



REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR FISHERIES (RECOFI)

Fourth Session

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STRATEGIC ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FOR RECOFI

Summary

The present paper presents a number of principal issues relating to the role of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) and its future. It provides a brief reference to FAO's Constitutional provisions relating to its Regional Fishery Bodies and highlights the importance and *raison d'être* of the Commission. The document addresses current and future challenges of RECOFI and points to short and medium-term activities that are expected to strengthen the Commission's impact on the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in the RECOFI region. The meeting is invited to comment on the analysis made, review the suggestions presented, examine the current Status and Rules of procedures and, provide guidance to members and FAO on how to further improve the Commission's efficiency and effectiveness.

I BACKGROUND

1. The FAO Constitution provides that the Organization shall collect, analyse, interpret and disseminate information relating to nutrition, food and agriculture. The term "agriculture" in the FAO Constitution includes fisheries, aquaculture and marine products. The Constitution further provides that the Organization shall promote and where appropriate recommend national and international action with respect to *inter alia*: scientific, technological, social and economic research related to food, nutrition and agriculture, and; the conservation of natural resources and the adoption of improved methods of agricultural production.

2. Article VI (1) of the Constitution allows the FAO Conference or Council to establish commissions to advise on the formulation of policies and to coordinate their implementation.
3. Article VI (2) provides that the FAO Conference, the Council, or the Director-General on the authority of the Conference or Council, may establish committees and working parties of *selected* FAO Members and Associate Members to study and report on matters pertaining to the purpose of the Organization. This article has been used only once to set up the Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic (CECAF).
4. Commissions established under Articles VI (1) and (2) show the same characteristics. Their expenses are covered by the regular budget of the Organization. Their Secretaries are provided by FAO.
5. Under Article XIV of the FAO Constitution, the FAO Conference or Council may approve and submit to Member Nations conventions and agreements concerning questions relating to food and agriculture. This procedure has been used to set up a certain number of commissions (by region and/or subject matter) in the Organization. Their functions are to recommend policy, to take measures, to advise Members on policy formulation and implementation, to facilitate exchange of information, and to recommend lines of inquiry and research. **The Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI)**, the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission (APFIC), the General Council for the Mediterranean (GFCM), and the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) have been set up under this procedure.

II THE ROLE OF RECOFI AND ITS RAISON D'ETRE

6. Capture fisheries has always been an important sector in most RECOFI countries and the last decade saw also a notable development of aquaculture activities. Fish production in the region continues to grow at a steady pace and plays a significant role in food security, national economy and socio-economic development. The added value produced by processed fisheries commodities further contributes substantially to the creation of national wealth.
7. In recognition to the importance of fisheries conservation and management and of promoting cooperation to that effect, it was agreed, in 1999, to establish a Regional Fisheries Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) within the framework of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. The Commission was established on the basis of Resolution 1/117 adopted by the Council at its Hundred and Seventeenth Session. RECOFI has subsequently established two working groups for technical and scientific matters relating to aquaculture (WGA) and fisheries statistics (WGS).
8. The role of RECOFI is an important as well as a difficult and complex one. It involves promotion of sustainable development, conservation, rational management and best utilization of living marine resources, as well as sustainable development of aquaculture in the area. To achieve these objectives the Commission first keeps under review the state of these resources including abundance and level of exploitation, as well as the state of the fisheries based there. At a second stage the Commission formulates appropriate implementation mechanisms of conservation and management measures in which due attention is also given to economic and social aspects of the fishing industry. In addition to promoting, formulating and coordinating fisheries management measures, the

Commission also undertakes research and development activities (including cooperative projects) in the area of fisheries and in the protection of living marine resources, including aquaculture and fish enhancement. Finally, the Commission assembles and disseminates information and data regarding exploitable living marine resources and fisheries based on these resources.

9. There are several international fisheries management instruments, protocols and standards applying to RECOFI as well as to other regional fisheries bodies, such as:
 - Principal Legal Instruments: UNCLOS (in force 16/11/1994), Compliance Agreement for Fishing Vessels on High Seas (in force 24/4/2003), Conservation and Management Agreement for Straddling and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks (in force 11/12/2001);
 - Other Legal Instruments: Conventional on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES, 1979), International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL 1973/78), Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS, in force 1983), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD, in force 1983);
 - Non Binding Law Instruments: FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (1995), FAO Strategy for Improving information on Status and Trends of Capture Fisheries (2003);
 - Internationally endorsed declarations and resolutions.

In addition, there are global and regional recommendations stemming from the Sessions of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) and the Near East Regional Conference (NERC) which can be of specific regional relevance to RECOFI (an example of the latter case is the inclusion of two NERC 2006 recommendations into the Agenda of its Fourth Session).

10. Since its establishment in 1999 the Commission met four times: At Muscat, Oman (6-8 October 2001), Muscat, Oman (18-21 May 2003), Doha, Qatar (9-11 May 2005) and, Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (7-9 May 2007). The RECOFI Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA) has met three times: At Manama, Bahrain (18-20 April 2004), Muscat, Oman (29-30 November 2005) and, Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (5-6 May 2007). With regards to the Working Group on Fisheries Statistics (WGS) there has been one meeting held at Shiraz, Islamic Republic of Iran during 24-26 May 2004.
11. Through its main sessions and those of its two technical Working Groups (WGA and WGS), RECOFI has been formulating and implementing a number of principal activities in the region covering a wide variety of applications sectors, such as the Regional Database on Capture Production, the Regional Aquaculture Information System (RAIS), formulation of a regional project for strengthening the legal and policy framework for aquaculture development, etc. Most of RECOFI recommendations so far made were followed up with visible results; some others (e.g. development of a website and harmonization of catch/effort data collection programmes) were met with delays mostly caused by financial constraints.
12. Regarding the current *modus operandi* of RECOFI its programme of work and budget takes the form of a multi-donor regional project extended on a year-by-year basis and financially supported by annual contributions. This structure provides the Commission with good flexibility of action combined with easy and transparent accountability. However, the financial level of the RECOFI regular budget only allows for activities of

rather moderate duration and scope; large-scale cooperative programmes involving advanced training, research and development would not be conceived and proposed without first assuring a collectively established source of additional funding.

III FUTURE CHALLENGES FOR RECOFI

13. RECOFI will continue to play a critical role in addressing issues relating to fisheries and aquaculture management which remain to be resolved and which require coordinated regional efforts including, *inter alia*, assisting concerned countries with shared or transboundary stocks (common issues) and in working towards collective agreements on the management of those stocks and sustainable development of aquaculture. The following paragraphs outline a number of institutional issues that RECOFI would have to address in the medium and long term.
14. **Food security:** Contribution of fisheries and aquaculture to food security has to be made more visible, and stakeholder participation improved. The potential role of fisheries and aquaculture in the economy should be stressed to promote cooperation of private and public interest. Capture fisheries and aquaculture development have to be seen and approached as an integral part of rural development using the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and, as appropriate, the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach, as useful tools.
15. **Human and ecological well-being:** In the efforts for better administration and management of fisheries and aquaculture, the different stakeholders must find the right balance between human well-being and ecological well-being. This means that fisheries development ought to be undertaken in full respect of the ecosystem on which fishery resources and critical habitats depend.
16. **Collaboration, linkages and commitment:** Fiscal and human resources for countries are becoming more and more limited and the public sector is asked to do more with less, frequently in close collaboration with the private sector. It would thus seem essential for RECOFI to strengthen its linkages and collaboration with civil society, the private sector (including producer organizations) and with FAO and its development partners. In this respect stronger commitment and interest from member states will be essential for the effective implementation of whatever understanding for collaboration is to be reached between RECOFI and its partners.
17. **Regional Service Providers:** Member countries of RECOFI may consider the establishment of regional service providers to handle medium- and long-term activities in the region for the achievement of specific goals determined by the Commission, an approach that has been adopted by other regional fisheries bodies. RECOFI would retain its political and coordinating role, both exercised through biannual sessions. However, Member Nations would be serviced more directly by project-type structures operating on a full-time basis for a determined period of time and with well-defined outputs. Examples of regional services could be regional training programmes along with regional research agendas. Such services could be complemented with technical assistance and monitoring programmes including such practical matters as regional criteria for environmental impact assessments, regional user groups and regional information systems.

18. **Performance Reviews:** There are signs that Regional Fisheries Bodies recognize the need to strengthen and review their mandates. With regards to RECOFI potential subjects of review include specific functions, efficiency and effectiveness of institutional components (e.g. Secretariat and Working Groups), effectiveness of RECOFI against its objectives and, compliance with international obligations. Although there is no specific model for an evaluation and review of a regional body such as RECOFI, it would nevertheless seem reasonable to suggest that a set of evaluation criteria, framed around international and regional obligations, would be developed with the view of providing opportunities for benchmarking and continuous improvement. Since regular performance reviews would add more tasks to the already full work programme of RECOFI, such an approach ought to be undertaken with well balanced frequency.

IV SUGGESTED ACTION BY THE COMMISSION

19. Current and future challenges of RECOFI point to the need for appropriate action in order to strengthen the Commission's impact on the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in the region. The meeting is invited to comment on the analysis made, review the suggestions presented, examine the current Status and Rules of procedures and, provide guidance to members and FAO on how to further improve the Commission's efficiency and effectiveness.