

August 2003



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EXPERT CONSULTATION ON IMPROVING INFORMATION ON STATUS AND TRENDS OF AQUACULTURE

Rome, Italy, 20-23 January 2004

PROSPECTUS

Background and Rationale

During the past few decades, aquaculture has expanded, diversified, intensified and advanced technologically. It is anticipated that its growth and contributions to national economic and societal goals will increase in the future as enabling environments for investment and sustainable development are established. Growth is likely to be driven by a static supply from capture fisheries and rising prices, diversification of species, especially those with established regional or global markets, a greater diversity of value-added products, market development and the increasing application of science and technology.

Optimally, aquaculture should not expand faster than the acquisition of the information required for its rational management. The rapid growth of the sector will increase concern about implications of its expansion and the risk of unsustainable development, and underline the need for an information base to ensure informed policy and development planning. Unmanaged development has resulted in societal and environmental problems, failure to provide development support, loss of market opportunities, and conflicts with other traditional sectors. The novelty of aquaculture as a significant, recorded economic activity and the lack of easy access to adequate objective information on its social, economic and environmental characteristics has often resulted in its exclusion from development planning and the management of resources. It has also hampered investment in the sector.

The need for aquaculture data and information collection is embedded in the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF)¹, and some data needs are further elaborated in the associated FAO Technical Guidelines². The Code recognizes that reliable and timely data are required for the competent authorities of national governments to effectively discharge their general responsibility in the promotion of sustainable aquaculture practices that are well-integrated into rural, agricultural and coastal development.

¹ FAO. 1995. Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. Rome, FAO, 41 p.
<http://www.fao.org/fi/agreem/codecond/ficonde.asp>

² FAO Fisheries Department. 1997. Aquaculture Development. *FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries* No. 5, Rome, FAO, 40 p.

In recent years the demand for reliable data and information and for reporting on aquaculture has greatly increased, driven not only by the need to formulate and monitor sound policies and development plans, but also by new information and reporting requirements of international agreements and initiatives³, and by the increasing public demand for transparency and accountability. Changing perspectives in management are also changing requirements for information; e.g. the need to take a wider range of issues (besides production volume and value) into account in decision-making and to consider aquaculture development within the full scope of the environment and management of natural resources, as well as to exercise appropriate precaution as the best approach to sustainability.

FAO plays a unique role in aquaculture statistics and the preparation of information on the global status and trends of the aquaculture sector -- the cooperative collation at the global level of national and regional data, and the production of global assessments of the state of aquaculture and development trends based on these. The quality of regional and international data ultimately depends on prevailing national statistical standards in reporting. The usefulness of the national statistics which constitute the regional and international data bases depends on their accuracy and completeness. It is clear that countries need to collect aquaculture statistics for their own national interest, for policy-making, planning and management. The provision of statistics to FAO (and regional fishery bodies) is a secondary concern.

Though aquaculture has a long history, the management of the sector is a fairly new concern and the collection of statistical data and other information on aquaculture is a recent endeavour in many parts of the world. Equally, the FAO aquaculture statistics database system is a relatively recent activity, initiated only in 1984. Published FAO statistics are currently limited to production quantities and values by species and environment.

There is considerable variation in the quality of the data submitted to FAO by Member States, and some of the data (e.g. hatchery output, structural data) is not published because of quality problems. Though FAO has made considerable progress in improving the database, the latter is still in the developmental stage, lagging behind statistical systems for fisheries and agriculture. However, the growing importance of aquaculture requires closer attention to some aspects of data collection and their accurate reporting and analysis, as well as the purpose and scope of collected data.

With these concerns in mind, the FAO Advisory Committee on Fisheries Research (ACFR), through its Working Party on Status and Trends in Fisheries (WP/STRF) recommended that the FAO global system of status and trends reporting be improved in support of more effective policy-making and management, and better monitoring of environmental and ecosystem impacts, in the context of an international plan of action to be drafted for this purpose⁴. Such a strategy has been developed for capture fisheries and was adopted by the FAO Committee on Fisheries in its meeting in March 2003. Aquaculture was excluded from the strategy because of perceived differences in its information requirements, and recognition that the aquaculture sector is deserving of a dedicated initiative.

More recently, The COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture (COFI/SCA), during its first session in April 2002, designated information needs for aquaculture as a priority area for attention at the global level and recommended that FAO develop an approach for improving reporting on aquaculture status and trends similar to that developed for capture fisheries, with special attention

³ (e.g. Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, Kyoto declaration and Plan of Action, International Convention on Biological Diversity; WTO Agreement of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures & OIE's related International Aquatic Animal Health Code; Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species; etc.)

⁴ FAO. (In press). Report of the Technical Consultation on Improving Information on the Status and Trends of Capture Fisheries. Rome, Italy, 25-28 March 2002. *FAO Fisheries Report* No. ?. Rome, FAO.

to the quality of the information on which it is based. This consultation is in follow up to that recommendation.

Objective and Scope

The Fisheries Department is organizing this consultation with the purpose of seeking advice and guidance for improving global status and trends reporting on aquaculture.

To provide guidance, the Consultation must consider a number of interlinked institutional and technical issues. It must evaluate the current information base and its adequacy for monitoring of trends in the light of changing management perspectives. It must also examine the procedures for global reporting and address the broader issues of quality assurance and participation in the collation and analysis of information in order to ensure transparency and consensus.

The overall objective of the Consultation therefore is to prepare a sustainable strategy and plan for the improvement of status and trends reporting on aquaculture at the international level.

More specifically, the Consultation will:

- Review available information on completeness, scope and procedures for preparation of FAO status and trends reports on aquaculture (i.e. information collection and collation, quality control, analysis and dissemination), as well as the nature and quality of the information on which it is based, and the timeliness of reporting;
- Review regional and global institutional arrangements and mechanisms for advising on information needs for policy and management, agreeing on standards and methodologies for collecting information, and coordinating statistical activities among regional bodies;
- Consider changing information requirements for sector management and suggest minimum content and related data and information needs at the national level and for global reporting, within the practical limits of national resources and capacities, to enable a more holistic, multi-faceted approach to aquaculture analysis and management;
- Identify areas for improvement and suggest practical measures and mechanisms for achieving improvements in targeted areas; and
- Draft an international strategy and plan to serve as a framework for implementing these improvements.

In addressing this task, and to ensure a practical outcome, the Consultation should take into consideration:

- Current content and constraints in the collection of aquaculture statistics and establishment of non-statistical information systems;
- National data collection capacities and resources, as well as the trade-off between the scope of coverage and data accuracy; and
- Recent recommendations from FAO meetings on these matters.

Documentation for the Consultation

The deliberations of the Consultation will be supported by documents prepared by FAO, which provide background information on key topics (information documents); e.g. current status of information for monitoring and reporting status and trends of aquaculture at the national level in selected countries, current FAO procedures for monitoring and reporting global status and trends of aquaculture, key issues in establishing an adequate information base for global reporting on aquaculture, and some relevant FAO publications. A “working document” will suggest a strategy and brief plan for improving global reporting of status and trend of aquaculture, adapted from the strategy prepared earlier for capture fisheries. The document will serve as a starting point for discussions.

The information and working documents will be placed on the FAO Fisheries Department web page for review in advance of the meeting. Participants are encouraged to review the papers before the meeting and prepare notes to allow time for substantive discussion.

Expected Outputs

It is anticipated that the Consultation will provide:

- Specific advice and guidance on measures to improve various aspects of global reporting of status and trends of aquaculture including, *inter alia*, matters related to institutional arrangement; scope; standards; quality; participation, transparency; and consensus
- A draft strategy to serve as a framework for implementing the suggested improvements.

The draft strategy will be published in the report of the Consultation, together with a record of discussions and conclusions.

Organization of the Consultation

The consultation will be held in English. All material prepared for and during the meeting, as well as the discussion, will be in English.

The Consultation will be conducted in plenary sessions. Key background will be presented in summary form by FAO staff prior to discussions. The report of the consultation will be prepared by the secretariat and reviewed and adopted in a final plenary session.

Participation

The Consultation will be attended by selected experts representing both information “providers” (involved in the collection of statistical and non-statistical information) and information “users” (policy-makers, planners/managers), and invited representatives of some regional and international organizations. Participants will be invited to attend in their personal capacities as technical experts in their fields and to achieve a balance of regional representation.

Programme, Venue and Date

The Consultation will be held at FAO Headquarters in Rome, Italy, during 20 – 23 January 2004. The provisional agenda and timetable for the Consultation is provided as document EC:STA/2004/ 1.

Technical Secretariat

The Consultation is organized by three services of the FAO Fisheries Department: the Inland Water Resources and Aquaculture Service (FIRI), the Fisheries Information, Data and Statistics Unit (FIDI) and the Policy and Planning Service (FIPP). Communications regarding the Consultation should be addressed to the Technical Secretariat:

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