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COOPERATION IN FISHERIES MONITORING CONTROL AND SURVEILLANCE (MCS) – WEST AFRICAN EXPERIENCES AT THE NATIONAL AND SUBREGIONAL LEVELS

I. BACKGROUND

1. Fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) is a concept that has grown steadily more important as a tool by which authorities can improve fisheries management. At a technical consultation held in FAO, Rome, in April 1981, several specialists in fisheries control from around the world first introduced the term MCS. It was intended to focus on fishing operations (monitoring), the laws and regulations for fishing (control) as well as their enforcement (surveillance). Subsequent to the meeting in Rome a workshop was held in Sierra Leone in July 1981 with support of the FAO/UNDP Project for support to the Eastern Central Atlantic Fisheries Committee (CECAF Project). In due course, a number of national projects encompassing MCS were formulated and approved for countries of the West African subregion.

2. MCS at the national level can take many forms, ranging from the complex - involving vessel monitoring systems (VMS), aircraft, fishery patrol vessels, coastal radar and other methods - to the simple, and relatively inexpensive, procedure of relying on observer programmes, or using licensed fishermen to report on illegal fishing activity, as well as shore and port inspection of craft.

3. At a regional workshop on MCS held at Accra, Ghana, in December 1992, organised by FAO in support of the Ministerial Conference on Fishery Co-operation among African States bordering on the Atlantic Ocean, a number of recommendations were made pertaining to: the need to delimit clearly defined maritime boundaries, harmonisation of fishery legislation, standard international identification markings for all vessels, the tasks and supervision of observers, the importance of logbooks, and the need for suitable legislation to support implementation of MCS. In December 1995, a technical consultation on fisheries observers in West Africa, was held in Senegal. The consultation was organized by the FAO Project GCP/RAF/302/EEC "Improvement of the legal framework for fisheries cooperation, management and development of coastal states of West Africa". More recent support to MCS by FAO has been undertaken through the

Subregional Fisheries Commission (SRFC), based in Dakar, and some of its experiences with MCS at a subregional level, and implications for West African fisheries, are the subject of this document.

II. SOME COUNTRY EXPERIENCES WITH MCS

4. Morocco's fisheries extend over a substantial coastline. The Institute for Research provides fishery management advice. The use of certain gear is prohibited in various zones of the coast. The cephalopod trawl fishery, as well as fisheries for shrimp and other species, are subjected to a closed season normally of two months per year, as well as a mesh size regulation in the codend. The Ministry of Fisheries and Merchant Navy co-operates with defence forces to patrol the fishing zones and apprehend vessels not working in compliance with management regulations. Indeed the Navy received planes and patrol vessels as part of an investment in the MCS programme. Observers are assigned to most foreign vessels. A vessel monitoring system has been introduced. Radar located at strategic points along the coast also monitor vessels.

5. The Republic of Mauritania maintains a management system through zones of fishing, reserved for artisanal fishing near the coast, and a series of zones for local and foreign registered vessels. Trawlers must use a minimum mesh size in the codend, and there is normally a closed season of one or two months each year when the catch of cephalopods is prohibited. Foreign fleets have access to Mauritanian resources within the framework of fishing agreements. The government has received substantial assistance from the Government of Germany, since the early 1990s in activities of monitoring, control and surveillance, as well as institutional strengthening. A special unit of the Ministry of Fisheries (based at Nouadhibou) is responsible for MCS and, in co-operation with the defence forces, employs patrol vessels, aircraft and shore facilities for tracking the operations of fishing vessels and, where necessary, arrest and prosecution for different offences. The unit was able to collate detailed information on fishing and catches. Regular surveillance of vessels at sea was started with two vessels designed for fishery patrols. A new fishery patrol vessel provided by Germany was designed to stay at sea for several weeks in the particular zone where fishing is most intensive.

6. Through the assistance of a project financed by Canada in the 1980s Senegal has been practising MCS over a relatively long period. There is a Directorate for Surveillance and Protection of Fisheries. The system relies on co-operation of the Direction de l'Océanographie et des Pêches Maritimes, with the defence forces, as well as the fisheries research institute. At one time a small aircraft regularly patrolled the fishing zones to check on location of industrial vessels, but this aircraft now needs to be replaced. Senegal continues to rely on naval vessels for surveillance at sea. Observers are assigned to most foreign vessels. Vessels should stay in zones at various distances from the coast; not only to protect inshore fish resources but also to avoid conflicts with the large and active shore-based canoe fleet. Nevertheless incursions by industrial vessels into areas reserved for artisanal fishing is understood to continue to be frequent. Coastal radar stations have been set up, to aid fishery officers monitor incursions of industrial vessels into zones reserved for canoe fishermen, so that follow-up action can be taken if required.

7. The naval defence force of The Gambia has had problems with keeping patrol vessels operational for inspecting industrial vessels and the control of illegal vessels. This is a similar problem faced by Guinea Bissau. The African Development Bank is assisting MCS in The Gambia, and it is anticipated that the World Bank will assist Guinea Bissau in its efforts to enforce fishery regulations at sea in its EEZ. Cape Verde has been successful in maintaining aerial and maritime surveillance in its waters but the operation has been costly.

8. Guinea is one of the countries that sets annual management plans for each fishery, which is an attempt to set a limit for catch of the main species, as well the number of vessels permitted to operate in the fishery. Systems of monitoring, control and surveillance are then designed so as to take into account the implementation of the management plan. At certain points along the coast the artisanal fishers have organized themselves to carry out surveillance, so as to dissuade incursions of industrial vessels into coastal areas. Sierra Leone has recently been making progress in improving maritime MCS. The country is to receive assistance in MCS through approval of a loan of the Asian Development Bank.

9. A number of countries in West Africa are focusing on changes in the approach to fisheries management through strengthening institutions. Ghana is a country that is enhancing the priority being given to fisheries, in the fields of strengthening the department of fisheries, stock assessment and preparation of management plans for marine and inland fisheries and establishment of fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance systems. Nigeria has been benefiting from a World Bank loan to assist coastal states put in place a strengthened monitoring, control and surveillance in support of fisheries management.

10. The Eastern Central Atlantic does not cover fisheries in Namibia, nevertheless there is much to be learnt from experiences in that country. The main fisheries are subjected to levels of total allowable catch. A fisheries management information system provides a comprehensive data base, to assist management and MCS. Many vessels carry observers, and the MCS is aided by deployment of patrol vessels, and aerial surveillance.

III. SUBREGIONAL EXPERIENCES WITH MCS

11. The Subregional Fisheries Commission (SFRC), based in Dakar, has been progressing steadily to be a vehicle for positive co-operation in fisheries matters between countries of the area (Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Guinea and more recently Sierra Leone), as well as serving as a focal point for donors in their interest to support fisheries on a regional basis. The Ministers responsible for fisheries in each country are the members of the Commission. The Coordinating Committee is made up of Directors of Fisheries. There are a number of subcommittees covering research, surveillance and legal matters.

12. The project for air surveillance of fisheries in maritime zones of The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea and Sierra Leone has been executed since 1992 with funds from Luxembourg Development, and with headquarters in The Gambia. Since 1999 the Government of Luxembourg has provided an extension of this funding for the Surveillance Operations Coordinating Unit (SOCU) based in Banjul, as well as a project executed by FAO (GCP/INT/722/LUX), for direct support to the SFRC secretariat in Dakar. Funding from the Government of Luxembourg ceased at the end of 2003. The main objectives were to collect information on fishing operations along the coast, train air observers, and reinforce cooperation between countries in the subregion. The SOCU in Banjul falls within the framework of the SFRC.

13. Initially, the Luxembourg/SOCU project consisted of a national coordinator, with internationally recruited expertise for information gathering and operational guidance. Then the posts for information gathering and operations were taken over by national staff. One international adviser continued to make contributions to the programme at regular intervals.

14. A number of joint operations, involving the navy, air force and technical staff of the fisheries ministries, have been organized by SOCU/SRFC between countries of the region; for example there were cooperative arrangements between Senegal and Mauritania, as well as between Senegal and The Gambia. Both these joint operations contributed to the arrest and prosecution of vessels that were found to be fishing illegally. In March 2002 the Dornier aircraft of the Cape Verde coast guard was used to locate fishing vessels off Guinea-Bissau, Guinea and Sierra Leone. A patrol vessel of the Senegal Navy cooperated in the inspection of vessels at sea, and the operation led to arrest of several vessels that were found to be fishing illegally. The naval vessel of Cape Verde also took part in joint surveillance operations in countries of the subregion. Regular aerial missions were flown over waters of the Gambia, Guinea Bissau and Guinea. Full cooperation and coordination was maintained with the national authorities. Normally at least one national of the cooperating country took part in each patrol.

15. SOCU undertook training activities with national staff involved in maritime surveillance on patrol vessels. An operations manual was produced. This provided supplementary guidance to trainees in planning for MCS. In addition to onshore course work there was practical training which included introduction to the procedures for locating and identifying vessels, boarding and safety at sea, transfer and boarding vessels for investigation. On board inspection included a check of vessel and crew documents, including the license to fish, record of fishing locations and catch records. Other requirements were the inspection of gear and measurement of mesh size, estimates of species composition and weight in the catch on board. When there was suspicion that illegal fishing had taken place the correct procedure for bringing the vessel to port, for prosecution, had to be followed. There then followed a necessary preparation of evidence for the court, or, in some situations an administrative penalty.

16. In addition to supporting SOCU, Luxembourg also provided funds to FAO for an internationally recruited staff member in Dakar at the headquarters of the Commission. The FAO staff member arrived in June 1999. Throughout the duration of his assignment with the secretariat he was able to follow-up and respond to recommendations of the coordinating committee of the Commission, notably through organizing technical workshops and meetings of the subcommittees. Documents and guidelines associated with the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries were circulated and discussed. A number of technical reports and documents were produced, and a newsletter was published regularly.

17. A workshop on negotiating fisheries agreements was held in Praia, Cape Verde, in October 2000, with the objective of setting a framework which coastal countries could follow when agreeing terms for entry of distant water fishing nation vessels to the coastal fishery. This was followed by organization of an international seminar on the dynamics of fisheries management, held at Nouadhibou (Mauritania) in November 2000. The themes that were covered in this workshop were regulation of capacity, ecolabelling, governance, constraints and perspectives for handling information, results and perspectives for MCS.

18. In March 2001 a workshop on establishing a regional register of vessels took place in The Gambia. Discussions were wideranging, but no definite decision was taken on setting up such a register. In fact the Commission has yet to make an official recommendation on this issue.

In September 2001 at Saly, Senegal, the representatives of SRFC countries as well as several other west African countries examined the management of fishing capacity at a regional level, and mechanisms open at a regional level for evaluating capacity in shared fisheries.

19. On 20 September 2001 the Ministerial Conference of the SRFC adopted the Nouakchott Declaration on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and approved a strategic action plan for the SRFC which accords high priority to MCS activities of the Commission. As a follow-up, in October 2002 – at Saly, Senegal, the SRFC with substantial funding of the US/FAO Fishcode trust fund project organized a workshop on vessel monitoring systems, specifically for members of the SRFC. The workshop objectives were to sensitise the SRFC member States on the potential of VMS as a complement to their other MCS activities, and to foster discussions at a technical level, which might eventually lead to the formulation of a sub-regional strategy for cooperation on VMS. A meeting to discuss shared stocks and highly migratory stocks was organised at Saly, Senegal, on 18-20 June 2002. This was also concerned with research of common concern, regulations that could be harmonised, and above all the conditions for access to the resource.

20. A number of subcommittees of the SRFC were supported. This included the subcommittee for surveillance and protection of fisheries. At a meeting of this subcommittee held in The Gambia in July 2002, points for discussion included illegal transshipping, mesh size offences, radio communication, hot pursuit, as well as IUU fishing in general. A subregional harmonised approach towards these issue as well as many other practical issues will help each country to improve procedures for dealing with similar problems. These of course range from fisheries exploited from the shore by canoes, often in brackish water lagoons linked to the sea, through to capital intensive operations undertaken by sophisticated multi-million dollar vessels catching large quantities of low value or smaller quantities of high value fish. Locally based and registered industrial fleets, frequently with foreign interests, are expanding steadily, and target shrimp and high value fish stocks such as sole. Large concentrations of small pelagic resources are found off certain coasts. Many canoe fishermen, also, are involved in the catching of high value fish for export. The presence of a number of highly mobile tuna vessels also poses problems for the implementation of effective MCS.

21. The most common management regulation concerns permits to allow access to zones, fishing zones for different sized vessels, and inshore zones (normally varying from five to twelve miles from shore) being reserved for canoe fisheries. Mesh size in the codend of trawl nets is also a regulation that is frequently enforced (frequently it is 60 mm stretch mesh). Closed seasons for certain fisheries have been introduced by some countries. Information which has become available from results of surveys clearly indicate that less illegal fishing takes place in the EEZs of countries where there is an effective fishery enforcement programme. In Senegal and Mauritania there is less illegal fishing than in other countries of the Commission.

22. In several countries the canoe fishers have organized themselves in to groups for identifying the industrial vessels intruding in to the coastal zone reserved for canoes fishers. This identification is sometimes assisted by provision of a radar and fast patrol boat. Sometimes the process fails because there is no serious follow-up to prosecution of the vessel. Other times the radar fails and is never repaired, or there is a breakdown of the fast patrol boat or lack of fuel. In many situations the government fishery officer attempts to perform various duties of support to the sector but is constrained by lack of financial resources.

23. Canada has been supporting the Subregional Fisheries Commission in the fields of resource management, monitoring, control and surveillance, research and training. The SRFC has also received funding from France, and the European Union for activities concerning fishery information, based in Guinea. This funding is often inadequate compared with the tasks for such a commission, as well as the difficulties which member countries have in meeting their financial commitments. Indeed the SRFC continues to suffer from the unpaid arrears both for the SOCU work based on Banjul as well as the core functions of the secretariat in Dakar.

24. Another subregional fisheries commission, the Commission Regional – or COREP, covering fisheries in the Gulf of Guinea countries, based in Gabon, has promoted MCS. Indeed a project supported by the EU undertook this work in the 1980s. Then further to the south, since 1999, the Southern Africa Development Committee (SADC) sector co-ordinating unit for marine fisheries and resources, with the support of the EU, has been implementing a programme for regional monitoring, control and surveillance of fisheries activities. This followed preparation of a report on MCS in the SADC countries of Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa, Namibia, and Angola. With regard to tuna in the region, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT) takes measures to enforce a number of management regulations.

25. The Commission for Cattle, Meat and Fishery Resources (Commission Economique du Bétail, de la Viande et des Ressources Halieutiques – CEBEVIRHA), based in Chad, is an entity of the Economic Commission for Central Africa which covers coastal countries such as Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Gabon and Congo. CEBEVIRHA organized a workshop on November 2003 in Libreville to discuss the potential for collaboration between the coastal countries in the field of fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance. The secretariat of the workshop wrote a report which made several references to recommendations made by the FAO workshop held at Accra in 1992 and their continuing relevance to the subregion. Then each country gave an expose of the work being undertaken. Gabon was making substantial progress with imminent introduction of a vessel monitoring system using the Argos satellite communication system. A number of marine parks have been established with the aim of reducing trawling activities near the shore, both to protect the marine resources and to permit the artisanal fishing to continue undisturbed.

26. At the workshop some detailed discussions took place on legal issues and the need for an adequate legal framework. Attention was given to the necessary regulations required, and the procedures expected if the law and regulations were to be enforced. Further discussions took place on operations which were practicable both onshore in port, in nearshore waters and offshore but still within the Exclusive Economic Zone. The inspection and control of fishing operations, undertaken by large fast tuna vessels and other industrial vessels, were acknowledged to be particularly difficult.

27. One approach that was advanced in the course of the workshop was subregional cooperation. Each of the four coastal countries would need to agree on a policy for cooperating in the field of fishery management. It would be necessary for Sao Tome and Principe to join in this arrangement also. The five countries could then exchange information on the industrial vessels that had permits to fish in the EEZ throughout the subregion. Indeed even if all five countries did not agree immediately on a joint programme there could first be an agreement between two countries. The cooperation could be expanded in due course with further countries.

28. The Coordinator for SOCU reported on MCS cooperation between SRFC member States. One advantage of this cooperation was that the coverage of foreign vessels fishing in adjacent EEZs could be more easily subject to surveillance. When there was subregional cooperation a fishery patrol vessel could go directly from the EEZ of one country to the EEZ of another country. Similarly a plane would be permitted to undertake aerial surveillance in areas subject to fishing which might well straddle the EEZs of different countries. The joint use of facilities already found in the region had been found to be useful. In this way the overall cost of enforcement would be reduced. For these initial maritime and aerial missions most of the costs were covered by the Luxembourg fund; nevertheless for continuing cooperative surveillance an arrangement to

jointly share the costs would require to be negotiated. The cost of a central coordinating unit could be kept modest if facilities from the national Departments of Fisheries could be used. However in order to show commitment there would need to be some central budget into which the member countries made an annual contribution.

29. In support of national and subregional initiatives the World Summit of Sustainable Development agreed that developing countries should be assisted in coordinating policies and programmes at the regional and subregional levels aimed at the conservation and sustainable management of fishery resources. As noted above, there was agreement on the need for monitoring and control of fishing vessels to deter illegal fishing, and this could be supported by the International Network for the Cooperation and Coordination of Fisheries-Related Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Activities (commonly called the MCS Network, with a website at www.imcs.net.org), which countries are encouraged to join.

IV. SUGGESTED ACTION

30. Although many countries along the West African coast are now giving increased attention to fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance, as a means of improving the overall fishery management process, there still remains a substantial need to improve the harmonisation of approaches, regulations and legal procedures between neighbouring countries. Members may like to elaborate further on how this harmonisation is advancing, and make proposals for further action in this field.

31. The experience of the Subregional Fisheries Commission in the field of fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance has been beneficial in enhancing the cooperation of coastal countries for fisheries management, most notably where effective management of a fishery is a responsibility shared between countries. Above all the shared use of information, patrol vessels and aircraft from the member countries has cut costs of enforcement. Members may wish to examine where and how this regional co-operation, and opportunities for cutting costs, could be intensified further.