



COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

SUB-COMMITTEE ON AQUACULTURE

Eighth Session

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REPORT FROM THE SECRETARIAT OF THE COFI SUB-COMMITTEE ON FISH TRADE

Executive Summary

This agenda item seeks to regularly apprise the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture (COFI-SCA) of the activities and status of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade (COFI-FT). As of the 8th Session of COFI-SCA a standing item entitled “Report from the Secretariat of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade” will be inserted on the agenda of all COFI-SCA sessions and reciprocally a converse item will be inserted as a standing agenda item of all future COFI-FT sessions as of its next session.

This brief document aims to inform participants attending the 8th Session of the COFI-SCA of the key issues and recommendations emanating from the 14th Session of COFI-FT. The full report of the aforementioned 14th COFI-FT session may be accessed through the following link: <http://www.fao.org/cofi/ft/en>.

Members are invited to comment and make suggestions on improving collaboration between COFI-FT and COFI-SCA.

1. The Committee on Fisheries Sub-Committee on Fish Trade (COFI-FT) was established in 1985 and its first session was held in October 1986. The next session (15th session) of COFI-FT will be held in the first quarter of 2016, hosted by the government of Morocco. The precise dates and location are still to be determined.

2. The COFI-FT provides guidance to the FAO work programme on trade and market access issues affecting stakeholders in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. The Member recommendations arising from COFI-FT sessions are frequently translated by the Secretariat into FAO action on fish trade and marketing issues. The COFI-FT raises awareness of the fisheries and aquaculture sector's vital contribution to economic growth, employment and the role of fish in nutrition and food security, and interacts with other international bodies such as the WTO, OECD, CODEX and CITES on seafood trade issues.

3. The 14th session of COFI FT met during 24–28 February 2014, in Bergen Norway. The main topics discussed were: fish trade and human nutrition, recent developments in fish trade, voluntary certification schemes (eco-labels), seafood traceability systems, the voluntary guidelines for small-scale fisheries and the report on CITES related activities in the listing of aquatic species. The important issues are as follows:

4. The Catch Documentation Schemes (CDS) guidelines being developed at the request of Member States, take into consideration the inclusion of production from aquaculture along the value chain where captured live fish are subsequently caged or penned for further growth or fattening. The draft guidelines suggest a risk-based approach that includes the introduction of aquaculture consignments for species where this is relevant. The tracking of aquaculture products along the food chain is often done through traceability schemes.

5. Similarly, traceability in fisheries covers many aspects from the legality of the product to food safety and food quality, including for aquaculture products. Traceability can be a component of a CDS or as a standalone scheme depending on the product and legislative requirements. A study to describe the gap between current practices and recommended best traceability practices outlined in the draft “Best Practices Guidelines on Traceability” is currently underway and managed by FAO as an outcome of the last COFI. The results should be presented at the upcoming COFI-FT in early 2016 in Morocco.

6. There are more than forty eco-labelling schemes that are applied to fish products globally with many applying to aquaculture products. The sheer number and diversity of labels poses many issues such as consumer confusion; costs of obtaining the eco-label for the producer; the need for multiple labels for producers and distributor with multiple buyers since each buyer may use a different eco-label which substantially increases the cost of production for the producer or distributor; and widely varying requirements for each eco-label.

7. FAO is working with the GSSI to ensure that the relevant elements of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, which includes aquaculture, are reflected in the minimum requirements for an eco-label for fish caught or farmed that are currently under development. The GSSI recommendations for the minimum requirements for eco-labels for fish products will also be presented at the upcoming COFI-FT.

8. There are two areas of work that are providing new and improved products for existing and new markets. The first is on the re-use of fish by-products from processed capture and farmed fish, as

well as by-catch, to create new products for human consumption. New products include nutrition enhancing ingredients added human food products such as school meals, as well as new products high in micronutrients from the processing of fish frames for direct human consumption. The other area of improved resource efficiency is reducing post-harvest losses and lowering energy consumption during post harvesting through new or improved technologies such processes as smoking.

9. A recently improved smoking oven design has reduced the amount of carbon-based fuel used in processing as well as product loss, and significantly improved the quality of the product and health of the processors. The improved product quality has opened up new and more profitable markets for the processors. These improvements in resource efficiency are widely applicable in the aquaculture sector.

10. Though bivalve molluscs are such an important commodity and make up a large percentage of the production of marine aquaculture, very few countries are able to access international markets due to stringent requirements. Since bivalves are filter feeding animals, they tend to concentrate microorganisms, toxins and chemicals in the environment and therefore, their safety management requires stringent sanitary measures. In this regard, FAO/WHO are working together to develop technical guidelines for implementation of Codex Code of Practice for Fish and Fishery Products, what will help the aquaculture sector to ensure products meet CODEX standards and can be safely traded domestically and internationally.

11. The perceptions on the aquaculture sector and on farmed fish products have been identified as a constraint on the sector's further development as well as on fish consumption which is ultimately linked to demand and trade. While the majority of consumers are not aware of the farmed or wild origin of the seafood they buy, negative perceptions can negatively affect prices. Moreover, as long as a balanced picture of aquaculture's costs and benefits is absent, policy does not reflect realities, which can lead to the overregulation of a sector. It is therefore crucial to better understand the range of perceptions that exist and to identify successful initiatives to improve the public understanding of aquaculture.

12. The Secretariats of COFI-FT and COFI-SCA are collaborating on a number of programmes and activities with the objective of integrating aquaculture issues better into the trade agenda. Likewise the Secretariats strive to achieve synergies where and when possible and to avoid duplication of effort.