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Food
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Продовольственная и
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Organización
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COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

SUB-COMMITTEE ON AQUACULTURE

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TECHNICAL GUIDELINES ON AQUACULTURE CERTIFICATION

Summary

Aquaculture contributes significantly to the world's supply of aquatic food and is expected to bridge the gap between the supply and the increasing demand for aquatic food which cannot be met by capture fisheries. Due to concerns that some forms of aquaculture are environmentally unsustainable, socially inequitable and that products are unsafe for consumers, over the years, there have been attempts to respond to the consequent public perception and market requirements, with varying degrees of success. One such attempt is the certification of aquaculture. During its third session held in New Delhi, India in September 2006, the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture commented that the emergence of a wide range of certification schemes and accreditation bodies was creating confusion amongst producers and consumers alike and stated that there was a need for more globally accepted norms for aquaculture production. In this regard, the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture encouraged FAO to play a leading role in facilitating the development of guidelines which could be considered when national and regional aquaculture standards are developed. This paper describes the transparent and exhaustive consultation process which FAO used to develop the draft *Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification*, presented to the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture at its 4th Session for review, advice and approval.

Background and Introduction

1. Global production from aquaculture has grown substantially, contributing increasing quantities to the world's supply of fish for human consumption. This trend is projected to continue in forthcoming decades. It is envisaged that the sector will contribute more effectively to food security, poverty reduction and economic development by producing - with minimum impact on the environment

and maximum benefit to society - 83 million tonnes of aquatic food by 2030, an increase of 31.3 million tonnes above the 2006 level¹.

2. Driven by concerns that some forms of aquaculture are environmentally unsustainable, socially inequitable and that products are unsafe for consumers, over the years, there have been attempts to respond to the consequent public perception and market requirements. Food safety standards have improved and international trade regulations tightened. Policy and regulations governing environmental sustainability have been put in place in many countries, requiring aquaculture producers to comply with more stringent environmental mitigation and protection measures. In some countries, these changes were initiated by the aquaculture sector itself, usually within the more organized private industry sector to ensure its sustainability and protect operations from poorly managed activities. The private sector has made significant advances in the management of its activities and there are many examples of improved management of farming systems that have reduced environmental impacts and improved efficiency, including profitability, in all regions.
3. Owing to the need to respond to these environmental and consumer concerns regarding aquaculture production and in order to secure better market access, there is an increasing interest in the certification of aquaculture production systems, practices, processes and products from aquaculture. The major markets increasingly recognize that some form of certification is a way of assuring buyers, retailers, and consumers that fishery products are safe to consume and originate from aquaculture farms or capture fisheries adopting responsible management practices. Certification has been introduced in relation to capture fisheries for quite some time. Guidelines for eco-labelling of capture fishery products were developed by FAO in 2005² and, presently, efforts are being made to develop eco-labelling guidelines for inland fisheries³. There is a need for harmonization of fish quality and safety standards within aquaculture, implying increased development and wider use of internationally agreed, scientifically-based standards.
4. The principles of achieving harmonization of standards and equivalency in food safety, quality and animal health and the use of science-based standards are embodied in two binding agreements of the World Trade Organization (WTO): the Agreement on the application of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures and the Agreement on technical barriers to trade (TBT). The SPS Agreement confirms the right of WTO member countries to apply measures necessary to protect human, animal and plant life and health. The objective of the TBT Agreement is to prevent the use of national or regional technical regulations and voluntary standards, as unjustified technical barriers to trade. The agreement covers regulations and standards relating to all types of products including industrial products and quality requirements for foods (except requirements related to SPS measures).

¹ FISHSTAT+ 2008.

² FAO. Guidelines for Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries. Rome., FAO. 2005. 90p.

³ Expert Consultation - Guidelines on Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Inland Fisheries Rome, Italy. 23 May 2006- 26 May 2006

5. An important aspect of certification is food safety and quality. FAO's normative work on food safety is focused on the development of food standards, codes of practice and guidelines linked to the *Codex Alimentarius*, developed in close collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), and related scientific advice and capacity-building. *Codex Alimentarius* includes standards, codes of practice and guidelines for all foods commodities and products traded internationally, as well as for their production, processing and distribution conditions and practices such as food hygiene, food additives, pesticide and veterinary drugs uses and residues, contaminants, certification, organic farming, labelling, presentation, methods of analysis and sampling.
6. In several countries, aquaculture producers are introducing environmental certification of aquaculture products, either individually or in a coordinated manner, in order to credibly demonstrate that their production practices are non-polluting, non-disease transmitting and/or non-ecologically threatening⁴. Some countries are attempting to introduce state-mediated certification procedures to certify that aquaculture products are safe for consumption and farmed in accordance with certain environmental standards. Most of the work done on improved management has been on salmon and shrimp, mainly due to their high commodity value, cost absorption capacity and their importance as the most internationally traded products.
7. Socially responsible aquaculture is also high on the agenda in certain markets and certification is one way to verify the efforts towards reaching a more social sustainable development. Nowadays, it is widely accepted that aquaculture should be conducted in a socially responsible manner, adhering to national rules and regulations beneficial to the workers, small-scale farmers, local communities, investors and the country. Aquaculture should also contribute effectively to rural development, poverty alleviation and food security and provide benefits to the local community and surrounding resource users.
8. Another important issue of aquaculture certification and aquaculture activities is animal health and welfare. Aquaculture should be conducted in a manner which assures the health and welfare of farmed aquatic animals, by minimising stress, optimizing health, reducing aquatic animal disease risks and maintaining a healthy environment during all phases of the culture cycle.

Requests by FAO Members

9. During its third session held in New Delhi, India in September 2006, the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture noted that many non-governmental certification schemes have resulted in higher costs for producers without delivering significant benefits to small-scale producers. It was pointed out that the costs of such schemes were disadvantageous to small-scale producers, adding to the cost of market access, and recognized that there are different needs between small-scale and large-scale producers which should be adequately addressed. The Sub-Committee on Aquaculture commented that the emergence of a wide range of certification schemes and accreditation bodies was creating confusion amongst producers and

⁴ The state of world aquaculture 2006. FAO Fisheries Technical Paper. No. 500. Rome, FAO. 2006. 134p

consumers alike and stated that there was a need for more globally accepted norms for aquaculture production. These new norms could, in fact, provide more guidance and serve as a basis for improved harmonization and facilitate mutual recognition and equivalence of such certification schemes (COFI:AQ/IV/2008/Inf.5).

10. Within the context of the application of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF), the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture requested FAO to organise an Expert Consultation to formulate recommendations regarding the development of harmonised shrimp farming standards and review certification procedures for global acceptance and transparency, which would also assist in elaborating norms and reviewing the diverse options and relative benefits of these approaches. In this regard, the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture encouraged FAO to play a leading role in facilitating the development of guidelines which could be considered when national and regional aquaculture standards are developed. Several members of the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture and the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA) – an inter-governmental organization representing over 90 percent of the global aquaculture production - offered to cooperate at the national, regional and international levels, and requested FAO to provide a platform for such collaboration. The Sub-Committee on Aquaculture also requested the establishment of an expert group to review the certification of shrimp farming systems.
11. The Sub-Committee on Trade, held in Spain in 2006, also recommended that work related to certification and harmonization be carried out. FAO was also requested to broaden the perspective and discussions on topics to include (i) how developed countries could support the integration of small-scale fisheries into international trade through, for example, standard settings; (ii) intermediation including financing issues; (iii) potential loss of bargaining power of small-scale fishers in obtaining fair prices for their products; (iv) traceability and eco-labelling; and (iv) value chain analysis (COFI:AQ/IV/2008/Inf.6).

Process of Developing the Technical Guidelines

12. In December 2006, the FAO Fisheries Department launched a Programme, with financial assistance from its Regular Programme budget as well as from the extra budgetary assistance provided by the Government of Norway, to implement the recommendations of the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture on aquaculture certification. The NACA, as agreed during the last session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture, collaborated with FAO during the process of developing the guidelines for aquaculture certification. The objectives of the programme were:
 - The establishment of a Secretariat consisting of staff from FAO/FI and NACA;
 - Creation of a website in collaboration with NACA;
 - The setting-up of an *ad hoc* expert group (Advisory Group) convening experts from around the world to provide advice on the process;
 - The organization of expert workshops and consultative fora based on national, regional, and/or focus group requirements and needs;

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- The review of existing certification procedures and systems and the development of guidelines for aquaculture certification for global acceptance and transparency through a comprehensive participatory process.
13. The process for the development of the certification guidelines and the organization of the Expert Workshops and Consultative Fora were undertaken by the Secretariat. The Secretariat ensured:
- Commissioning appropriate working papers for discussions at the workshops;
 - Development of the Terms of Reference for the working papers in consultation with the Advisory Committee;
 - Development of an accessible website to upload all information on the certification workshops/guidelines. The website allowed public access to all background material and reports (<http://www.enaca.org/certification>). The objective of the Secretariat was to make the process transparent, and with ample opportunity for making comments by the general public on the material and process;
 - Organising workshops and meetings in coordination with host country/organisations and other interested partners.
14. In this regard, six expert workshops and/or consultative fora were held during 2007/2008 as follows:
15. Expert Workshop on Guidelines for Aquaculture Certification, held in Bangkok, Thailand from 27-30 March 2007, hosted and partly financed by the Government of Thailand. The workshop assisted in scoping the contents of the certification guidelines and laying the groundwork for the programme of work on aquaculture certification. In addition, the workshop also looked at matters specific to the Asia regional issues of certification.
16. Expert Workshop on Guidelines for Aquaculture Certification, held in Fortaleza, Brazil from 31 July to 3 August 2007, hosted and partly financed by the Government of Brazil. This workshop further assisted the process of developing guidelines for aquaculture certification, with particular emphasis on aquaculture in Latin America. There was strong NGO participation in the Fortaleza Workshop, which significantly contributed to consultations on social and environmental needs.
17. Kochi Expert Discussion Forum, held in conjunction with the 8th Asian Fisheries Forum, on 23 November 2007. This expert discussion was organized to present the guidelines to Asian scientists, farmers and other stakeholders participating in the Asian Fisheries Forum for further feedback and suggestions. The consultation was hosted and financed by the Marine Product Export Development Authority of India (MPEDA). Relevant inputs received from the fishery and aquaculture scientists were taken into account when revising the draft guidelines.
18. Expert Workshop on Guidelines for Aquaculture Certification, held at DFID headquarters, London, United Kingdom from 28-29 February 2008 and hosted and financed by the Department of International Development (DFID). This was aimed at gathering views and expert inputs from stakeholders in Europe on the

certification of aquaculture products, including representatives of European aquaculture farmers, and large importers and retailers of aquaculture products. The workshop also explored the status, opportunities and mechanisms for enhanced supply chain partnerships to support aquaculture certification in producing countries and market access for aquaculture in the European market.

19. Consultative Workshop on Guidelines for Aquaculture Certification, held in Beijing, China, from 6-8 May 2008, hosted and partly financed by the Government of China. This workshop brought stakeholders, mainly from China, to present, discuss and build consensus on the draft FAO guidelines on aquaculture certification. The workshop also discussed opportunities and challenges in implementing the provisions of the guidelines on aquaculture certification in China, how to further improve quality and safety of aquatic products from China and how to improve compliance to international trading requirements of aquatic products for better market access and responsible trade. The discussions also focused on the small-scale farming sector, where the majority of Chinese aquaculture production originates from. The subsequent version of the guidelines included, as appropriate, the recommendations, suggestions and other relevant outputs from the workshop.
20. Silver Spring Consultative Workshop, the last of the series, was held from 29-30 May 2008, in Silver Springs, United States of America, hosted and partly financed by the US State Department in collaboration with other relevant US Agencies. The workshop focused mainly on the North America region (USA and Canada) as a major global seafood market with many diverse stakeholders in aquaculture certification and provided the opportunity for dialogue between the secretariat, producer representatives and stakeholders in the North American seafood supply chain. The workshop assessed the status, opportunities and mechanisms for enhanced partnerships within supply chains to support change, and as necessary, to assist aquaculture certification in producing countries. The workshop reviewed the most recent version of the draft aquaculture certification guidelines and sought to build further consensus amongst participants with regard to the technical contents.
21. At the conclusion of each workshop, the draft guidelines were revised by the secretariat taking into consideration the relevant views and concerns of the participants, as well as comments received from the public. All draft versions of the guidelines were circulated to over 300 individuals worldwide for comments and suggestions, pending the finalization of the version presented to the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture. All workshop reports, reviews and analyses carried out during the process of developing guidelines are available at the certification website (<http://www.enaca.org/certification>).

Technical Guidelines

22. This transparent and exhaustive consultation process concluded with the development of the *Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification*, which is presented to the 4th Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture. Please refer to COFI:AQ/IV/2008/Inf.7.

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23. The aquaculture certification guidelines provide guidance for the development, organization and implementation of credible aquaculture certification schemes. They cover a range of issues relevant for the certification in aquaculture production including: a) animal health and welfare, b) food safety and quality, c) environmental integrity and/or d) social responsibility associated with aquaculture. An aquaculture certification scheme might address one or all of these issues.
 24. The guidelines will not only provide the basis for developing and implementing credible certification systems for aquaculture, but also the opportunity for existing certification schemes to be benchmarked against these international guidelines.
 25. The direct users of these guidelines are entities that develop and implement certification schemes for aquaculture such as: a) standard setting bodies, b) accreditation bodies, or c) certification bodies (or an entity that is undertaking more than one of these functions). Such entities should use these guidelines to develop, implement or revise certification schemes that seek to address any or all of the above 4 issues.
 26. The indirect users of these guidelines are stakeholders with an interest in certification schemes such as aquaculture producers and other parts of the aquaculture industry, as well as civil society groups, government agencies, and other concerned parties (e.g. intergovernmental bodies, funding institutions). The stakeholders relevant to a particular certification scheme will depend on the objectives of the scheme, e.g. geographic scope, production systems covered, issues addressed.
 27. The direct users of the guidelines (i.e. a standard setting body, an accreditation body, or a certification body), should ensure that their efforts to develop and implement a certification scheme are in accordance with the principles, considerations, relevant minimum substantive requirements and institutional and procedural requirements in the guidelines.

Request to the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture

28. The COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture is requested to review, comment, advise upon and approve the draft guidelines.