



## WORKING GROUP OF EXPERTS ON THE FAO AQUACULTURE QUESTIONNAIRE, FISHSTAT AQ

26 – 28 January 2004, FAO, Rome, Italy

### PROSPECTUS

#### Background and Rationale

FAO plays a unique role in global aquaculture statistics and the preparation of information on the global status and trends of the aquaculture sector. Such reports are important in alerting regional organizations, national policy makers and advisors, industry, NGOs and the public to the global aquaculture situation and global issues which can have effects at the regional and national levels.

In recent years the demand for reliable data and information and for separate reporting on fisheries and aquaculture has greatly increased, driven by the need to formulate and monitor the impact of sound policies and development plans for sustainable aquaculture development, and management of resources and the environment; and the increasing public demand for transparency and accountability.

Changing perspectives in fisheries and aquaculture management also are changing requirements for information. It is now largely accepted that:

- Managers must take a wider range of issues into account in decision-making. Thus, information on resource utilization, the environment and socio-economics plays an enormous part in the multifaceted research required for modern management.
- Aquaculture needs to be considered within the full scope of the environment, and that ecosystem-based management for sustainability is likely to be an approach that will be increasingly adopted.
- The best approach to sustainability is through appropriate precaution and application of the Precautionary Principle, as embodied in the CCRF.
- Interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral information is required and there is urgent need for integration of data and data collection.

Changing perspectives and the increasing contribution of aquaculture to nutritional, economic and social goals have created a need, in many countries, for a better array of numerical data of reliable quality and for other information that can better measure and describe trends of the sector.

Systematic collection of aquaculture statistics by FAO's Fishery Information, Data and Statistics Unit (FIDI) started only in 1984. The questionnaire, FISHSTAT AQ, designed in consultation with regional experts and HQ Aquaculture experts, was introduced in 1984 to collect aquaculture statistics reported at the national level. The questionnaire is sent annually

to national fisheries statistical offices and other appropriate institutions in all Member and Non-member States. The questionnaire and its instruction sheet are intended to (a) promote standardized usages of variables to facilitate international comparability of data and (b) improve monitoring and analysis of trends in aquaculture development.

There have been no substantial changes in the structure and contents of the questionnaire since then, with the exception of improvements to the definition of aquaculture. The FAO questionnaire was last reviewed in 1999 (mainly in the Asia region) by a SEAFDEC<sup>1</sup>-FAO ad hoc expert consultation, but no modifications were made to the questionnaire. Guidelines for the collection of structural aquaculture statistics were also prepared by FIDI as a supplement to the Programme for the World Census of Agriculture 2000 to encourage Member States to improve availability of structural data on aquaculture. This is a voluntary and long term process and the results will not be available for some time.

The FAO aquaculture database, consisting of pooling together validated national statistics collected through the questionnaire, currently reports aquaculture production in terms of quantity and value, in marine, brackish and freshwater environments, and provides information on rearing facilities. There is great variation in the quality of the national data submitted to FAO. Some of the received (e.g. hatchery output and structural data) are not published because of completeness and quality issues. The absence of reliable structural statistics in some cases sheds doubt on the validity of sample surveys and collected data. A growing percentage of production is identified to the family/order level only, and some problems arise from inadequate harmonization of terms and definitions.

The FAO aquaculture statistical database is still in the development stage. FAO efforts to improve the completeness and quality of the data are a continuous process, and much remains to be done. However, the growing need for the collection of additional information not now included in the questionnaire, together with other reporting required in connection with international agreements and sustainability issues, will probably put a strain on most developing country Members and pose problems in terms of country response. Accordingly, any modification of FISHSTAT *AQ* must take that into consideration, and should perhaps aim at the collection of priority basic data for global reporting that is, optimally, also of priority at the national level, and at approaches and tools which will help simplify and reduce the cost of data collection, while ensuring data reliability, particularly in countries with limited capacity and resources. Modifications to the questionnaire must also be carefully evaluated and agreed by the data “providers”.

The Conference on Aquaculture in the Third Millennium (2000)<sup>2</sup> identified information needs for aquaculture as a priority area for attention at the national, regional and global level, while the first meeting of the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI-SCA; 2001)<sup>3</sup> designated improvement of the quality of FAO global aquaculture statistics, including establishment of unified standards and guidelines for data collection and clearer definitions as a priority area of work for FAO. It also suggested a minimum set of data to be collected for global reporting on status and trends of aquaculture.

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<sup>1</sup> SEAFDEC = Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center

<sup>2</sup> NACA/FAO. 2000. Report of The Conference on Aquaculture in the Third Millennium. NACA, Bangkok, and FAO, Rome. 120p.

<sup>3</sup> Committee on Fisheries. Sub-Committee on Aquaculture. First Session, Beijing, China, 18-22 April 2002. [http://www.fao.org/fi/meetings/cofi/cofi\\_aq/cofi\\_aq1/default.asp](http://www.fao.org/fi/meetings/cofi/cofi_aq/cofi_aq1/default.asp)

This Working Group is being convened by the FAO Fisheries Department in response to these recommendations and needs, to specifically address practical and achievable modifications to the FAO aquaculture questionnaire, FISHSTAT *AQ*.

### **Objective and Scope**

The FAO Fisheries Department is organizing this consultation with the purpose of seeking expert advice and guidance concerning the FAO questionnaire, FISHSTAT *AQ* and its instruction sheet, in order to identify and prioritize modifications that are deemed most necessary to improve the FAO data base on aquaculture.

The overall objective is to improve the information base for global reporting within the practical limits of national capacities and resources while responding to the extent possible to changing management perspectives and widespread concerns about sustainable development, and management of the environment and natural resources.

Specifically, the Working Group is invited to review the FISHSTAT *AQ* questionnaire to provide recommendations on what modifications are necessary and feasible (e.g. in terms of scope, harmonization of terms and classifications, definitions, periodicity of data collection, adequacy and clarity of the instruction sheet, user-friendliness), to prioritize the suggested modifications and to identify specific approaches and actions to achieve them to meet global information requirements.

In doing so, the WG should take into consideration:

1. The discussions and recommendations of the preceding Consultation on Improving Information on Status and Trends of Aquaculture regarding:
  - Minimum essential data needs
  - National issues and priorities for improving statistical data
  - Issues concerning the FAO global statistical data base on aquaculture
  - Modifications to FISHSTAT *AQ* suggested earlier (for the Asia region), and the response of concerned Member States
2. Possible need for modifying the scope of statistical data collected to meet new management perspectives and to respond to increasing public concerns about resources and the environment, including minimum needs for relevant indicators;
3. The revised definitions and additions to structural and non-structural statistics suggested in FAO's *Guidelines for the collection of structural aquaculture statistics*;
4. Differences in development stages of the sector;
5. Issues relating to the collection, processing and dissemination of statistical data and information at the national level, as reported and discussed in the preceding Consultation; and
6. The need to address effects of modifications of the FAO questionnaire on the integrity of historic data sets at the national, regional and international level.

### **Output**

The expected output includes:

1. Suggested changes, and priorities, and the underlying rationale;

2. Practical means of achieving recommended changes (i.e. an action framework/road map), including suggestions on how to phase in changes to long standing data sets; and
3. Recommended level of aggregation and periodicity of data collection for each type of data category.

In arriving at recommendations, the WG should pay special attention that:

1. Recommendations are specific and achievable
2. Targets to be monitored are measurable
3. Data collection can be cost-effective and sustainable by providers
4. Collection of additional information may be attained at the expense of precision and reliability

### **Documentation**

The deliberations of the Working Group will be supported by the results of the Consultation on Improving Information on Status and Trends of Aquaculture and the related supporting documentation, discussion notes prepared by the secretariat, previous proposals for changing the questionnaire and increasing its scope, and other published background information relevant to the questionnaire.

### **Organization**

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

The deliberations will be conducted in plenary sessions. The report of the consultation will be prepared by the secretariat and reviewed and adopted in a final plenary session.

### **Participation**

The Working Group will consist of “information providers” (involved in the collection of statistical information) selected from participants in the preceding Consultation on Improving Information on Status and Trends of Aquaculture, and invited observers from 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 tentative programme for the Working Group is attached as document WG: ASQ/2004/1. The Working Group will be convened at FAO headquarters in Rome, Italy, during 26 – 28 January 2004.

### **Technical Secretariat**

The Working Group 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 Working Group should be addressed to the Technical Secretariat:

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