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et
l'agriculture

Organización
de las
Naciones
Unidas
para la
Agricultura
y la
Alimentación

REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR FISHERIES (RECOFI)

Fourth Session

Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 7–9 May 2007

REVIEW OF INTERSESSIONAL ACTIVITIES 2005–2007

SUMMARY

The document presents a synthesis of the inter-sessional activities that took place between the Commission's Third and Fourth Sessions. The Commission will be invited to evaluate the progress in the implementation of the inter-sessional activities and their relevance to the Commission's deliberations and recommendations made at earlier sessions, identify the constraints encountered and provide guidance for the planning and implementation of its Programme of Work with the view of facilitating future operations.

I. FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES RELATED TO GENERAL ISSUES

1. Recommendation n.15 (see Appendix I) of the Commission's Third session (Doha, Qatar, 9–11 May 2005) had called upon countries to present at RECOFI sessions national reports that also include issues of regional concern. The Secretariat has suggested the inclusion of Item 3 in the Agenda of the Fourth session and invited participating countries to present summarized statements emphasizing the status of major stocks, aquaculture activities, joint operations, constraints encountered and future programmes. It was also suggested that the presentations would place emphasis on regional aspects concerning harmonization of data collection and analysis and stress the importance of research and studies at regional level.

2. Recommendations 17 and 18 of the Third session referred to the preparation by the Secretariat of reports relating to the Commission's Programme of Work and Budget. Specifically, the countries had requested that the Secretary prepares full and comprehensive financial reports including statements from the previous biennium. This request was fulfilled for the present session. A second request had asked the Secretary to distribute updated budget reports on a quarterly basis. This request was fulfilled only partly, due to (i) the separation of the RECOFI Secretary in December 2005 and, (ii) the lack of any expenditure during 2006. A short budget statement, however, was circulated in February 2007 that practically contains the same totals shown in document RECOFI/IV/2007/8 (Programme of Work and Budget 2007–2008).

3. Recommendation n. 22 of the Third session requested that the Commission's working groups on aquaculture and statistics meet more frequently during the inter-sessional period. The Second meeting of the Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA) was held in Muscat, Oman, from 29 to 30 November 2005 (see below). Furthermore, as shown in document RECOFI/IV/2007/8 (Programme of Work and Budget 2007–2008), the Third meeting of the WGA is planned to take place back-to-back with the Commission's Fourth session, while a Fourth meeting is programmed for 2008. With regards to the Working Group on Statistics (WGS) a second meeting is programmed for 2007 and a third one is envisaged for 2008.

4. The Commission also expressed at its Third Session the need for the preparation of a RECOFI publication in the form of a bulletin. Given the undergoing work in developing RAIS, the establishment of a regional statistical database of capture production data and the envisaged integration of other variables into regional datasets, it was thought that at the present stage the development of a RECOFI web site would be an easier and cheaper task which would also be the basis for future publications. Provisions for such a development have been made in document RECOFI/IV/2007/8 (Programme of Work and Budget 2007–2008).

II. FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES RELATED TO CAPTURE FISHERIES STATISTICS

Data collection and analysis

5. Paragraph 17 and Recommendations 2 and 4 of the Report of the Commission's Third session (see RECOFI/IV/2007/Inf.3) indicate the need for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to assist RECOFI countries to review and improve their methods of data collection and analysis, with the view of facilitating the preparation of statistical indicators relating to the fish stocks in the region. Such activities have not taken place during 2006 due to the vacancy created by the separation of the RECOFI Secretary and the resulting lack of coordination. The allocated funds have also proved insufficient for the type, size, and duration of activities requested by the Commission. However, provisions for technical assistance in the sector of fisheries statistics have been made in document RECOFI/IV/2007/8 (Programme of Work and Budget 2007–2008).

6. Paragraph 23 and Recommendation n.1 of the Report of the Commission's Third Session (see RECOFI/IV/2007/Inf.3) stress the need for RECOFI countries to attempt the formulation of regional statistical indicators (such as Catch Per Unit Effort – CPUE), at least for certain categories of finfish species. This and other statistical indicators and variables were discussed at the regional workshop on latest developments in fishery survey tools and integrated databases in the Near East (see RECOFI/IV/2007/Inf.5). The workshop was organized by the FAO Regional Office for the Near East (RNE) with the view of bringing together senior fisheries statisticians of the region and providing a forum for the exchange of views and experiences in the development and implementation of fisheries statistical monitoring programmes. Participants from Bahrain, Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, United Arab Emirates and Yemen attended the workshop. A detailed account of proceedings, major findings, conclusions and recommendations is given by Information Document RECOFI/IV/2007/Inf.5.

RECOFI database

7. As agreed at the Third Session, in August 2005 the first version of RECOFI capture production database including 1986-2003 data was made available as a dataset downloadable from the FISHSTAT+ web page (<http://www.fao.org/fi/statist/fisoft/FISHPLUS.asp>). In June 2006 the database was updated to include 2004 data, and in April 2007 will contain data for 2005.

8. FAO-FIES (ex FAO-FIDI) has continued to “...*work with the Commission's member countries to increase the level of taxonomic disaggregation of reported landings that are reported in the FAO capture database...*” as requested by the Second RECOFI Session. Following the improved species breakdown reported by Iran for the 2003 FAO fishery statistics inquiry, during the inter-sessional period Bahrain and Saudi Arabia have also significantly increased the number of species items reported in their capture statistics submissions.

III. FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES RELATED TO AQUACULTURE

9. The Second meeting of the Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA) was held in Muscat, Oman, from 29 to 30 November 2005 as recommended by the Commission. The meeting reviewed the recommendations made at the Third session of the Commission (Doha, Qatar, 9–11 May 2005) and agreed on follow-up activities as recommended. The report of this meeting is available as information document RECOFI/IV/2007/Inf.10.

RECOFI Regional Aquaculture Information System (RAIS)

10. The development of a regional information system had been requested by the RECOFI Members at its Second session (Muscat, Oman, 18–21 May 2003) in response to the rapid development of aquaculture in the region and, accordingly, the Commission identified this as a priority activity for the WGA. Following the first meeting of the WGA (Manama, Bahrain, 18–20 April 2004), a proposal for the development of the system was drafted which

included technical issues, time schedule and budget implications related to the development of the information system.

11. At the Third session of the Commission (Doha, Qatar, 9–11 May 2005) the Secretariat presented a document on the progress made for the establishment of the RECOFI Aquaculture Information System (RAIS). The Commission approved the proposed structure of the system and strongly recommended the WGA and the Secretariat to go ahead with the project. The Commission gratefully acknowledged that Kuwait, as the RAIS hosting country, would provide the agreed financial and logistical support to develop the system (refer to Appendix F in RECOFI/IV/2007/Inf.10).

12. The Commission further agreed that the FAO Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture would develop the RAIS as soon as the funds became available. In July 2005 the Public Authority for Agriculture and Fisheries Resources (PAAFR) officially confirmed that Kuwait would host the RAIS Regional Centre and subsequently transferred the funds to FAO in November 2006 enabling the Secretariat to take immediate action as described below.

13. By December 2006 the Secretariat requested and received three separate quotations for the development of the RAIS, two submitted from competent and recognized IT companies and one from FAO by the WAICENT Knowledge Exchange Facilitation Branch (KCEW). Following analysis of the technical documentation received, the Secretariat decided to start the development of the RAIS within FAO through the KCEW. This choice was based on a number of factors, as indicated below, which were seen as comparative advantages to the employment of one of the two private firms.

- KCEW has a considerable experience in developing web-based information systems for a wide range of clients within the framework of FAO;
- Development of RAIS with the KCEW would ensure the availability of high technical competences and the application of FAO standard technology and terminology;
- The presence of the KCEW consultants within the FAO Headquarters would facilitate the daily communication between the Secretariat and the experts developing the system;
- The KCEW technical proposal was financially competitive which would allow savings to further strengthen the information system, including the translation of the web pages in Arabic, cover travel costs of one developer during the RAIS handover to the Regional Centre and training of the Regional Centre staff; and
- KCEW would ensure technical assistance support to the RAIS Regional Centre team for the first phase of the project with no additional costs.

14. The RAIS is being designed applying the most up-to-date information technology and database management in accordance to international IT standards: i.e. the Open Source

Content Management System TYPO3¹. The system aims to be as user-friendly as possible allowing rapid data entry from the administrators and easy retrieval from end users. The use of specific tool such as the “white page” directories will also allow the easy creation of Web pages created upon request to provide preliminary outlooks on the major emerging regional aquaculture issues. The initial and approved contents of RAIS are summarized and detailed in Appendix G of the report of the Second meeting of the WGA (RECOFI/IV/2007/Inf.10).

15. At the time of preparation of this working document the Secretariat initiated actions to request all the WGA Focal Points to submit preliminary information and data for inclusion in the first RAIS prototype that would be technically discussed at the Third meeting of the WGA (Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 5–6 May 2007) and presented at the Fourth session of the Commission.

Aquaculture legal and policy framework project proposal

16. The regional project proposal to strengthen the legal and policy framework for aquaculture in the RECOFI Member countries, presented to the Commission during its Third session (Doha, Qatar, 9–11 May 2005), was finalized by the Secretariat taking into account the comments received from the Member states as recommended by the Commission. The proposal was then submitted to all WGA Focal Points for follow-up actions and is available in its final form in Appendix H of the report of the Second meeting of the WGA (RECOFI/IV/2007/Inf.10).

17. During the Second meeting of the WGA (Muscat, Oman, 29–30 November 2005) the experts reported little progress made with regards to exploring alternative funding sources for the proposal as recommended by the Commission in view of the limited resources available by FAO. In view of the above, the WGA experts agreed to discuss with the relevant national authorities the possibility of funding the project through the contribution from all RECOFI Members in equal parts of the estimated project proposal sum. An additional alternative was for one Member to fund the project entirely. Furthermore the possibility of having the project financially supported by the private sector was also discussed as an option. A third option discussed at the WGA meeting was for the Secretariat, in close coordination with the WGA Chairperson, to approach the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) as well as other donors in the region [e.g. Islamic Development Bank (IDB), Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)].

18. Although the experts recognized that timely follow-up actions would be required to move ahead with the activity no concrete results had been achieved when drafting the present report. Furthermore, due to the temporary vacancy of the Commission’s Secretary, no action had also been taken to approach regional donors. In view of such situation an agenda item to discuss progress made has been added to the Provisional Agenda of the Third meeting of the WGA (Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 5–6 May 2007). The outcome of this meeting and any recommendation that may arise will be presented at the Fourth session of the Commission.

¹ TYPO3 is a free Open Source Content Management System for enterprise purposes on the web and in intranets. It offers full flexibility and extendability while featuring an accomplished set of ready-made interfaces, functions and modules (See www.typo3.org for more technical information).

Introduction of exotic species in the RECOFI region

19. In view of the introduction of exotic species by individual countries in the region, the Commission recommended at its Third session (Doha, Qatar, 9–11 May 2005) to refer the issue to the WGA for further study and discussion. The WGA fully agreed that a regional approach for the responsible use and control of alien species in aquaculture is required, recognizing however that the introduction of certain species in the region have contributed to the growth of the regional aquaculture industry.

20. The WGA reviewed and endorsed the structure of the technical guidelines for the control and responsible use of alien species in aquaculture and fisheries prepared by FAO and other organizations such as the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia and Pacific (NACA) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). The WGA agreed in the meantime to follow the precautionary approaches and guidelines referred by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES).

21. The WGA Focal Points urged FAO to produce the guidelines at the earliest and possibly before the Fourth session of the Commission. At the time of preparation of the present report the guidelines were still under preparation, however, the FAO CD-ROM on “Introduced species in fisheries and aquaculture: Information for responsible use and Control” was finalized and launched (CD-ROM made available at the RECOFI session). The CD-ROM contains a variety of information, including guidelines, codes of practices, international instruments and the Database on Introductions of Aquatic Species (DIAS) which include updated records submitted by the RECOFI Member countries.

22. Follow-up activities with regards to the introduction of non endemic species in the region will be further discussed at the Third meeting of the WGA (Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 5–6 May 2007). The outcome of the meeting along with suggested actions will be presented to the Commission at its Fourth session for consideration.

Marine stock enhancement and artificial reefs

23. The Commission at its Third session (Doha, Qatar, 9–11 May 2005) requested the WGA to look into the issues related to marine stock enhancement and artificial reefs. These issues were discussed at the Second meeting of the WGA (Muscat, Oman, 29–30 November 2005) where the experts decided to proceed with the preparation of ad hoc workshops one of which to be held back-to-back with the Third meeting of the WGA originally planned to take place in Bahrain in September 2006. The workshop was postponed due to the decision taken to hold the Third meeting of the WGA only in May 2007.

24. In view of the above an agenda item to discuss the organization of the aforementioned workshop has been included in the Provisional Agenda of the Third meeting of the WGA

(Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 5–6 May 2007). The outcome of the meeting and recommendations that may arise will be presented at the Fourth session of the Commission.

RECOFI National Aquaculture Sector Overview

25. During the intersessional period all the RECOFI Member countries, as recommended by the Commission, prepared and submitted to the Secretariat their respective National Aquaculture Sector Overview (NASO) draft documents according to the Terms of Reference prepared by FAO. Such documents were used to prepare the FAO regional aquaculture review for the Near East and North Africa. The review process included two regional expert workshops held in Cairo (Egypt) and Muscat (Oman) in late 2005. The latter workshop held in Muscat back-to-back with the Second meeting of the WGA (Muscat, Oman, 29–30 November 2005) was attended by 13 experts from the RECOFI countries. The “Regional review on aquaculture development – 2. Near East and North Africa – 2005” is available as information document RECOFI/IV/2007/Inf.13.

IV. SUGGESTED ACTION BY THE COMMISSION

The Commission is invited to review the intersessional activities and provide guidance on issues of particular regional relevance expressed by its subsidiary working groups, including on any follow-up that might be deemed necessary.