



**EXPERT CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED SUB-COMMITTEE ON AQUACULTURE OF THE COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES**

**Bangkok, Thailand, 28-29 February 2000**

**WORKING DOCUMENT  
A STRATEGIC FORUM FOR AQUACULTURE DEVELOPMENT:  
OPTIONS FOR THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON AQUACULTURE OF  
THE COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES**

**PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT**

This document is meant to serve as a point of departure for discussions on the need for and establishment of an FAO Sub-Committee on Aquaculture (COFI:AQ). The document should not be seen as being comprehensive. The contents, suggestions and issues herein are not final positions, but rather topics for debate, elaboration, clarification, and discussion during the Expert Consultation.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

In light of the (importance) growing contributions of aquaculture to global food security and economic development, the diversity of international trends that present challenges to the sector, and extremely heavy work loads of existing international instruments of FAO and others on issues dealing with the capture fisheries sector, the establishment of an intergovernmental statutory body dealing specifically with aquaculture, COFI:AQ, has been proposed by a large number of delegations to the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI).

Aquaculture, including culture based fisheries, is one of the fastest growing food producing sectors. Global aquaculture production in 1998 was 38.2 million metric tonnes with a value of US\$50.4 billion. This production derives from a sector that is extremely diverse and practiced in a wide variety of environments, countries, and social systems. Production systems range from simple low-input enclosures of natural water bodies where natural seed and feed are used, to sophisticated closed-

system raceways where temperature, lighting, and other physical aspects are tightly controlled and specialized diets are fed to genetically improved stocks.

Marine and freshwater aquaculture make up approximately 47% each of total production, with approximately 6% of production coming from brackish water culture. Developing countries produce 89.6% of the farmed animals for both domestic consumption and foreign export. Low income food deficit countries (LIFDC) account for over 80% of global aquaculture production. Aquaculture production in developing countries has grown by an average annual rate of 13.1% since 1987, while growth in developed countries for the same time period was 2.2%.

The number of aquatic animal taxa farmed has slowly increased from 174 in 1984 to 231 in 1994 as knowledge on nutrition, breeding, health, and general animal husbandry has improved. As the life cycle of these animals becomes closed, domestication and breed improvement is developing for many species, e.g. common carp, Nile tilapia, Atlantic salmon, and channel catfish.

Farmed aquatic animals provide increased nutrition and food security in many rural and developing areas through "affordable high quality protein" rich in essential nutrients, such as omega-3 fatty acids, calcium, selenium, phosphorus, iodine, and vitamins A and D. Aquaculture product is also a valuable export commodity for developing countries. Marine shrimp, derived primarily from developing countries and consumed mainly in developed countries, account for 2.6% of total aquaculture production, yet make up 12.1% (over US\$6 Billion) of the total value.

This varied and growing sector is facing, and will continue to face in the coming years, a diversity of challenges that must be addressed if it is to continue its growth and contribution to global food security. Once looked upon as a "green" industry, a means to improve local economies, and a tool to stem the loss of aquatic biodiversity, the sector is sometimes criticized for un-sustainable practices and for endangering local livelihoods.

Aquaculture is a key area of activity within FAO and corporate policy recommends further activity in this area within a strategic framework developed for the next 15 years.

## **FAO STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK**

A Strategic Framework for FAO 2000-2015 (Annex XX) was presented to the 30<sup>th</sup> session of the FAO Conference (November, 1999) containing corporate strategies on:

- eradicating of food insecurity and rural poverty;
- promoting developing and reinforcing policy and regulatory frameworks

for food, agriculture, fishery<sup>1</sup> and forestry;

- creating sustainable increases in the supply and availability of food and other products from the crop, livestock, fishery, and forestry sectors;
- supporting the conservation, improvement and sustainable use of natural resources for food and agriculture, and
- improving decision making through provision of information and assessments and fostering of knowledge management for food and agriculture.

The Strategy notes that for implementation, FAO must take a multidisciplinary approach and seek to develop synergetic partnerships among the international development community, industry, governments, and NGOs. FAO also must be able to mobilize international will and resources. Improved and focused discussion and the exchange of accurate information among countries and stakeholders will be essential in accomplishing the FAO strategy.

The subsidiary and statutory bodies of FAO are valuable fora to aid in implementation of the Strategy and in assisting FAO to help Members. The Committee on Fisheries (COFI), a subsidiary body of the FAO Council, was established by the FAO Conference in 1965. The Committee presently constitutes the only global inter-governmental forum where major international fisheries and aquaculture problems and issues are examined and recommendations addressed to governments, regional fishery/aquaculture bodies, NGOs, fishworkers, FAO and international community, periodically on a world-wide basis. COFI has also been used as a forum in which global agreements and non-binding instruments were negotiated.

During the 22<sup>nd</sup> Session of COFI (Rome, 1997), a significant number of delegations supported the proposal to consider the establishment of a Sub-Committee on Aquaculture to serve as a global multilateral governmental forum, open to all international parties interested in aquaculture development, for consultation on matters of global importance in aquaculture development and inland fisheries enhancement / culture based fisheries, and on key development issues and problems and possible measures for their resolution. At the 23<sup>rd</sup> Session of COFI (Rome, 1999) there again was broad support for the establishment of a Sub-Committee and the Committee decided that an Expert Consultation should be convened from regular programme funds to work out a detailed proposal for the Sub-Committee to be presented to the next session of COFI.

## **2. OBJECTIVES AND OUTPUTS OF THE EXPERT CONSULTATION**

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Session of COFI charged FAO with developing a report that includes rationale for, terms of reference of, operating procedures and financial implications of a COFI:AQ. In order to assist FAO, the Expert Consultation will

strive to:

- identify key issues of international importance in aquaculture requiring the establishment of an intergovernmental forum
- assess, in general terms, the benefits and practical implications of establishing such a Sub-Committee for FAO and Member countries
- elaborate terms of reference, operating procedures, and an outline of possible programme activities for the Sub-Committee, including possible agenda items for its first two sessions (Annex XX).

The report of the Expert Consultation will contain the above items and other relevant issues discussed.

### **3. POTENTIAL KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE**

A COFI Sub-Committee can provide the opportunity for information exchange, discussion and consensus-building among various stakeholders interested in global aquaculture development. Being an intergovernmental forum, within the framework of the United Nations system, the principal (main) constituents / participants would be the representatives of government agencies and institutions dealing with matters related to aquaculture. Significant additional interest can be expected from international civil society organizations concerned with aquaculture (including non-governmental organizations - NGOs- involving, for example, consumers, producers, private sector, social and environmental interest groups, others). Attendance and contributions by these CSOs would be facilitated in their capacity as recognized international observers to COFI and FAO. Other intergovernmental organizations and institutions with regional or global mandate, or specific thematic interests, would also be represented and will participate, as is common practice with COFI, the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade, or any other FAO Governing or Advisory Body. The COFI:AQ would therefore be the major global and intergovernmental forum for discussion and decision on matters requiring international agreement and action by governmental and non-governmental stakeholders concerned with aquaculture.

It can be expected that the work of the Sub-Committee, and especially the resulting outputs, will benefit from a high level of technical competence and expertise of participating experts and representatives in the field of aquaculture. In view of the highly multi-disciplinary character of aquaculture, strong consideration would be given to social, economic and cultural attributes of aquaculture and a wide range of institutional, legal and policy issues could be addressed at intergovernmental level. In addition to technical and scientific excellence, deliberations and decisions would be based on contributions and views provided by delegates and observers interested in issues associated with aquaculture, for example, food security and rural development, food quality and food safety, environment and biodiversity, infrastructure and investment opportunities, R&D,

etc.

Aquaculture comprises a wide range of very diverse practices, systems and species, as well as people and environments, which in many respects shows that there are significant similarities with terrestrial food production. The participants of the Sub-Committee must strive to incorporate this broad-based approach into the work of the Sub-committee. Therefore, COFI:AQ could provide the unique opportunity - at global and intergovernmental levels - for more participation by, and interaction with, representatives from related sectors, such as agriculture (crop production and animal husbandry), food processing, human nutrition, marketing and trade, land and water use, environment, etc.

#### **4. POTENTIAL KEY ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED BY SUB-COMMITTEE**

Addressing issues relevant to aquaculture development within the structure of an FAO subsidiary body such as COFI or its COFI:AQ is advantageous in that FAO:

- serves as a honest broker;
- provides a forum for comprehensive treatment of technical, trade, and policy topics;
- has an official interface with governments and links to other relevant organizations; and
- is a repository of aquaculture and fishery data from Member countries.

However, issues addressed by the Sub-Committee should have one or more of the following characters:

- they should have a transboundary component to them, e.g. use of introduced species;
- they should have the possibility to lead to international agreement, e.g. the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, and
- they should utilize FAO's comparative advantage, e.g. integrated farming systems, improvement of fishery and aquaculture statistics.

A list of potential issues is presented in Annex XX.

The 16<sup>th</sup> Session of COFI in 1985 established the Sub-Committee on Trade (COFI: FT) to deal with matters of international trade in fish and fishery products. It will be important that COFI:AQ is complementary to the Sub-Committee on Trade.

Issues that require action by COFI:AQ will be considered by the Expert

Consultation as possible components of a programme of action for the first two meetings of COFI:AQ (Annex XX).

## **5. RELATED MECHANISMS**

In considering the creation of a new intergovernmental body, i.e. the COFI:AQ, consideration must also be given to any existing mechanisms, or instruments that have a similar function, and how the COFI:AQ would complement the work of these existing instruments. Worldwide, there is no intergovernmental global forum which would have aquaculture as a primary and exclusive focus and target, with a principal and comprehensive mandate for discussion, decision and agreement on technical and policy matters related specifically to the aquaculture sector.

However, there is a wide range of international, regional and global fora and regional intergovernmental mechanisms which deal primarily (exclusively) and specifically with aquaculture matters. These include organizations such as, for example, the World Aquaculture Society (WAS) and regional chapters, the Global Aquaculture Alliance, the Federation of European Aquaculture Producers (FEAP), the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA).

There are further numerous regional intergovernmental arrangements (bodies) which include - to some minor or larger extent - aquaculture (production or products) within their overall mandate or coverage which scope however involves more than aquaculture, for example all of fisheries production, or fish trade, representing the entire fisheries sector. The mechanisms include many regional fishery/aquaculture bodies, such as, for example, SEAFDEC, INFOFISH, APFIC, GFCM, EIFAC, COPESCAL, CIFA, as well as fisheries related Working Groups or Gremia within regional economic groupings such as, for example, ASEAN, or APEC, or the European Union, etc.

As an intergovernmental, global forum dealing with a special thematic aspect important in aquaculture, there is the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade that traditionally covered all issues related to the international trade of fish products of aquaculture. COFI:FT also deals with trade of fish meal and fish oil.

General food standards and safety issues in aquaculture have been covered at global and intergovernmental level by the FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), through its Committee on Fish and Fishery Products. This CAC Committee also dealt with aquaculture in as much as it started to explore food safety and food quality and related regulatory issues specific to aquaculture products.

Other thematic areas, such as biodiversity or environmental impact issues in aquaculture have been discussed in international advisory bodies such as, for example, SBSTTA of the CBD, GESAMP, ICES, NASCO, and others. The use of aquatic genetic resources in aquaculture will eventually be discussed in the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. A number of

selected specific research issues are being developed by ICLARM.

All these mechanisms and fora, whether regional or global, whether intergovernmental or non-governmental, whether statutory or advisory, cover certain aquaculture issues, to varying degrees and depths, depending also on their thematic or subject matter mandate. However, none of these has an exclusive full scale mandate to deal with the entire aquaculture sector on a global scale, with an established intergovernmental commitment to discuss and agree on issues and actions important for continued sustainable contributions by aquaculture to food security and economic development in FAO Member countries.

All of these international mechanisms, agreements, and fora can however, contribute - through representatives - to deliberations and decisions by COFI:AQ and COFI itself, and subsequently, the FAO Conference. COFI:AQ could request, for example, the preparation of reviews, studies, or normative texts, which could be developed in joint cooperative efforts by FAO and other interested organizations, and which could be discussed and approved/endorsed by COFI:AQ. There is scope for enhanced cooperation by FAO with the various initiatives and organizations, for the benefit of the sustainable development of the aquaculture sector.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The establishment of an intergovernmental body has administrative and financial implications for the FAO Secretariat and for the governments participating in the work of such a body. It is envisioned that COFI:AQ would meet biennially (see below) for three to four days.

For FAO, the convening and servicing of sessions as well as the preparation, processing and distribution of documentation and follow-up work will involve additional staff time, travel costs and possible contractual services. Depending on the items covered in the agenda, it is conceivable that 6 months professional staff time and an equal amount of general service staff would be required and should be reflected in the Programme of Work and Budget. Cost effectiveness is envisioned because some of this work is already being undertaken by the Fisheries Department and to this extent additional resources would not be required.

The direct costs for a meeting session include documentation, translation, and interpretation. Indicative costs are presented here. Experience has shown that interpretation for four days of interpretation (seven sessions) with five languages is \$38,000; with four languages it is \$28,800. Translation is approximately \$500/1000 words; COFI usually aims at producing four major documents of a total of 25,000 words. If documents are available for translation well in advance of the required date, translation fees can be substantially reduced (as much as 50%). Costs of meeting facilities and staff time are omitted from these considerations as they will change depending on venue.

For participating governments and observers the financial obligations are relatively minor, consisting mainly of provision of information, and direct participation in meetings (travel, room and board), unless governments offer to host meetings or have specific action programmes to be implemented.

## **7. PROPOSED TOR AND RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR COFI:AQ**

A draft TOR for the COFI:AQ is attached as Annex XX for review and elaboration.

Normally, the rules of procedure of subsidiary bodies are the same as those of the parent body. Therefore, the rules of procedure and membership and attendance of the COFI:AQ would be identical to COFI (Annex XX). In order for COFI:AQ to be useful and representative, participation from a wide variety of stakeholders is desirable, i.e. industry, academia, NGOs (conservation and industry), IGOs, and CSOs. Participation of established FAO partners, such as, for example, ICLARM, CBD, Mekong River Commission, EU, UNEP, IUCN, the International Development Banks, XXX should be actively pursued.

The venue and frequency of meetings should be cost-effective and take advantage of existing facilities and existing mechanisms where possible. There are a number of existing fora that address aquaculture issues on a regular basis, e.g. the World Aquaculture Society whose venue changes yearly and Aquaculture Verona, Italy. In order for timely input of material from COFI:AQ to COFI, meetings should be held biennially and approximately 6 months prior to COFI.

**Annex A**

### **PROGRAMME OUTLINE**

#### Possible Issues for Discussion by the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture

The Strategic Framework for 2000 - 2015 presented at the 30<sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO Conference (1999) cited possible criteria for prioritizing issues addressed by the Organization: i) they should have a transboundary component to them, ii) they should have the possibility to lead to international agreement, or iii) they should utilize FAO's comparative advantage. These same criteria could apply to the selection of topics to be addressed by the next two sessions of an eventual COFI:AQ.

Two broad subject areas appear suitable for issues to be discussed by COFI:AQ, i) the role of aquaculture in promoting food security and rural livelihoods and ii) implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries in relation to sustainable aquaculture development. Specific topics are listed under these general headings.

The role of aquaculture in promoting food security and rural livelihoods

- Role of producer organizations/networks, and other stakeholders.
- Strengthening regional fishery/aquaculture organizations and defining their role in relation to FAO and others.
- Codes for integrated farming systems in regards to human health issues.
- Integrated resources management - cost/benefit of aquaculture vs other land/water uses; how to involve other sectors.

### Implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries in relation to sustainable aquaculture development

- Fish health and quarantine.
- Alien species and genotypes in aquaculture and culture based fisheries.
- Supply of inputs such as feeds, fertilizers, chemicals, equipment.
- Precautionary approach and best management practices in aquaculture.
- Ecosystem approach in aquaculture.
- Eco-labelling, other types/requirements of labelling (eg. food safety, product quality; quality of inputs - seed, feeds, chemicals, equipment).
- Biotechnology and especially new genetic technologies.
- Improvement of aquaculture statistics - farming system, habitat, strain/breed, release to wild or contained area, etc; promotion of information systems - FIGIS.
- Monitoring of trends ( production, value; key development issues, etc. ) and development of indicators of sustainable aquaculture development.

### **Annex B**

### **TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR SUB-COMMITTEE ON AQUACULTURE (DRAFT)**

The principal functions of COFI:AQ are twofold:

- to advise the FAO Committee on Fisheries on technical and political matters related to aquaculture, and
- to advise COFI and FAO as to the work to be performed by the

organization in the subject matter field of aquaculture.

Specifically the Sub-Committee would:

- identify and discuss, major issues and trends in global aquaculture development;
- determine those issues and trends of international importance requiring action aiming at sustainable contribution of aquaculture to food security and economic development in FAO member countries;
- recommend and/or agree on international action to address aquaculture development needs;
- in particular, advise on mechanisms to prepare, facilitate and implement action programmes identified as well as on the possible/expected contributions of partners (e. g. financing and technical cooperation agencies, national governments, regional organisations);
- in particular, strengthen international collaboration to assist developing countries in the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.
- request and/or promote the preparation of technical reviews and elaboration of issues and trends of international importance for example, on agreements on international norms and standards on food safety and quality, biotechnology and biosafety, environment, use of inputs, production practices, product labelling, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> FAO defines "fishery" in the broad sense to include aquaculture and culture based fisheries.