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Organización  
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Naciones  
Unidas  
para la  
Agricultura  
y la  
Alimentación

## REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR FISHERIES (RECOFI)

### Fourth Session

Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 7–9 May 2007

## CAPTURE FISHERIES STATISTICS

### SUMMARY

The document presents a synthesis of the proceedings of the regional workshop on fisheries statistics that was held in Cairo in November 2006. Most of the conclusions of the workshop are of high relevance to the RECOFI countries in which a variety of fisheries statistical programmes are currently operated. Purpose of the discussion is to determine short- and medium-term actions to be undertaken in order to strengthen national statistical programmes and facilitate harmonization of statistics to be used for regional studies.

#### I. VENUE AND PURPOSE OF THE WORKSHOP

1. The regional workshop on latest developments in fishery survey tools and integrated databases was held at the Flamenco Hotel, Zamalek, Cairo, during the period 20–22 November 2006. The workshop was organized by the FAO Regional Office for the Near East 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, Iran IR, Iraq, Jordan, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, United Arab Emirates and Yemen attended the meeting. A detailed account of proceedings, major findings, conclusions and recommendations is given by Information Document RECOFI/IV/2007/Inf.5.

#### II. MAJOR CONCLUSIONS OF THE REGIONAL WORKSHOP

2. Each of the national representatives briefly described their functions and made presentations of their national fishery statistical programmes. Their statements included methodological and logistical aspects, such as methods of data collection (e.g. census- or sample-based), existing infrastructure, and operational constraints. Summarized statistical data were also presented that related to vessel typology and distribution, landings and fishing effort, infrastructure, and personnel. Based on the discussions that followed each presentation the following major points of common concern/interest were identified:

### **Accuracy of obtained statistics**

3. There is a wide variety of statistical programmes in use by the countries in the RECOFI region. Some use sample-based data collection systems by means of which only part of the fishing activities are covered statistically and sample estimates are extrapolated. Others use mixed approaches whereby total catch is estimated while total effort is enumerated. However, irrespective of the type of data collection system in use, the question of accuracy was debated at some length, with regards to complete enumeration methods versus sample-based approaches. The participants showed high interest in the practical approaches that provide continuous control over the accuracy of sample-based data collection procedures and urged FAO to expedite the translation of related technical documents into Arabic and promote their use in the region, supplemented with training and guidelines for incorporation into national programmes.

### **Monitoring of data collection**

4. Participants stressed the role of human element in data collection procedures and underlined the importance of regular guidance and supervision, as these affect the quality of collected information. It was recognized that survey personnel constitute the cornerstone of a fisheries statistical programme and that operational aspects such as motivation, training and mobility ought to be taken into consideration in the implementation of large-scale statistical operations.

### **Need to make maximum use of obtained statistics**

5. The meeting agreed that a statistical programme should not be an end in itself but serve the purpose and meet the objectives for which it was conceived, developed and implemented. This would mean that along with good quality, the collected and processed statistics should also be of high utility and lead to the formulation of indicators and diagnostics for use by research groups, administrators and planners. In this respect the meeting called upon the assistance of FAO to include special sections in training courses with the view of assisting countries in making maximum use of their statistical data.

### **Harmonization of statistics for regional purposes**

6. The meeting discussed various aspects of integrating nationally collected data on fishing effort, prices and fish size into regional datasets. The participants observed that the best alternative to achieve this is to make use of nationally developed systems that would regularly be feeding a regional data collection. This has already been achieved in the RECOFI area and for annual statistics on fish production, thanks to the efforts of the countries and the Fishery Information, Data and Statistics Unit (FIES) of the FAO Fisheries Department. It was pointed out that the integration at regional level of other variables such as fishing effort, calibrated prices/values and average fish size, would essentially be based on the following three assumptions:

- All participating countries have national fisheries statistical programmes that are functional and statistically sound;
- There exists a commonly accepted species nomenclature and boat/gear classification;
- The integration process would not interfere with national standards and criteria.

Several participants observed that in essence the links between national systems and regional datasets simply concerned a well-defined regional classification system (e.g. one based on FAO codes and standards), combined with logical links between national and regional data items.

### Advanced data diffusion (i.e. GIS)

7. Although the workshop did not have the technical capacity to discuss this point at the desired length and level, it was nevertheless recognized that GIS and similar data dissemination systems ought to be considered as the next development target after data collection systems have reached a certain level of accuracy and completion. Timeliness and completeness of GIS contents were considered as elements of high importance, as any weakness in either of them would compromise the effectiveness of the data dissemination system, irrespective of its functional and technological merits. Participants from RECOFI countries observed that GIS-related issues ought to be addressed in a comprehensive manner and requested that the agenda of the next RECOFI WGS Session make ample provision for such discussions.

### Data security and confidentiality

8. It was recognized that medium- and large-scale statistical programmes require the continuing support of system administrators so as to secure the application of standard data security measures, such as backup operations, technical support, troubleshooting, etc. Data confidentiality was also considered an issue of importance when data are disseminated to different user groups. It was agreed that confidential information concerning individual fishing units ought to be of privileged use.

## III. ACTIONS TO STRENGTHEN NATIONAL FISHERIES STATISTICAL PROGRAMMES

9. Overall, RECOFI inter-sessional activities relating to capture fisheries statistics have been below expectation level. To be noted that the RECOFI Working Group on Fisheries Statistics (WGS) has so far held only one session (Iran IR, May 2004), while the one for aquaculture (WGA) has been more active with two meetings, and a third scheduled for May 2007, back-to-back with the Fourth RECOFI Session. Although good progress was achieved in relation to integrated statistics of annual fish production (FAO FIES and RECOFI countries worked out a FISHSTAT+ sub-dataset for RECOFI), direct contacts with countries and major findings of the aforementioned regional workshop indicate the need for short- and medium-term actions to be undertaken, with the view of improving the performance of fisheries statistical programmes in the area. The following two actions have been included for approval in the RECOFI Programme of Work and Budget for 2007–2008 (document RECOFI/IV/2007/8) and suggest that:

- Action 1: National, regional and international experts will be mobilized for providing *in situ* training and technical advice for the improvement of the performance of national fisheries statistical programmes in RECOFI countries. It is envisaged that this activity will be conducted in stages over a period of eight to ten months. Its cost will be covered by RECOFI (60 percent) and other funding sources (40 percent).
- Action 2: Two WGS Sessions will be programmed for late 2007 and 2008. The first will mainly address GIS and STF issues. The second will review and evaluate the results of Action 1 and will recommend follow-up activities to be considered by the Fifth session of RECOFI.

10. RECOFI countries are invited to reflect on the current status of capture fisheries statistics in the region, take into account the recognized need for strengthening and harmonizing national fisheries statistical programmes, and consider the implementation of the aforementioned actions during 2007–2008.