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## COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

### SUB-COMMITTEE ON FISH TRADE

#### Thirteenth Session

Hyderabad, India, 20-24 February 2012

### Results of the Expert Consultation to develop an FAO evaluation framework

#### Executive Summary

This paper describes the outcome of the Expert Consultation to Develop an FAO Evaluation Framework to Assess the Conformity of Public and Private Ecolabelling Schemes with the FAO Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries. The paper seeks guidance from the Sub-Committee on how to proceed with the evaluation framework developed by the Expert Consultation, both in terms of process and of substance.

#### The Sub-Committee is invited to:

1. Comment on the Expert Consultation's Report, including the draft evaluation framework to assess the conformity of public and private ecolabelling schemes with the FAO Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine and Inland Capture Fisheries;
2. Comment on the usefulness of the evaluation framework developed by the Expert Consultation;
3. Comment on the usefulness of having a common framework that addresses both inland and marine capture fisheries;
4. Provide guidance on follow-up actions required to finalize the evaluation framework, including:
  - Identifying areas where further work is required to finalize the evaluation framework; and
  - The process that should be followed to undertake this work, including consideration of convening a Technical Consultation.
5. Provide guidance on related issues including:
  - Assessment of the extent to which ecolabelling schemes in practice contribute to improved fisheries management and economic returns.

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## BACKGROUND

1. The 12<sup>th</sup> session of COFI:FT agreed that the FAO Secretariat should develop an evaluation framework to assess the conformity of public and private ecolabelling schemes with the FAO Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries (the marine Guidelines). COFI:FT also agreed that FAO would not undertake conformity assessments of ecolabelling schemes, but only provide the tools required to undertake assessments. The Sub-Committee also agreed that as a first step in this process the Secretariat should convene an Expert Consultation to initiate work on the evaluation framework. The results of the Expert Consultation would then be considered by the Twenty-ninth Session of COFI in January 2011. COFI would provide guidance on how to proceed with this issue.
2. An Expert Consultation to Develop an FAO Evaluation Framework to Assess the Conformity of Public and Private Ecolabelling Schemes with the FAO Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries was convened in Rome on 24-26 November 2010 (the Expert Consultation). The Expert Consultation's report was submitted to the Twenty-ninth session of COFI.
3. The Twenty-ninth session of COFI recommended that FAO refer the report of the Expert Consultation to the Thirteenth session of COFI:FT for further guidance and follow-up action, including consideration of the need to convene a technical consultation on this matter.

## RESULTS OF THE EXPERT CONSULTATION

4. The FAO Secretariat convened the Expert Consultation with the objective of initiating the process of developing an evaluation framework to assess the conformity of public and private ecolabelling schemes with the marine Guidelines for consideration by COFI. The principal task was to develop an evaluation framework for marine capture fisheries. As COFI:FT had also noted that it would be beneficial to develop a similar evaluation framework to assess the conformity of ecolabelling schemes with the FAO Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Inland Fisheries (the inland Guidelines) after their adoption<sup>1</sup>, and as these draft inland Guidelines follow very closely the marine Guidelines, the Expert Consultation also considered additional criteria relating specifically to the inland Guidelines.
5. The following sections describe the main conclusions of the Expert Consultation. Delegates are kindly requested to refer to the report of the Expert Consultation to Develop an FAO Evaluation Framework to Assess the Conformity of Public and Private Ecolabelling Schemes with the FAO Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries, Rome, 24–26 November 2010 (the Report) for a complete description of the work that was undertaken. Appendix D of the Report, in particular, contains the draft evaluation framework developed by the Expert Consultation.

### *Evaluation Framework*

6. The draft Evaluation Framework in Appendix D of the Report sets out the benchmarking indicators developed by the Expert Consultation and the corresponding paragraphs of the Guidelines for which these indicators can be used to assess conformance. The draft Evaluation Framework has been developed to cover both marine and inland fisheries with one set of indicators. Textual differences between the two sets of Guidelines, and associated differences in individual indicators, are identified in the text of the Framework.

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<sup>1</sup> The FAO Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Inland Fisheries were adopted at the Twenty-ninth Session of COFI.

7. Three main parts of the Guidelines create the structure for the Evaluation Framework:
  - ◀ The principles;
  - ◀ The Minimum Substantive Requirements, including ‘Management systems’, ‘Stocks under consideration’ and ‘Ecosystem’; and
  - ◀ The Procedural and Institutional Aspects, including Guidelines for the setting of standards of sustainable fisheries, Guidelines for accreditation (of independent certifying bodies) and Guidelines for certification (of fisheries).
8. The Principles of the Guidelines describe a number of higher order requirements that are essential for all ecolabelling schemes. The details of how the schemes achieve these requirements are provided in the sections on Minimum Substantive Requirements and the Procedural and Institutional Aspects.
9. The Expert Consultation developed benchmark indicators covering all paragraphs in the Minimum Substantive Requirements and the Procedural and Institutional Aspects. No separate benchmark indicators were developed for the Principles. Conformance with the Principles is to be assessed through conformance with the benchmark indicators developed under the Minimum Substantive Requirements and the Procedural and Institutional Aspects.
10. The approach used in developing the Evaluation Framework has been to identify indicators that will permit an assessment of conformity with the FAO Guidelines to be made. In the section dealing with Minimum Substantive Requirements and Criteria for Ecolabels one or more indicators are identified for each paragraph in the Guidelines. In the section dealing with Procedural and Institutional Aspects indicators are often identified to cover groups of paragraphs where related issues are identified. The indicators can be found in the Appendix D of the Report and follow closely the text of the Guidelines.
11. The assessment process developed by the Expert Consultation enables an evaluation to be made as to whether the scheme being assessed is in conformity with the indicators identified in the Evaluation Framework (Appendix D) only on a pass/fail basis. The Evaluation Framework includes a very large number of benchmark indicators (155 in total, six of which apply only to the inland fisheries guidelines). All indicators are treated equally. Conformance by the scheme is determined only when the scheme is in conformance with all the indicators in the evaluation framework (Appendix D of the Report).
12. The meeting discussed the benefits of more flexible approaches (e.g. a traffic light approach) to assess the extent of conformity. It recognized that this would require weighting indicators in order to identify those that are critical to ensure conformance with the principles. The performance assessment of indicators of a more operational nature might lead to determinations of partial but acceptable conformance with the Guidelines. The Expert Consultation considered that there could be value in this approach but there was insufficient time to attempt it.

### ***Types of assessment***

13. The Evaluation Framework may be used to assess conformity with FAO Guidelines through a variety of means. It could be used as a self-assessment tool by the ecolabelling scheme holder; it could also be used by third parties with an interest in assessing the conformity of ecolabelling schemes with the Guidelines. These would include governments, consumers, retailers, processors and harvesters that are seeking to make their own assessments against the agreed criteria. As noted earlier, FAO will not actually undertake the conformity assessment of ecolabelling schemes.

### ***Special circumstances of developing countries and countries in transition***

14. The Guidelines recognize the special circumstances of developing countries and countries in transition, including the need to use less data demanding approaches, financial and technical assistance, technology transfer, and training and scientific cooperation. In some instances these special circumstances can be addressed by ecolabelling schemes. In other instances these special

circumstances can only be addressed by States, relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, and financial institutions. The Evaluation Framework only requires ecolabelling schemes to address the special circumstances when they fall within their capacity. The extent to which States, relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, and financial institutions respond to these requirements falls outside the scope of this Evaluation Framework. However, ecolabelling schemes should try to facilitate access to appropriate assistance from States, relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, and financial institutions.

### ***Other issues***

15. The Guidelines require ecolabelling schemes to address the chain of custody certification. However, the Expert Consultation felt they did not provide effective minimum substantive requirements to ensure that the integrity of ecolabelled products is maintained at all points throughout the supply chain. The meeting has provided guiding comment in the Evaluation Framework in an effort to address the shortcomings. However, an amendment to the Guidelines would be required in order to address this issue in full.

16. The Expert Consultation agreed that there is a need to assess the extent to which ecolabelling schemes in practice contribute to improved fisheries management and economic returns. The assertion is frequently made by proponents of ecolabelling schemes that they do. The meeting agreed that there is now a body of evidence emerging that should be analysed to verify whether these assertions have been borne out. The meeting considered that this was a task that FAO might consider undertaking.