was derived from the workshop contains a set of suggestions and recommendations regarding technical and policy requirements needed to support the growth of the aquaculture sector as a whole and more specifically cage fish farming.

12. The workshop's proceedings also contain three review documents on marine cage aquaculture in the region, regulation of Norwegian net-cage fish farming, and a review on cage aquaculture licensing procedures prepared as background discussion papers for the workshop. With specific regard to environmental impact assessment (EIA), the discussions held at the workshop clearly indicate that there is a need for the region and individual Commission members to develop an *ad hoc* EIA format based on the conditions of the local marine environment. A proposed cage aquaculture licence procedure was discussed and proposed at the workshop based on the format developed and adopted by the Sultanate of Oman.

Fifth Meeting of the Working Group on Aquaculture

13. The fifth meeting of the RECOFI WGA was held in Doha, Qatar, on 27 October 2010 and was attended by the representatives from seven Member countries. The WGA reviewed the outcome and recommendations of the Special Meeting on RECOFI Consolidation and Development held in Rome in May 2010 at the request of the Commission at its Fifth session. The WGA discussed national and regional follow-up actions to the two WGA technical workshops on aquatic animal health (Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 6–10 April 2008) and on sustainable marine cage aquaculture development (Muscat, Oman, 25–27 January 2009).

14. In general it was agreed that the Members benefitted from technical workshops organized under the *aegis* of the Commission. It was nevertheless noted that an efficient mechanism on how best to ensure a coordinated and region-wide response and follow-up to key technical recommendations was needed.

15. A brief presentation on the joint RECOFI WGA and Working Group on Fisheries Management (WGFM) Regional Technical Workshop on Spatial Planning for Marine Capture Fisheries and Aquaculture, held in Doha, Qatar, from 24 to 28 October, was presented highlighting the key recommendations and suggested follow-up outputs.

16. Attendees at the meeting discussed the RAIS following the presentation of the first Web site analysis report that indicated a steady interest in the information system particularly among the Arabic speaking countries. Actions to further consolidate the system were discussed along with the need to improve the overall communication outputs at the national and regional levels.

17. The WGA finalized its proposed programme of work for the next intersessional period based also on the recommendations from its previous technical workshops. The WGA recognized that the Commission, based on its current level of financial contribution, may not have the required budget to implement a comprehensive aquaculture programme and recommended that some activities could be implemented with extra budgetary funds. The WGA Focal Point of Qatar was nominated as the new WGA Chairperson.

ACTIVITIES OF THE WORKING GROUP ON FISHERIES MANAGEMENT (WGFM)

RECOFI Stock Indicators and Stock Status Reporting

18. Stock status reporting is fundamental to the RECOFI mandate. However, little progress has been made since the establishment of the Commission in 1999. At its fourth session (Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 7-9 May 2007) RECOFI addressed the issue and referred it to the Working Group on Fisheries Management (WGFM) for further analysis. At the second meeting of the WGFM (Cairo, Egypt, 27-30 October 2008) attendees reviewed briefly the major fisheries in the RECOFI region and identified a set of species of primary concern, agreeing on a gear-boat classification to be used for further work. At the fifth RECOFI session (Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 12-14 May 2009) it was agreed to move towards an ecosystem approach to fisheries (EAF)

with adaptive management procedures and decided to hold a workshop specifically focusing on a review of data and statistics available in the region and stock status reporting.

19. The FAO/RECOFI Regional Workshop on “Stock Indicators and Stock Status Reporting” was convened in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, from 26 to 29 July 2009. Eighteen experts from seven of the eight RECOFI member countries attended the meeting, in addition to the FAO Technical Secretariat and the Secretary of the Commission. Furthermore, twenty-six Iranian nationals attended the workshop as observers. The workshop focused its attention on identifying key issues in the region and determining the minimum data requirement to address those key issues from the perspective of monitoring stocks and fisheries status.

20. A RECOFI regional resource monitoring strategy including minimum data reporting was developed at the FAO/RECOFI Regional Workshop. Employing a simple matrix of Susceptibility Productivity Analysis (PSA), the participants identified three areas of particular concern:

- ecosystem-wide impacts of shrimp trawls;
- exploitation of coastal finfish resources using groupers and emperors (identified as the most vulnerable component within this group) as reference indicators of fishing pressure, and
- stock management of priority species with narrow-barred Spanish mackerels as the first target species.

21. The workshop concluded with a set of recommendations to the WGFM that focused on improvement of data collection and monitoring capacity and members’ contributions to scientific knowledge through joint activities.

22. The regional approach to stock monitoring and EAF in the Gulf needs to be much more developed and consolidated. At present, the most useful output of the workshop was the cooperative identification of the minimum data requirement to be collected and compiled at the regional scale for the purpose of stocks and fisheries monitoring. The workshop created the opportunity to improve and bring up to date the understanding of the status of major fisheries and exploited fish resources, to discuss issues related to the formulation of the scientific advice on fisheries management, to identify the regional priorities and lay the basis to formulate a regional action plan, and to address the integration of the regional knowledge base for the purpose of fish stock assessment and fishery management in the region. Most importantly, the workshop could identify and agreed on a minimum data requirement to be collected in each country which can be compiled at the regional level.

Third Meeting of the Working Group on Fisheries Management

23. The third meeting of the RECOFI WGFM was held in Doha, Qatar, from 20 to 22 October 2009. The meeting was attended by fourteen delegates from all Members of Commission in addition to four members of the FAO Secretariat.

24. The WGFM updated the RECOFI Regional Strategy and Priority for Regional Fisheries Management, including a work plan to reflect RECOFI decisions at its fifth session (May 2009), and new initiatives proposed by the Working Group. The WGFM agreed that there would be merit in investigating the implications of certification and related schemes and the relationship between IUU fishing and trade for the region.

25. The WGFM appreciated the proposal made by the Sultanate of Oman in relation to the development of a RECOFI record of IUU fishing violations and agreed that RECOFI should take steps to: i) initiate the development of a regional database of violations; ii) establish a list of vessels

authorized to fish by Members; and iii) promote the establishment of a regional monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) network.

26. The Working Group reviewed the FAO Fisheries Circular titled “Review of fisheries laws of certain members of the Regional Commission for Fisheries” and requested that the report be translated into Arabic as a means of maximizing its dissemination in the region.

27. The WGFM considered the outcomes of the RECOFI Workshop on Stock Status Reporting (26–29 July 2009) and concurred that a resolution should be prepared concerning minimum data reporting and be submitted to the sixth session of RECOFI for consideration.

Fourth Meeting of the Working Group on Fisheries Management

28. The fourth meeting of the RECOFI WGFM was held from 3 to 5 October 2010 in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman. The meeting was attended by fourteen participants from six Members of the Commission and four FAO staff supporting the Secretariat.

29. The WGFM elaborated a revised work plan for the period 2011-2012 including a special WGFM meeting to be held one day immediately prior to the next session of the Commission in May 2011. With reference to the budget of the Commission, the delegates recognized that should the current level of Members’ contributions to the Commission remain unchanged, this would have a significant impact on RECOFI’s work. The most important outcome of the meeting was the approval, for the first time, of a binding recommendation to be implemented by the Commission.

30. Since its establishment in 1999 the Commission has not adopted, or discussed, a recommendation. The WGFM reviewed the proposed “Draft Recommendation RECOFI/6/2011/1 on Minimum Data Reporting in the RECOFI Area” with special attention being paid to considerations that would enable all Members to implement the recommended actions. It will be submitted to the sixth session of RECOFI in May 2011 for consideration. The draft recommendation approved by the WGFM is focused on the minimum data reporting requirement in the RECOFI region.

31. The proposed recommendation is the result of a significant effort made by the FAO/RECOFI Secretariat that started in 2008 with the establishment of the WGFM (formerly Working Group on Fishery Statistics). The process was further reinforced in 2009 through the FAO/RECOFI Workshop on IUU fishing (Muscat, Oman, March 2009), and substantiated through the FAO/RECOFI Workshop on stock indicators and stock status reporting (Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, July 2009) and third meeting of the WGFM (Doha, Qatar, October 2009). This would be the first time in the RECOFI history that the Commission is given the possibility, and responsibility, to exercise its powers as regional fishery body established under Article XIV of the FAO Constitution. It is a relevant milestone in the history of this Commission and within the scope of the current efforts to strengthen it.

JOINT RECOFI WGA/WGFM TECHNICAL WORKSHOP ON SPATIAL PLANNING FOR MARINE CAPTURE FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE

32. RECOFI’s Regional Technical Workshop on Spatial planning for Marine Capture Fisheries and Aquaculture was implemented in response to Commission recommendations. The fifth session of RECOFI (Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 12–14 May 2009) recommended that a joint workshop between the WGFM and the Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA) concerning the use of spatial planning tools (i.e. geographical information system, remote sensing and mapping) for marine capture fisheries and aquaculture should be undertaken, with the main focus being to conduct an assessment of spatial planning tools in the region, focusing on the issues and needs of both marine capture fisheries and aquaculture. The WGFM further identified training exercises on the handling of

national data as an essential requisite to raise awareness and enhance spatial analytical capacity in the region. In the fourth meeting of the WGA (Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, 27-28 January 2009), members proposed a review the regional competence in the use of spatial planning tools (e.g. GIS, remote sensing and mapping) and organize an inception workshop that would synthesize the knowledge acquired in the region and to recommend a road map on how to move forward in aquaculture zoning.

33. The RECOFI Technical Workshop on Spatial Planning for Marine Capture Fisheries and Aquaculture took place in Doha, Qatar from 24–28 October. Twenty-one delegates participated, representing official participants and observers from seven RECOFI Members, representatives from FAO, two international consultants on marine capture fisheries and aquaculture respectively, and one national consultant on GIS from Oman.

34. The main outcome of the workshop was a proposal for a Regional Programme for Implementing a Strategy on Spatial Planning for Marine Capture Fisheries and Aquaculture in RECOFI Member countries. A summary of the outcomes and recommendations derived from the workshop was presented at the fifth WGA meeting for discussion.

THE SPECIAL MEETING ON RECOFI CONSOLIDATION AND DEVELOPMENT

35. The Special Meeting on RECOFI Consolidation and Development was convened as a follow-up to the fifth Session of RECOFI in May 2009. At this meeting the Commission requested the Secretariat to convene an *ad hoc* inter-sessional meeting to consider ways and means to enhance the role of RECOFI as a regional fisheries management organization (RFMO).

36. The Special Meeting was convened at FAO headquarters, Rome, Italy, from 11 to 12 May 2010. The meeting was attended by fifteen delegates from seven RECOFI Members and the complete FAO Secretariat supporting the Commission.

37. The objective of the Special Meeting was to consider ways and means to enhance the role of RECOFI as a RFMO. The participants reviewed the preliminary findings of a technical review on the work and operations of the Commission. In addition, comparative information was provided on the statutes, budgets and structures of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) and the RECOFI.

38. The meeting considered the financial status of RECOFI and future scenarios for the consolidation and development of the Commission with particular emphasis on the significant differences between Members' contributions and the total expenses of the Commission. The history and present structure of GFCM was presented to the Special Meeting. It agreed that the future strengthening of RECOFI would benefit from GFCM experiences.

39. The Special Meeting agreed unanimously that RECOFI required strengthening to make it a more effective and legitimate organization. It was agreed to make three broad recommendations in relation to the future technical and institutional work of RECOFI and its financial needs. The proposals and recommendations from the meeting will be considered by the Commission at its sixth session.

SUGGESTED ACTION BY THE COMMISSION

40. The Commission is invited to review the activities performed by the WGA and the WGFM over the inter-sessional period and to provide guidance on issues of particular relevance expressed by the subsidiary bodies, including any follow-up actions that might be deemed appropriate and necessary.