

REGIONAL FISHERY BODY SECRETARIATS' NETWORK**Sixth Meeting****Rome, 9 and 15 July 2016****CONSOLIDATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF RSN****Introduction**

1. The First meeting of FAO and Non-FAO Regional Fishery Bodies and Arrangements was held in February 1999; participants discussed how to promote the implementation of recent international instruments and initiatives, the precautionary approach to fisheries management; the mechanisms for the exchange of information among RFBs and between RFBs and FAO; potential closer collaboration between RFBs on a geographic or species basis; and mechanisms to promote the global coordination of the activities of RFBs.

2. In 2005, at the Fourth meeting of the FAO and Non-FAO Regional Fishery Bodies (hereinafter referred to as 'RFBs') and Arrangements, considering the fluent consultations in preparing meetings and that "*this constituted a virtual group during intersessional periods rather than a single event every two years*", the participants agreed that the title of 'RFB Secretariats Network' (hereinafter referred to as 'RSN' or 'the Network') would be more applicable than the Meeting's title¹. The RSN met again in 2007 and consecutively each two years, in coincidence with sessions of the Committee on Fisheries.

3. The RSN is a Network independent from FAO, which according to the RSN-5 report "*had expanded to include 51 RFBs and Arrangements*"². The decisions made by the RSN are non-binding to its members and the organizations represented by them.

4. The main objective of the RSN is promoting information sharing and discussion among secretariats on emerging issues or subjects covered by the mandate of their respective organizations. The RSN aids to support the important role played by RFBs in the conservation, management and sustainable

¹ Report of the Fourth meeting of the Regional Fishery Bodies, Rome, 14-15 March 2005, paragraph 7, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/008/a0078e/a0078e00.htm>

² <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4210e/index.html>, page 1, paragraph 8, 1st paragraph.

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use of fish stocks, and, contribute to the fact that ‘cooperation and coordination among RFBs is one of the most effective ways to strengthen regional fisheries governance’³.

Background - Laying the foundation

5. Regional bodies were established in the context of multilateral agreements which provide for the development and management in fisheries sector; the first RFB, created under the FAO Constitution, in 1948, was the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission (APFIC). Previously, the FAO Conference referred to the relevance of these bodies and recommended actions to their creation, indicating sea areas of preference⁴. Also the 1998 High-level Panel of External Experts in Fisheries expressed the view that such bodies or arrangements are essential in reinforcing regional cooperation⁵.

6. At the First meeting of FAO and non-FAO Regional Fisheries Bodies or Arrangements, in February 1999, participants highlighted the relevance of these bodies as vehicles for good fishery governance and considered the forum provided by the Meetings an opportunity to share experiences and views upon often common problems, recommending that such meetings should be held regularly with FAO as focal point.⁶

7. As regards its internal functioning, the draft of Rules of procedure was presented by the Chairperson at the Fifth RSN meeting, held in 2014, and members agreed that the document shall be further considered during the Sixth RSN meeting in 2016⁷.

8. The purpose of the network is centred in strengthening information sharing and offering a forum for discussion to RFBs secretaries on fisheries management strategies, challenges and emerging issues of relevance to fisheries governance in their regions. In its biennial meetings, important concerns and experiences in conservation and management are shared, as an exercise for RFBs and FAO to understand practical problems with impact on fisheries and aquaculture development.

9. The Network is supported by FAO, which hosts and provides secretariat services and the venue for meetings; maintains a dedicated website⁸, as a space for providing RFBs data collection, details on bodies’ work and conventions, information on Secretariat’ Network, plenary and technical reports, as well as institutional framework for fishery governance, comprising principles, agreements, processes, mechanisms and organizations related to fisheries and aquaculture. In this context, the RSN produces a regular newsletter that can be consulted at <http://www.fao.org/fishery/rsn/newsletter/en>.

10. Performance reviews to the work and practices of bodies have been welcomed by the RSN. The recommendations made in these evaluations are a constructive tool to the functioning of RFBs. Its usefulness could be improved if methods and criteria applied for evaluation are considered in the context of local circumstances that each body is dealing with as well as the particular issues affecting their

³ Report of the First Meeting of Regional Fisheries Body Secretariats Network, 12-13 March 2007, <http://www.fao.org/fishery/topic/18244/en#RFB1>, Appendix D.

⁴ Report of the FAO Conference, Second Session, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2-13 September 1946; Report of FAO Conference, Third Session, Geneva, Switzerland, 25 August - 11 September 1947. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/x5583E/x5583e00.htm#Contents>, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/x5582e/x5582e00.htm#Contents>

⁵ Report of the High-Level Panel of External Experts in Fisheries. Rome, Italy, 26-27 January 1998.

⁶ Report of the Meeting of FAO and Non-FAO Regional Fishery Bodies or Arrangements, Rome, 11-12 February 1999, paragraph 12. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/006/X1840E/X1840E00.HTM>

⁷ Report of the Fifth Meeting of the Regional Fishery Body Secretariats Network, (RSN-5), Rome, 7 and 13 June 2014, paragraph 8, page 2. <http://www.fao.org/fishery/rsn/en>

⁸ <http://www.fao.org/fishery/rfb/en>

specific area of competence and related regions or sub-regions. The diversity of concerns, from political to technical indole, remarks some complexities to standardise criteria for evaluation.

11. The increasing recognition of the RSN is reflected in references made in publications, meetings and reports, in other technical products as well as communication channels and social media of partners. The RSN networking communication and information flow, through its newsletter and dedicated website, is becoming very instrumental and a useful vehicle through which the RSN makes information available to all RFBs, partners, stakeholders and the general public.

12. Finally, and in order to suggest improvements to the RSN which could concretely help RFBs in developing their role, especially those with more serious constraints, we could consider issues previously identified by these organizations and the kind of activities implemented by them⁹.

Towards future improvements

13. The Network could be particularly well suited to support the strengthening of its related organizations and identifying together collective actions, including by:

- Providing a neutral forum for discussion through more frequent and/or longer meetings
- Providing a knowledge network, facilitating the collection of documentation and sharing of information and knowledge to develop capacities and good practices required to improve fisheries governance
- Providing specialist expertise; facilitating the sharing of policy expertise and raising political will, as well as supporting the formulation and implementation of effective policies, legislation, programmes and strategies
- Providing products to foresee sharing experiences, technical support, access to information, including relevant data; and make information readily available to members and institutions engaged on fisheries and aquaculture matters, as well as local constituencies. A dynamic website could be design in order to respond to different necessities (e.g. material to awareness raising, capacity building, good practices, etc).
- Stimulating cooperation between RFBs: considering that some bodies are facing difficulties in terms of resources as well as lack of political will from their members, joint efforts can be made in order to identify strategic areas of collaboration between RFBs and arrangements, to strengthen organizations and contribute to fisheries governance. In this regard, noting the diversity of members in terms of mandates and the need to provide focused attention to them, the organization of more frequent meetings between those covering same area of competence could be proposed¹⁰.

14. Cooperation between the RSN, its related organizations and FAO would be boosted by, among other potential initiatives, making visible how RFBs are promoting FAO policies and contributing to the achievements of the Organization's mandate. Clear examples of regional and sub-regional programmes in implementing FAO policies among member states, and related good practices, might be documented and

⁹ Report of the Fourth Meeting of the Regional Fishery Body Secretariats Network (RSN-4), Rome, 13 July 2012, Appendix 3.

¹⁰ This proposal was raised in other meetings, "*in order to better provide for issues unique to inland fisheries, consideration should be given to a possible back-to-back meeting, or a meeting within the margins of the main meeting for those RFBs which had interest in inland fisheries*", FAO Fisheries Report No. 645 - Report of the Second Meeting of FAO and Non-FAO Regional Fishery Bodies or Arrangements, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/y0593e/y0593e0b.htm#ANY%20OTHER%20MATTERS>, paragraph 70. Also, at the RSN-1 members mentioned that some issues "*require more focused attention by a limited sub-set of RSN members – particularly on small-scale fisheries, inland fisheries and aquaculture matters*", Report of the First Meeting of Regional Fisheries Body Secretariats Network, 12-13 March 2007, <http://www.fao.org/fishery/topic/18244/en#RFB1>

published and, when applicable, replicated through FAO projects and programs. The RSN could enhance its role as focal point between the RFBs community and FAO, through a collaboration framework to join forces and facilitate the development of above-mentioned initiatives.

Some options for consideration

15. The capacity to support the development and sustainable implementation of the above options remain a main challenge to be addressed and should be opportunely considered.

16. Possible actions for improvements could be based on building *mechanisms* to provide support and share experiences, e.g. a ‘dynamic website’ instead of the current static website, and in line with a broad common strategy, as follows:

A. Institutional aspects

1. Common strategy

For instance, this could be based on e.g. UN (SDGs) and FAO framework

2. Meetings

The frequency of meetings could be reconsidered for a more sustainable collaboration

3. Funding - Collaborative Ownership Approach

The RSN may consider pooled funding approaches for resources mobilization

4. Enhance FAO-RSN collaboration framework

B. Communication and visibility

1. Website re-design

The RSN website could offer space for supporting operational challenges facing by RFBs. Potential changes would include:

- **Platform thinking**
How the RSN can enable its members and related organizations to create value through its tools
- **Optimize openness**
Facilitate easy connection for users to share and manage information
- **Database**
Allowing knowledge to different stakeholders
- **Market Place**
Including:
 - **Awareness Raising package**
 - **Capacity Building resources**
- **Partnership networks - Stakeholders’ Forum**
- **Newsletter**
- **Calendar and promotion of RFBs community events**

2. Visibility

Brand: common symbols, logo design, stile, etc.