



منظمة الأغذية
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联合国
粮食及
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des
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pour
l'alimentation
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Organización
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para la
Agricultura
y la
Alimentación

**REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR FISHERIES (RECOFI)
WORKING GROUP ON AQUACULTURE (WGA)
REPORT OF THE FIRST MEETING**

Manama, Bahrain, 18–20 April 2004

OPENING OF THE SESSION

1. The first Meeting of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA) was held from 18 to 20 April 2004 in Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain. Mr Mohammed Saif, Secretary of RECOFI, formally opened the Meeting on behalf of Dr Jacques Diouf, Director General, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Mr Jassim Ahmed Al-Qaseer, Director of the Marine Resources Directorate, Kingdom of Bahrain, welcomed the participants to Bahrain and wished the Working Group well in their deliberations and discussions. The participants and observers were invited to introduce themselves. The list of participants is attached as Appendix A.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE SESSION

2. The Agenda was presented by Mr Abdulredha J. Shams, WGA Interim Chairperson, and adopted with some minor modifications. The Agenda is attached as Appendix B and the list of meeting documents is attached as Appendix C. The election of the chairperson was deferred until the end of the Meeting.

RECOFI RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO THE WORKING GROUP

3. The Secretariat (Mr Alessandro Lovatelli, WGA Technical Secretary) reviewed the history and the purpose behind the creation of the Working Group on Aquaculture. The need for active participation from the countries through the assigned “focal points” was emphasized. The Working Group belongs to the participants and they need to take an active role in identifying the issues to be addressed in future meetings. Eventually members should put forth ideas for further work and develop project proposals for these initiatives with the technical assistance of the Secretariat.

4. It was stressed that this Working Group should make recommendations on how to move forward, including proposals to the Commission and to the national governments.

5. The Secretariat introduced for discussion the paper “Status Report on the RECOFI Working Group on Aquaculture” (RECOFI:WGA/I/2004/2). Two activities that had been previously suggested for the Working Group by RECOFI were identified for discussion during this session:

- Consultation on regional aquaculture legislation including a review of existing laws and recommendations for a regional legislative structure; and
- Establishment of a regional aquaculture information system.

6. It had been proposed that the Working Group on Aquaculture adopt a logo. The Secretariat presented four possible designs that had been developed. The Working Group identified a favourite out of the submitted designs. The Group also made some suggestions including the inclusion of a map of the RECOFI region and the inclusion of a symbol particular to aquaculture such as a cage or a sketch of a life cycle for a species. It was recognized that all this may not be possible in a small logo. The Secretariat will send out a revised version for approval by the Focal Points.

7. The budget of the WGA was discussed. The RECOFI Secretary explained the current situation with the Commission's budget in general and invited the WGA to prepare a proposal with regards to its financial need. This proposal would be discussed at the next session of the Commission. The Group recognized that a budget allocation could only be approved by the Commission, however, considering that the next RECOFI session would be held in May 2005 the WGA Chairperson invited all Focal Points seek funds from their Governments as well as to contact private sector for possible contribution to the WGA budget.

UPDATES OF COUNTRY AQUACULTURE REPORTS

8. The WGA Focal Points were invited to present short updates on the status of aquaculture development in their country. In addition written reports were distributed to the Group. The major changes and developments since the Second Session of RECOFI were discussed.

9. New aquaculture centres (e.g. Kuwait), new hatchery facilities (e.g. United Arab Emirates – UAE) and new species under production (e.g. Yellow fin tuna in Oman and *Panaeus vannamei*) were highlighted.

10. In addition, an observer from the National Prawn Company (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) presented an overview of their experiences developing fully-integrated shrimp farming in Saudi Arabia over the last 22 years. Additionally, their experience with experimental culture of marine fish was discussed.

NATIONAL AQUACULTURE SECTOR OVERVIEW (NASO)

11. The Secretariat (Mr Valerio Crespi, Fishery Resources Officer – Information) introduced the paper “National Aquaculture Sector Overview (NASO): An Activity of the FAO Fisheries Department” (RECOFI:WGA/I/2004/3).

12. The development of the NASO has been requested by the FAO Member Countries during the first two Sessions of the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture in order to respond to the increasing public demand for transparency and accountability of information concerning aquaculture at the national level. The presentation detailed the main components of the NASO. It is a comprehensive, concise, dynamic and a multi-domain product. The development process to produce a NASO was presented and clarified.

13. The meeting participants appreciated the structure of NASO and expressed their interest in developing their own NASO. They agreed to provide a draft NASO for each of the RECOFI Member Countries by the end of July 2004. A “Focal Point” for each country would need to be identified for this activity. Information should be written following the NASO template which will be sent to the Focal Points by the Secretariat.

ESTABLISHING A LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR AQUACULTURE

14. Mr Melvin Spreij, FAO Legal Consultant, introduced the paper “Establishing a Legal Framework for Aquaculture” (RECOFI:WGA/I/2004/5).

15. The collection of laws and regulations from all RECOFI Member Countries and a comparison of the degree of development among the countries were identified as priority activities in the WGA Proposed Work Programme 2003–2004 during the Second Session of the Commission. The aim is for an external evaluation of the existing legislation, highlight improvement areas, where needed, and make recommendations on common regulations that could be adopted at a regional level.

16. A brief introduction was given to the establishment of a legal framework for aquaculture in general. The main international instruments were highlighted, due to the influence they have on the development of national legislation. They include voluntary instruments, such as the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF), and binding international agreements, such as the Biosafety Protocol, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and the Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Relevant is also the International Aquatic Animal Health Code of the World Organization for Animal Health.

17. Next, the place of aquaculture in the national legal framework was described. Some countries have no legislation on aquaculture whatsoever while others have comprehensive legal frameworks in place. Characteristically, aquaculture involves many issues. For instance, aquaculture depends on natural resources, such as land and water, and impacts on the environment through the discharge of wastewater, the use of chemicals and drugs, and the introduction and movement of species. The protection of aquatic animal health is a major issue of concern and, finally, the aquaculture product must be safe for consumption, too. Consequently, aquaculture is often addressed under a wide range of various laws and regulations, which makes it a difficult activity to regulate. In addition, enforcement is often identified as a weak link due to budget constraints, lack of manpower and overlap of laws of institutions.

18. It was stated that the challenge that the RECOFI countries are beginning to address is the need to review and reform their regulatory framework applicable to aquaculture to ensure that unnecessary legal and bureaucratic obstacles are removed and to ensure that the sector develops in a sustainable manner. Governments must recognize aquaculture as distinct agriculture sector, integrate aquaculture into resource and development planning, improve the management of aquaculture (in particular where it has the potential to be socially or environmentally unsustainable), and improve food safety standards.

19. The WGA identified several common issues of concern, which may require a region-wide approach. They included the introduction and movement of exotic species, the

protection of aquatic animal health, the application and implementation of strict food safety standards required by major importing countries, such as the European Union and the United States of America, and the pollution of marine waters caused by aquaculture farms.

20. The participants were invited to present a brief overview on the status of aquaculture legislation in their country. To a certain extent, the level of development of legislation is related to the importance of aquaculture in the various countries. Oman already has adopted rules and regulations on many of the issues that are relevant to aquaculture. Iran reported to have established special guidelines for aquaculture in 1999. Some countries have included several articles on aquaculture in their basic fisheries law, which are dealing mainly with the application process (UAE, Saudi Arabia). Kuwait reported to be in the process of developing aquaculture legislation. Countries that still have no or little aquaculture activity have limited their regulation of aquaculture to a so-called “enabling clause” in their basic fisheries law (e.g. Bahrain), or to the preparation of standard application forms for the issuance of aquaculture licenses, discharge permits and environmental authorizations (e.g. Qatar).

21. It was recommended by the WGA for the Secretariat to seek assistance from FAO through a preparatory mission to develop a regional Technical Cooperation Project (TCP), which should eventually culminate in the drafting and preparation of regional guidelines or a code of conduct for sustainable aquaculture development in the region. It was agreed that on the long term the best results would be obtained by following a comprehensive approach to set up and carry out the project. The preparatory mission should therefore be carried out by a legal consultant and an aquaculture expert in order to review and assess the national legislation in the various RECOFI countries and to review their aquaculture management frameworks and policies. The legal consultant and the aquaculture expert should prepare a report with findings, conclusions and detailed recommendations, including the preparation of a work plan and the final TCP document. This should be followed by discussion and approval of the report, including the work plan and the final TCP proposal, during a workshop.

22. The WGA agreed upon the Terms of References (TOR) for the legal consultant and for the aquaculture expert. In addition, it formulated the justification for the preparatory mission, its objective, and its results (see Appendix D). The Focal Points invited the Secretariat to approach FAO to see whether an advance allocation for a regional TCP is possible. It was pointed out that the granting of an advance allocation does not automatically guarantee that the total TCP will be funded.

23. It was agreed that FAO will prepare a draft letter with an official request for a sub-regional TCP. This request must be sent by all RECOFI countries (preferably at ministerial level) to the Director General of FAO and copies to the Deputy Director General, Assistant Director General of the Fisheries Department and to the Office of the Legal Counsel. A sub-regional TCP can be justified only if the Director General receives a request from at least three RECOFI countries. It was further agreed that the Interim Chairman would also present a recommendation for a letter to the DG-FAO at the ministerial level at the coming Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Fisheries Committee scheduled in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on 4 May 2004.

24. Finally, it was agreed that the WGA Secretariat will be informed within two weeks about the estimated budget that is required for carrying out the preparatory mission. If funding is not readily available by FAO, or FAO cannot fund the entire TCP, other sources of funding

will be required. The WGA agreed that the RECOFI countries will use all their efforts to explore the possibilities of other funding.

DATA AND STATISTICS FOR AQUACULTURE IN THE RECOFI REGION

25. The Secretariat (Mr Alan Lowther, Fishery Statistician – Aquaculture) introduced the topic of improving the collection of aquaculture data and highlighted the topics in the paper “Current Status of Aquaculture Data in the Gulf Region: Improving the Statistics Concurrently with the Development of the Sector” (RECOFI:WGA/I/2004/4). Basic statistics on aquaculture production in the region were presented, followed by an overview of FAO procedures for the annual compilation of global aquaculture statistics. Basic concepts regarding data collection at the national level were outlined including the use of census and survey methodologies. It was stressed that the best data collection system for each country will depend on the nature of the activity and industry in the country.

26. A FAO Fisheries software product, the ARTFISH (Approaches, Rules and Techniques for Fisheries Statistical Monitoring) system for data collection, compilation and estimation was discussed. The development of this software for aquaculture data has been completed and is currently being tested. This software and related training materials will soon be available through the FAO webpage. The WGA expressed great interest in the ARTFISH system. The Secretariat will inform the members by e-mail when the information is available.

27. Some discrepancies were noted between the data presented earlier during the country updates and the data currently in the FAO database. The Secretariat and FAO Fisheries Information, Data and Statistics Unit (FIDI) will follow-up with the members to confirm the correct data. In addition, the FIDI will send to the WGA Focal Points the names and addresses where the FAO fisheries statistical questionnaires are sent. This will allow FIDI to confirm that they are being sent to the appropriate persons.

28. The members of the WGA were invited to report on the data collection procedures in their countries. For some countries it was very simple because all aquaculture production comes from a small number of companies. Some of these members expressed interest in the ARTFISH system, as they expect the sector to grow. For larger countries, more detailed systems were described.

DEVELOPMENT OF A REGIONAL INFORMATION SYSTEM

29. The Secretariat (Mr V. Crespi) presented the working paper on the “Establishment of a Regional Aquaculture Information System” (RECOFI:WGA/I/2004/6).

30. The development of a regional aquaculture information system has been requested by the RECOFI Member Countries during the last two sessions of the RECOFI Commission in order to respond to (a) the increasing development of aquaculture in the region; (b) the increasing need to develop a regional system facilitating the exchange of information; (c) to assist the private and public sectors to have quick and easy access to information required for decision making, both on specific technical matters and for the design and assessment of new aquaculture projects; (d) to respond at the increasing public demand for transparency and accountability of information concerning aquaculture at national and regional level; and (e) to secure a position in the international information scene giving more visibility to the regional

aquaculture development and related activities. The presentation detailed the main potential components of a Regional information system.

31. The purpose of this activity should consist in gathering information on the aquaculture sector in RECOFI Member Countries (e.g. national aquaculture sector overview, statistics, bibliographies, reports and photos, names and addresses of private and government institutions involved in aquaculture activities, names of specialists working in aquaculture, training opportunities, ongoing research activities). This information could be collected in a common system and made available on a dedicated website.

32. The proposed name of the information system suggested was “RECOFI Aquaculture Information System (RAIS)”. This name was discussed but no final decision was taken. The “RAIS” network would consist of a regional centre, composed by several professionals including a Regional Coordinator (Information Officer) and a Web Master, located in one of the RECOFI countries and one National Centre for each RECOFI Member Country. Each National Centre would be represented by a National Coordinator.

33. The participants appreciated the structure of the proposed regional information system and expressed their interest in developing it. All the participants agreed to start with the development of a static information system simply based on HTML pages. In the future a regional database linked to the web pages could be developed according to the requirements of the RECOFI Member Countries. It was noted that both Kuwait and the Islamic Republic of Iran had offered to host the Regional Centre of “RAIS”. After a brief discussion the participants jointly agreed that Kuwait would be in a better position to host the Regional Centre.

34. With regards to timing and work flow the following steps were identified and agreed: (a) agreement on the final product that will be developed (e.g. static HTML pages, use of other specific software); (b) three months to organize the regional centre in Kuwait (e.g. space, equipment, developers); (c) three months to identify all the National Centres and nomination of the “National Coordinators”; (d) the Secretariat will provide a list of input that should be developed by each RECOFI Member Country in order to prepare the material that should feed into the system; (e) the Focal Point of Kuwait and FAO will provide a budget estimation for the development of RAIS and for its maintenance; (f) design RAIS together with FAO (e.g. contents, web design). The participant asked technical support from FAO. The Secretariat ensure to fund the travel and the DSA of an Information Officer; (f) The first draft of RAIS could be ready and presented at the next Commission session that will be held in Qatar in May 2005.

OTHER MATTERS

35. The Secretariat identified several common issues of concern, which may require a region-wide approach. Among them, the introduction and movement of exotic species should be reported to DIAS (Database on Introduction of Aquatic Species) one of the FAO information systems. The Secretariat presented the DIAS website and its contents and distributed a hard copy of the input form to all participants. All the participants agreed on the importance to provide this information and they agreed to send as soon as possible all the information requested by filling in the input form. Periodically this information will be validated and added to the DIAS database.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

36. The Meeting was expertly chaired by Dr A. J. Shams, Manager of the National Mariculture Center under the Directorate of Marine Resources of Bahrain and RECOFI-WGA Interim Chairperson. Dr Shams also ensured that the local and meeting arrangements were of superior quality. Activities outside of the Meeting were arranged including a visit of the National Mariculture Center and a tour of the Gulf Petrochemical Industries Company (GPIC). The hospitality of the Kingdom of Bahrain was greatly appreciated by the participants.

ELECTION OF THE CHAIRPERSON

37. The WGA Focal Points appreciated the excellent work carried out by the Interim Chairperson, Mr A. J. Shams who was unanimously elected as chairperson for the next three years to coincide with the organization of the Fourth Session of the Commission.

DATE AND PLACE OF THE SECOND WGA MEETING

38. The WGA Focal Points proposed to hold its next meeting sometime after the Third RECOFI Session scheduled for May 2005. The Focal Point of Saudi Arabia expressed interest to host the meeting. The exact dates of the meeting would be discussed and agreed during the next RECOFI Session.

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Appendix B – MEETING AGENDA

1. Opening of the Session
2. Adoption of the Agenda and arrangements for the Session
3. Report on the discussion and recommendations of the WGA to the Second Session of RECOFI
4. WGA Status Report
5. Country aquaculture updates and presentation of the ‘National Aquaculture Sector Overview’ (NASO) activity of the FAO Fisheries Department
6. Country aquaculture legislation reports - National institutional arrangements for aquaculture development and management
7. Aquaculture legislation and regional developments - Recommendations
8. Country aquaculture information system reviews
9. Current status of aquaculture data in the Gulf Region: Improving the statistics concurrently with the development of the sector
10. Presentation of a regional aquaculture information system proposal
11. Assistance for aquaculture development in the region
12. Discussion and Recommendations
13. Future work plan and review of recommendation
14. Any other matters
15. Election of the Chairperson
16. Date and place of the Second RECOFI-WGA Meeting

Appendix C – LIST OF DOCUMENTS

RECOFI:WGA/I/2004/1	Provisional Agenda and Timetable
RECOFI:WGA/I/2004/2	Status report on the RECOFI Working Group on Aquaculture
RECOFI:WGA/I/2004/3	National Aquaculture Sector Overview: An Activity of the FAO Fisheries Department
RECOFI:WGA/I/2004/4	Current status of aquaculture data in the Gulf Region: Improving the statistics concurrently with the development of the sector
RECOFI:WGA/I/2004/5	Establishing a Legal Framework for Aquaculture
RECOFI:WGA/I/2004/6	Establishment of a Regional Aquaculture Information System
RECOFI:WGA/I/2004/Inf.1	Provisional List of Documents
RECOFI:WGA/I/2004/Inf.2	Provisional List of Participants
RECOFI:WGA/I/2004/Inf.3	Report of the Second Session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (Muscat, Oman, 18–21 May 2003)

Appendix D – Project Justification, Objectives and Draft TORs

Project justification

The aquaculture sector in the RECOFI Region, although still in an initial stage, is rapidly expanding. Between the years 1997 and 2001 production in the area has nearly doubled. It is crucial for the protection and preservation of the marine aquatic environment and its natural resources in the RECOFI Region that any further expansion of the sector takes place in a sustainable manner. Generally, the countries have few laws and regulations in place that regulates the aquaculture sector. If a country has some form of regulation, it is often limited, outdated and applied to the sector in an inconsistent manner. Only some countries require the carrying out of an environmental impact assessment before setting up and operating an aquaculture facility. In addition, in most countries there are overlaps and inconsistencies among the various ministries and government authorities and agencies involved. The following issues of common concern justify a region-wide approach: the introduction and movement of exotic species, the protection of aquatic animal health, the application and implementation of strict food safety standards required by major importing countries, and the pollution of marine waters caused by aquaculture establishments.

Objective

Strengthening the aquaculture sectors of the RECOFI Member Countries, increase the sectors' contribution to the economy and to food security in the Region and development of the aquaculture sector in a sustainable manner.

Output

- Systematic and comparative review of existing legislation related to aquaculture in the RECOFI Member Countries;
- Review of the functions and structures of responsible aquaculture management institutions in the RECOFI Member Countries, the existing aquaculture policies and the overall national development objectives;
- Preparation of a report with the review's findings and conclusions, as well as detailed recommendations toward the drafting of regional guidelines/code of conduct and the enhancement of aquaculture policy development and management. The report includes the preparation of a work plan and of a final project proposal in the TCP format; and
- Workshop where the findings, conclusions and recommendations will be discussed and, where necessary, amended.

TOR for the Legal Expert:

- Hold, in collaboration with the Aquaculture Expert and Aquaculture Policy expert, discussions with representatives of the relevant ministries and government authorities of Oman, Bahrain, Iran and Saudi Arabia, as well as the private sector, NGOs and other aquaculture interest groups;
- Collect, review and assess first hand information on legal framework for aquaculture in relevant RECOFI Member Countries, and make a preliminary evaluation of its adequacy and effectiveness for the sustainable development of aquaculture resources;
- Consider relevant needs and views expressed by stakeholders and evaluate possible best options for dealing with them through a potential regional TCP;

- Based on the foregoing, in collaboration with the Aquaculture Expert and Aquaculture Policy expert, prepare and submit to FAO and the Commission a report with findings and conclusions, as well as detailed recommendations. This includes preparation of a detailed work plan and of the project proposal in the TCP format;
- Assist in the preparation and lead the conduct of the workshop, in collaboration with RECOFI Secretariat.

TOR for the Aquaculture Expert:

- Hold, in collaboration with the Legal Expert and the Aquaculture Policy Expert discussions with representatives of the relevant ministries and government authorities of the RECOFI countries, as well as the private sector, NGOs and other aquaculture interest groups;
- Review and analyze current aquaculture management structures and objectives and on-going aquaculture programmes under the overall national development policies and goals, and to recommend appropriate actions to achieve sustainable aquaculture resources management;
- Consider relevant comments and views expressed by stakeholders in writing and through meeting, and evaluate the best options for handling each of them;
- Based on the foregoing, in collaboration with the Legal Expert and the Aquaculture Policy Expert, prepare and submit to FAO a report with findings and conclusions, as well as detailed recommendations. This includes preparation of a detailed work plan and of the project proposal in the TCP format.

TOR for the Aquaculture Policy Expert:

- Hold, in collaboration with the Aquaculture Expert and the Legal Expert, discussions with representatives of the relevant ministries and government authorities of Oman, Bahrain, Iran and Saudi Arabia, as well as the private sector, NGOs and other aquaculture interest groups;
- Collect, review and assess first hand information on institutional framework for aquaculture in Oman, Bahrain, Iran and Saudi Arabia, RECOFI Member Countries, and make a preliminary evaluation of its adequacy and effectiveness for the sustainable development of aquaculture;
- Consider relevant needs and views expressed by stakeholders and evaluate possible best options for dealing with them through a potential regional TCP;
- Based on the foregoing, in collaboration with the Aquaculture Expert and the Legal Expert, prepare and submit to FAO and the Commission a report with findings and conclusions, as well as detailed recommendations. This includes preparation of a detailed work plan and of the project proposal in the TCP format.