

Second Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on aquaculture concludes successfully

Rohana Subasinghe
Fisheries Department
FAO, Rome

George Kourous
News and Multimedia Service (GIIM)
FAO, Rome

This past August, the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture of FAO's Committee on Fisheries (COFI) concluded a very successfully meeting in Norway. The second-ever meeting of the Sub-Committee was held from 7 to 11 August 2003 in the northern port city of Trondheim at the kind invitation of the Government of Norway, and was attended by over 150 people representing 64 FAO member countries, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs).

During opening remarks made on behalf of FAO, Mr Serge Garcia, Director, Fisheries Resources Division, Fisheries Department, expressed the Organization's gratitude to Norway for hosting the meeting, for its generous hospitality, and for having helped support attendance by a number of member countries. In his comments, Mr Garcia stressed the importance of aquaculture to both developed and developing countries as a source of food, employment and revenue, and also highlighted the diversity of the sector in different regions. He noted that aquaculture presents a number of opportunities in terms of its capacity to help meet goals for eliminating hunger established at recent international fora, such as the World Food Summit and the World Food Summit: Five Years Later. Additionally, he emphasized that while the sector provides significant social, economic and nutritional benefits worldwide, continuing public debate concerning health, safety and environmental issues related to aquaculture means that the Sub-Committee has an important role to play as a unique global intergovernmental forum for discussing policy issues related to the sustainable development and responsible management of the sector.

The welcoming address on behalf of the Government of Norway was delivered by

His Excellency Svein Ludvigsen, Minister of Fisheries. Minister Ludvigsen noted that the rapid development of aquaculture in Norway over the past 30 years has been a direct result of close collaboration and communication between the aquaculture industry, researchers, and public administrative agencies. He also drew attention to the opportunities and challenges that are presented by the global trade in aquaculture products, emphasizing the importance of appropriate frameworks for aquaculture development to ensure that products are safe for consumers and environmentally acceptable.

During the five-day working meeting, representatives from FAO member countries wrestled with a wide range of issues, including the environmental impacts of shrimp farming, the use of antibiotics by aquaculture, the introduction of non-native fish species into new regions, harmonization of trade standards, and the need for better monitoring of product safety. In its final report, the Sub-Committee made a series of recommendations for action by FAO as well as by the individual countries that make up the Organization's membership.

To help promote national policies conducive to responsible fish farming, FAO will develop detailed guidelines for the responsible management of fish farms aimed at both improving the quality of the fish farmed and at reducing any environmental impacts. A reference compendium of aquaculture-related legislation already on the books in different countries will also be produced. Assistance to member countries in implementing the relevant provisions of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) will also be provided.



Mr Serge Garcia, Director of the Fisheries Resources Division, addressing the Meeting on behalf of the Director General

Responding to developing countries' comments that they are often unable to keep up with changing safety standards governing fish imports, FAO will work to improve information sharing between importing and exporting nations and, via the international Codex Alimentarius Commission, to develop international standards for the safety of fish products. The Organization will also evaluate various labelling systems being used to certify aquaculture products as safe and environmentally friendly, with a view to encouraging worldwide adoption of a single set of science-based standards.

Countries attending the event also agreed to work with FAO to improve and enhance the collection of world data about aquaculture. In early 2004, FAO's Fisheries Department will convene an Expert Consultation to address the issue of better trends reporting in aquaculture and improving data and statistics on aquaculture (www.fao.org/fi/NEMS/events/detail_event.asp?event_id=14402 for more information).

Boosting the role of aquaculture in meeting food and nutritional needs, especially in the developing world, was another area of priority that the Sub-Committee recommended for action by FAO. To increase the contribution that fish farming makes to world food security, FAO's Fisheries Department will organize technical consultations on small-scale rural aquaculture, and possibly will convene a major conference in Africa aimed at outlining a strategy for the development of aquaculture there.

Discussing inland fisheries and their contribution to aquatic production, the Sub-Committee emphasized that appropriate management schemes for stocking activities

and other culture-based fisheries – based on ecological evaluation of water bodies and fishery resources and appropriate community-based management schemes – are vital. At the request of the Sub-Committee, FAO's Fisheries Department will formulate technical guidelines and best practices for responsible stocking programmes, conduct feasibility assessments of shrimp ranching, engage in specific-risk evaluations for transfers of selected species, and provide support to regional cooperation related to coordination of stocking programmes in transboundary watersheds.

The Sub-Committee also discussed several different shrimp culture certification schemes being implemented or developed under various auspices, in some instances without adequate stakeholder input. Several Members expressed concern that these schemes could constitute a barrier to international trade and might require developing countries to adapt constantly to new and changing trade rules. In order to address this issue, FAO will embark on a programme to review and analyse certification systems already in place, with a view to helping harmonize approaches and procedures. This work is expected to be conducted through the FAO/NACA/WB/WWF Consortium Programme on Shrimp Farming and the Environment ([see <http://www.enaca.org/shrimp> for more information](http://www.enaca.org/shrimp))

The final report of the second COFI/AQ/II session will be available on the FAO Fisheries Department Website in all official Organization languages in January 2004.

The next session of the Sub-Committee will be held in India in 2006. Exact dates and location details are pending.

