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WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION Thirteenth Session
WECAFC LESSER ANTILLES FISHERIES COMMITTEE Tenth Session
Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, 21-24 October 2008
MAIN DECISIONS OF THE TWENTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES (COFI)¹

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The 27th Session of FAO's Committee on Fisheries was held in Rome from 5 to 9 March 2007. It was attended by 131 governments and the European Commission, 41 intergovernmental organizations and 29 nongovernmental organizations.

2. Mr A. Hettiarachchi (Sri Lanka) was unanimously elected Chairperson of the Committee and Mr Z.S. Karnicki (Poland) was elected First Vice-Chairperson. El Salvador, Iceland, Iran (Islamic Republic of), New Zealand and United Republic of Tanzania were elected as other Vice-Chairpersons.

II. MAIN OUTCOMES

Progress in the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, related International Plans of Action and Strategy:

3. The Committee referred expressly to the further work to be done in order to facilitate and ensure the implementation of the International Plans of Action (IPOA-Capacity, IPOA-IUU Fishing, IPOA-Sharks, IPOA-Seabirds), including the development of best practice technical guidelines to support the elaboration of NPOAs for seabirds.

4. It also addressed specifically the issue of fishery subsidies, urging FAO to continue its proactive engagement with WTO in this matter and to continue its studies on the impact of subsidies on fishing capacity, IUU fishing, fisheries management and sustainable development in a manner that complemented, but should not duplicate, WTO's work.

5. A new issue that drew the attention of the Committee was that of genetic resource management in fisheries and aquaculture: COFI welcomed the pending submission to the Eleventh Session of the FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture in June 2007 of a general multi-year programme of work.

6. In addition to working arrangements for the Sub-Committees on Aquaculture and on Fish Trade, respectively, in relation to their monitoring of the implementation of the relevant provisions of the Code of Conduct, COFI urged FAO to continue asserting its international leadership as the only global fisheries body and

¹ Extracted from the Report of the twenty-seventh session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI). Rome, 5-9 March 2007. *FAO Fisheries Report*. No. FIEL/R830 (En).

agreed that it must maintain its high profile in global fisheries affairs in order to integrate debate from across the various fora dealing with fisheries and aquaculture issues.

Rehabilitation and reconstruction of livelihoods in the fisheries and aquaculture sector in countries affected by the tsunami in 2004:

8. COFI underscored two issues that must be addressed more particularly: first, the higher level of fishing capacity than prior to the tsunami in some of the areas affected by the disaster – which calls for, with FAO assistance as required, the design and implementation of sustainable and effective fisheries management arrangements that included a gradually phasing out fishing overcapacity, monitoring, access and livelihood considerations; second, the issue of safety-at-sea in relation to the use of sub-standard vessels.

9. In addition to welcoming the emphasis given in the programmes for further long-term support for reconstruction and sustainable development, the Committee recommended that FAO report more extensively on lessons learned from the post-tsunami rehabilitation and reconstruction work and widely disseminate results so as to enhance preparedness.

Decisions and recommendations of the Tenth Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade:

10. COFI endorsed the report of the Tenth Session of the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade and noted the importance of international trade in fish and fish products for developing countries.

11. Recognizing the importance of traceability for fish trade, it expressed the view that traceability schemes for small-scale fisheries should be compatible with WTO rules.

12. It welcomed the Memorandum of Understanding between FAO and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and recognized the value of the FAO ad hoc Expert Advisory Panel's work in reviewing and providing recommendations regarding any relevant proposals to amend the CITES Appendices.

13. COFI also identified four areas for further work: (1) the draft International Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Inland Capture Fisheries, in combination with similar outstanding work in the guidelines for marine capture fisheries ecolabels, which were adopted at the last COFI; (2) the draft Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fish Trade; (3) the relationship between fish trade and food security; (4) fisheries subsidies, in particular with a view to providing technical expertise and cooperation to the ongoing WTO negotiations on and, as necessary, assisting in the implementation of future fisheries subsidies disciplines.

Decisions and recommendations of the Third Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture:

14. COFI endorsed the report of the Third Session of the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture, and recognized the ever increasing importance of the aquaculture sector and the need for its sustainable growth in a responsible manner.

15. Reaffirming its trust in FAO to play a coordinating role in advancing the global aquaculture agenda, COFI welcomed the recent change in the name of the FAO Fisheries Department to the Fisheries and Aquaculture Department and stressed the importance of an adequate Departmental budget so that more resources could be allocated for aquaculture-related activities.

16. COFI highlighted the importance of addressing socio-economic impacts of aquaculture, improving planning and policy development at national and regional levels, ensuring food safety and human health, and developing best management practices, risk assessment methodologies and guidelines for the better management of aquaculture.

17. COFI identified several areas for action. (1) Prioritization and implementation of the recommendations made by the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture, recalling in particular the need for technical assistance to Members; (2) Speedy implementation of the Strategy and Outline Plan for Improving Information on Status and Trends of Aquaculture, including the establishment of a Coordinating Working Party on Aquaculture Statistics; (3)

establishment of a special programme for aquaculture development in Africa with regular and extra-budgetary funding support, with the aim of providing special assistance to African countries to access financial services and markets, to boost investment in aquaculture as well as exchange knowledge and experience, particularly through South-South Cooperation; (4) development of guidelines on aquaculture certification through expert workshops and meetings; (5) development of regional aquaculture networks in Africa and the Americas similar to the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA); (6) work on genetic resources management in fisheries and aquaculture.

Social issues in small-scale fisheries:

18. COFI referred to a number of these issues, including the necessity to tailor policies and development programmes to the specific needs to particular locations, countries and regions and types of small-scale fisheries; the implementation of international human rights instruments and the recognition and adoption of human rights principles; the need to adopt a rights-based approach to managing small-scale fisheries.

19. COFI considered different options to give greater prominence to small-scale fisheries in its deliberations and FAO's Programme of Work. It took note of the strong support by many members to establish a dedicated COFI Sub-Committee and/or a specific programme of work on small-scale fisheries supported by extra-budgetary funding.

20. COFI welcomed the proposal by Norway that FAO examine the convening of a broad-based international conference focusing specifically on small-scale fisheries of a format similar to the 1999 FishRights and 2006 Sharing the Fish Conferences.

Combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing through monitoring, control and surveillance, port states measures and other means:

21. COFI encouraged Members to join or cooperate with the voluntary International MCS Network.

22. It recognized that all those involved in IUU fishing such as beneficial owners of fishing vessels, as well as of transshipment and support vessels, should be included in the scope of measures to fight against IUU fishing.

23. COFI identified three specific areas for action. (1) Port State measures: COFI took note of the strong support for the Norwegian proposal to develop a new legally binding instrument based on the FAO Model Scheme on Port State Measures to Combat IUU Fishing and the IPOA-IUU, through an Expert Consultation (latter half of 2007) followed by a Technical Consultation (first half of 2008) to finalize the instrument's text and present it to the Twenty-eighth COFI Session in 2009; (2) the global record of fishing vessels: its concept to be further developed by an Expert Consultation to be convened; (3) the performance of flag States: criteria for assessing such performance to be developed in an expert consultation, as well as possible actions against vessels flying the flags of States not meeting such criteria.

Implementing the ecosystem approach to fisheries (EAF), including deep-sea fisheries, marine debris and lost and abandoned gear:

24. COFI identified several areas where further work is required: (1) the technical guidelines on social, institutional and economic considerations in EAF, which must be completed as quickly as possible; (2) climate change and fisheries, where, in addition to a scoping study, FAO is requested to take a lead in informing fishers and policy makers about the likely consequences of climate change for fisheries; (3) technical guidelines including standards for the management of deep-sea fisheries in the high seas to be drafted by an Expert Consultation, no later than August 2007, and finalized by a Technical Consultation in January or February 2008; (4) the technical guidelines on the design, implementation and testing of marine protected areas (MPAs) in relation to fishing, which must be completed at the earliest opportunity; (5) best practice guidelines to assist countries and RFMOs in implementation of the IPOA-seabirds to be developed in cooperation with relevant bodies; (6) biodiversity mapping; (7) the creation of a global database on vulnerable marine ecosystems in areas beyond national jurisdiction, in cooperation with other relevant organizations such as IUCN; (8) the creation of a list of authorized vessels engaged in high seas deep-sea fisheries.

25. COFI also addressed other relevant issues, such as derelict fishing gear and marine debris.

Strengthening regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) and their performances including the outcome of the 2007 Tuna RFMOs Meeting:

26. The main and most concrete issue that COFI considered under this agenda item was the report of the joint meeting of the five RFMOs with a mandate for the management of tuna stocks (Kobe, Japan, January 2007), which was presented by Japan, and the following discussion on the performance review processes of RFMOs and RFBs, which should be transparent as noted by COFI.

FAO's programme of work in fisheries and aquaculture:

27. COFI addressed mainly two issues:

- i) The level of the budget assigned to the Fisheries and Aquaculture Department, which COFI found unsatisfactory and not commensurate with the importance of its work and the expectations of the international community, hence its strong request that the relevant FAO Governing Bodies allocate more resources to the Department;
- ii) The activities of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Department, all of which were reiterated to be important, notwithstanding the emphasis on the need that the work programme of the Department should take due consideration of the priorities which COFI identified and highlighted in its report.

Suggested Action by the Commission:

28. The Commission is invited to take note of the main decisions of the Twenty-seventh COFI, especially those that are relevant to the WECAFC region.