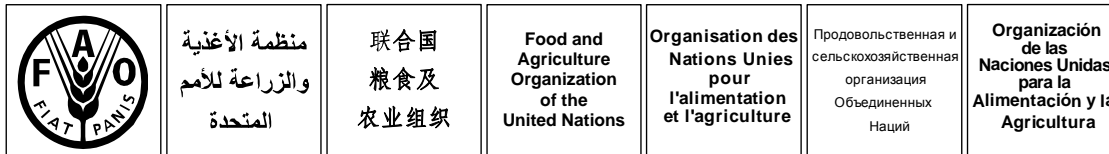


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REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR FISHERIES

Sixth Meeting of the Working Group on Fisheries Management

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Review of the outcomes of the tripartite initiative on fisheries management cooperation in the Northern area of RECOFI and progress

Executive Summary

The purpose of this paper is to provide information to the WGFM on the progress of the FAO/RECOFI initiative to promote fisheries management cooperation in the northern area of RECOFI. The Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Iraq, and the State of Kuwait share the marine waters of the northern area of RECOFI and enjoy its rich fishery and potential for marine and brackish water aquaculture. These countries have recently recorded declining catches from the marine waters and a realisation that improved management is essential to protect the stocks from over-exploitation. There have also been problems in marine finfish aquaculture and brackish water shrimp aquaculture. Iran, Iraq and Kuwait have worked together during tripartite meetings held in 2009–2011 to prepare the groundwork for a cooperative project known as the “*Initiative on Fisheries Management Cooperation in the Northern Area of RECOFI*”. This project will jointly assess marine fisheries and marine and brackish water aquaculture in the sub-region by cooperatively exchanging information and data. This will allow the three countries to focus on various common issues and, through the RECOFI or by bi-lateral and/or multi-lateral agreements, to harmonise measures throughout the sub-region that will be consistent with the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and its associated Technical Guidelines and Plans of Action.

The WGFM is invited to:

- consider the progress and outcome of the initiative to promote fisheries management cooperation in the northern area of RECOFI meetings reviewed in this paper and to provide guidance on the future activities including any follow-up actions.

INTRODUCTION

1. At the fourth RECOFI Session, the Commission expressed the hope that Iraq will resume its role by participating in future RECOFI sessions and stressed that it would welcome further information from Iraq on priority requirements for rebuilding and rehabilitating its fisheries institutions. At the fifth Session of RECOFI (12-14 May 2009, Dubai, UAE) the delegate from Iraq, with the support of the delegates from Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Kuwait, requested that the FAO Secretariat facilitate sub-regional cooperation among the three countries on fisheries issues of common concern, including IUU fishing. The Commission agreed that the Secretariat should support this sub-regional initiative including an *ad hoc* meeting among the three Members, with the view of promoting enhanced cooperation.

ACTIVITIES AND RESULTS

2. The RECOFI Secretariat convened the preliminary meeting on the *Fisheries Management Cooperation in the Northern Area of the RECOFI* in occasion of the FAO/RECOFI Regional Workshop on “Stock Indicators and Stock Status Reporting” that was held in Tehran (Islamic Republic of Iran) from 26 to 29 July 2009. The meeting was attended by participants from Iran, Iraq and Kuwait. At the meeting it was explained and agreed upon that current and future discussions should pertain exclusively to fisheries issues appropriate and coherent with the RECOFI and FAO mandate, with no reference to legal status of territories and boundaries. The participants agreed to name the current undertaking as the FAO/RECOFI “Initiative to Promote Fisheries Management Cooperation in the Northern Area of the RECOFI” (henceforth “the Initiative”). The discussion focused on the identification of the priority topics, as listed below, to be included in the agenda of this initiative aimed at fostering sub-regional cooperation to support sustainable fisheries:

- fisheries management in the northern area of RECOFI including the review of effectiveness of current conservation and management measures to preserve the resources and aquaculture;
- sub-regional trade (dynamics, constraints, opportunities);
- promotion of sustainable inland, brackish and marine waters aquaculture, including stock enhancement;
- establishment of scientific cooperation and implementation of joint activities.

3. With reference to topic three above, it should be noted that the mandate of RECOFI does not include inland waters. In the sub-region concerned, however, inland waters are an essential component of the northern RECOFI’s ecosystem much affecting marine fisheries production. The meeting participants concurred on the need to pursue an integrated and holistic approach in accordance with the FAO mandate concerning freshwater fisheries and aquaculture. Moreover, it was deemed necessary to substantiate the selected topics with quantitative information to be collected through a survey questionnaire. This would create a solid base for discussion and analysis.

4. The technical meeting on Fisheries Management Cooperation in the Northern Area of the RECOFI was held in Kuwait City on 1 and 2 November 2010. Based on data gathered through a questionnaire prior to the meeting as well as on discussions at the meeting, it was agreed in the meeting that the following issues were priorities for the sub-region:

- the improvement and development of institutional and technical capacities;
- the establishment of cooperative appraisal of shared stocks including biological research on life history of priority species supporting fisheries of common interest;
- a concerted formulation and implementation of measures to prevention IUU fishing including illegal transboundary landing of catch;
- the effective enforcement of fishery regulations;

- the identification of priority species essential habitats such as spawning and nursery grounds in the area concerned, including the identification of breeding and spawning seasons for the joint adoption of appropriate conservation measures;
 - the creation of a cooperative research programme to assess and monitor the environmental pollution and its impact on marine biodiversity in general and on the shared fish stocks in particular in the Northern Gulf sub-region; and
 - the elaboration of a joint management plan under the guidance of FAO/RECOFI for the management and conservation of the shared stocks including the prevention of fishing activities during spawning and breeding seasons.
5. There was agreement that the work plan to support fisheries management cooperation in the northern area of RECOFI should be structured around three main components encompassing the activities identified as priority and of common interest to the countries. These components were:
- capacity development in fisheries and aquaculture research and management;
 - joint appraisal of shared stocks and fisheries of common interest including standard data collection and compilation; and
 - improvement of sub-regional fisheries management including combating IUU fishing.
6. The Thirtieth Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (Khartoum, 4-8 December 2010) unanimously agreed and requested FAO to: *Continue providing technical support to enhance cooperation among Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq and Kuwait related to the FAO/RECOFI initiative for sustainable fisheries management by applying the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries.*
7. A coordination meeting on the Tripartite Initiative was held on 11 October 2011 in Tehran in occasion of the 5th Meeting of the FAO/RECOFI Working Group on Fisheries Management. Representatives from Iraq, Iran and Kuwait concurred on a work plan that would include the participatory formulation through FAO assistance of a field programme to implement the initiative and foster sub-regional technical cooperation and dialogue through the assistance of FAO. They also agreed to coordinate the countries request to relevant regional donors to fund the implementation of such a programme.
8. In December 2011 a project formulation mission was fielded in the region. In April 2012 the project proposal “Initiative on Fisheries Management Cooperation in the Northern Area of RECOFI” has been sent to the countries concerned for review and comments.

THE WAY FORWARD: COOPERATIVE WORK PLAN

9. The Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Iraq, and the State of Kuwait share the marine waters of the northern area of RECOFI and enjoy its rich fishery and potential for marine and brackish water aquaculture. These countries have recently recorded declining catches from the marine waters and a realisation that improved management is essential to protect the stocks from over-exploitation. There have also been problems in marine finfish aquaculture in Kuwait and brackish water shrimp aquaculture in Iran. There is the potential to increase production from aquaculture, but this requires greater knowledge and technological developments.
10. Iran, Iraq and Kuwait have worked together during tripartite meetings held in 2009–2011 to prepare the groundwork for a cooperative project known as the “*Initiative on Fisheries Management Cooperation in the Northern Area of RECOFI*” or the “*Initiative*” in short. This project will jointly assess marine fisheries and marine and brackish water aquaculture in the sub-region by cooperatively exchanging information and data. This will allow the three countries to focus on various common issues and, through the RECOFI or by bi-lateral and/or multi-lateral agreements, to harmonise

measures throughout the sub-region that will be consistent with the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and its associated Technical Guidelines and Plans of Action.

11. The Initiative project was further developed during a field visit to Iran, Iraq (at the FAO Iraq Office in Jordan) and Kuwait in December 2011 and is based as far as possible on the original concepts developed by the three countries during their tripartite meetings. The project will be implemented by FAO over a two-year period and contains elements that can be completed during that time span and elements that require further planning and support. The purpose of the project is to stimulate cooperation and it is agreed that this is best achieved by addressing real and significant issues that are presently facing fisheries and aquaculture in the sub-region.

12. The project will work with three fisheries departments to coordinate work on the shared stocks of silver pomfret *Pampus argenteus*, hilsa shad *Tenualosa ilisha*, and penaeid shrimps, following the minimum data reporting requirements adopted by RECOFI in 2011. This will be supported by research projects on hilsa shad and shrimp bycatch so that management measures are underpinned by a strong science base. The cooperative work will lead to an improved understanding of stock status and to better and harmonised management measures that can be proposed to RECOFI.

13. The project will also work with Iran, Iraq and Kuwait on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing issues and on the supporting use of Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) and port State control procedures, to ensure that management measures are respected. The international nature of the shared fishery will again mean that the support of RECOFI is fundamental to reduce or eliminate IUU fishing in the sub-region.

14. An additional project component is in the harmonisation and simplification of trade and market regulations that are not overly restrictive and encourage the positive benefits associated with trade. The project components require that the fisheries departments, as part of their regular program, prepare documentation and collect appropriate high quality data that can be shared and analysed at project workshops. Some of the work components will be undertaken in participatory meetings with boat owners, vessel masters or buyers, to ensure measures are consistent with the needs of all the stakeholders.

15. Lastly, it is also appreciated that the fisheries infrastructure in Iraq has suffered over the past 25 years. The Government fisheries sector is in need of rehabilitation and the marine branch in Basra in particular. The project will work with the Government fisheries department to develop a support package for the rehabilitation of its marine capacity. This will proceed along with the work on the fisheries and aquaculture development in the northern area of RECOFI.