



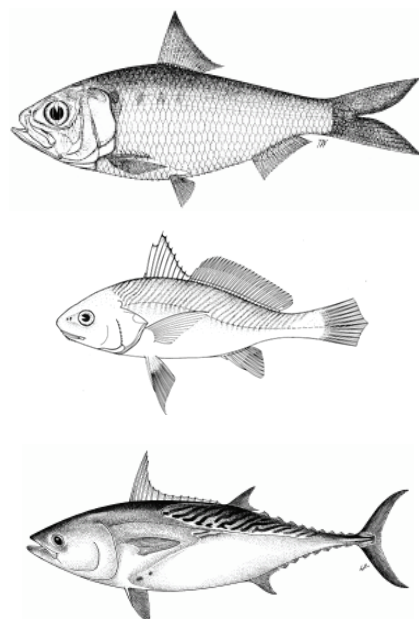
Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



REPORT OF THE THIRTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE

# ASIA-PACIFIC FISHERY COMMISSION (APFIC)

Bangkok, Thailand, 5–7 May 2021



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# ABSTRACT

This document is the edited version of the report adopted by the 36th session of the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission (APFIC) convened at a virtual session in Bangkok, Thailand from 5 to 7 May 2021. It was hosted by the Department of Fisheries, Government of Thailand and attended by 53 registered delegates from 17 APFIC member countries, three non-APFIC FAO members and 8 observer regional organizations.

The Commission reviewed the intersessional programme activities of APFIC and endorsed the report of the meeting of the 77th APFIC Executive Committee. The Commission commended the work of the Secretariat and the technical support provided by FAO to APFIC member countries over the biennium. In particular, the Commission appreciated FAO's support for initiatives to develop capacity and strengthen regional cooperation in support of the Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA) and combating of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in the region and requested continued support under the Technical Cooperation Programme. The Commission requested the APFIC Secretariat to continue to provide resource persons to technical meetings and workshops. The Commission emphasized the importance of training for reporting on SDG14b and continued work on antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in aquaculture.

The Commission noted that the importance of Asia as a globally important fish producer required APFIC members to have a strong voice in international fora such as FAO's Committee on Fisheries (COFI) and its technical committees and to contribute to the development of international guidelines such as the FAO Guidelines on Sustainable Aquaculture (GSA). The Commission concurred that there is a clear case for increasing access to knowledge and skills in sustainable aquaculture production practices. The Commission agreed on the importance of the FAO Aquaculture Platform and welcomed this initiative. Several APFIC regional partners offered their support to the initiative.

The Commission emphasized the importance of fishery management grounded on science for sustainable marine and inland fisheries. It acknowledged the challenges related to lack of adequate capacity for conducting stock assessment and analyses and welcomed the development of an FAO initiative for capacity development to improve stock assessment for marine and inland applications.

The Commission recognized the importance of APFIC as a regionally focused platform and requested broader discussions and consultations among members related to APFIC's future. The Commission agreed that the use of a virtual approach could be used for other workshops and events of the Commission, with consideration of devising a hybrid format in the future and recommended the development of rules of procedure to ensure effective outcomes of virtual format workshops and decision-making events. It requested further information on the potential for establishment of APFIC subcommittees for subregional arrangements and the possibility and implications of setting up a multi donor/multicountry Trust Fund to support the Commission. Noting the complex set of issues relating to the Commission and its functions, the Commission recommended the creation of an ad hoc working group to be better informed of the legal and financial implications of the future of APFIC. It further recommended that the results of the working group be discussed at the 78th Executive Committee Meeting.

The Commission endorsed the 2021–2023 biennial APFIC work plan with an amendment to include the establishment of a working group to look at addressing the limitations and the future of the Commission. The Commission elected the People's Republic of China (Chair) and Thailand (Vice-chair) as the office bearers for the 37th session, with India, Malaysia and the Philippines elected as Members of the Executive Committee. The Commission agreed that the 37th session of APFIC will be convened in China in 2023.

## **Distribution:**

Session participants, members of the Commission  
Other interested nations and international organizations  
FAO Fisheries Department  
Fishery officers in FAO regional offices



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## **Opening of the session**

1. The Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission (APFIC) held its 36th session from 5 to 7 May 2021 in virtual format, hosted by the Government of Thailand.
2. The virtual session was attended by 53 representatives of 17 member countries of the Commission and the APFIC Secretariat. There were three FAO member country observers and representatives from eight partner organizations (Appendix B).
3. The delegates were welcomed by Mr Jong Jin Kim Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative, FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. Mr Kim expressed his gratitude to the Government of Thailand and the Chair of APFIC, Mr Mesak Pakdeekong, Director-General, Department of Fisheries, Thailand for hosting the session and the excellent arrangements. Mr Kim noted that this was the first time the Commission session had been organized in virtual format. He informed the Commission that APFIC had been active, providing virtual technical webinars on key regional issues relating to the Commission's work plan. He concluded that the Commission would also be deliberating the future of the Commission and its operations and encouraged the members to seek options for sustainable solutions to current issues.
4. The inaugural speech for the session was provided by the APFIC Chair. He welcomed the APFIC member country delegations and observers noting that this was an exceptional meeting in virtual format. He informed the Commission that the onset of COVID-19 had made a tremendous impact on the world's socio-economic situation in all regions, especially on the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. Emphasizing that the Asia-Pacific region is a global hub of fish production, he highlighted the broad range of challenges to responsible and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture production and urged members to focus on the responsible use of technologies and innovations for the development and enhancement of effectiveness in aquatic animal production.

## **Adoption of the agenda**

5. The Commission adopted the agenda (Appendix A) and agreed on the arrangements for the session.
6. Appendix C lists the documents considered and reviewed by APFIC members.

## **Intersessional activities of APFIC since the 35th session**

7. The APFIC Secretary introduced document APFIC/21/02 supported by information documents APFIC/16/INF 3 and APFIC/16/INF 5. This summarized the main events and activities undertaken by APFIC and the Secretariat since the 35th session, which was held in Cebu, Philippines, from 11 to 13 May 2018.



### *FAO's Blue Growth initiative*

8. The Commission was informed that following recommendations of previous sessions, the FAO regional initiative on sustainable intensification of aquaculture for blue growth in the Asia-Pacific region had been expanded in scope and coverage to focus more broadly on all aquatic resources-related sectors and cover more countries during implementation. The range of national Technical Cooperation Projects (TCPs) related to the regional initiative indicates how this has evolved during the biennium.

### *Organization of regional meetings and workshops*

9. The Secretariat/FAO have independently or jointly organized or supported more than 18 regional and international workshops and a major regional consultative workshop. These include the APFIC technical webinar series and are all notable for the high level of participation of APFIC member countries and the excellent partnerships with a range of regional fishery organizations, institutions and projects.

### *Technical and advisory support to workshops and meetings of FAO and regional organizations and member countries*

10. The APFIC Secretariat actively pursued collaboration with regional and international organizations providing advisory inputs or acting as technical resource persons to 20 events, such as governing council meetings, programme steering committee meetings, policy consultations and technical workshops and conferences. The organizations concerned were NACA, SEAFDEC, MRC, RPOA-IUU, UNEP-COBSEA<sup>1</sup>, WorldFish, PEMSEA<sup>2</sup>, ILO, AIT<sup>3</sup> and USAID<sup>4</sup>.

### *Direct assistance and advice to member countries*

11. The Secretariat in its functions within the FAO Regional Office in Bangkok (FAO-RAP), has provided direct technical assistance and policy advice to members in addressing country-level and regional-level fisheries and aquaculture development issues. Overall, 26 FAO TCP and TCP Facility (TCP-F) and 11 Trust Fund national and regional projects have been supported.

12. In addition, the Secretariat has been active in developing eight new projects, including two large regional Global Environment Facility (GEF) International Waters projects (promoting the blue economy and strengthening fisheries governance of the Gulf of Thailand through the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries [GoTFish Project]); and Sustainable Management of the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME II - SAP Implementation).

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<sup>1</sup> Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia.

<sup>2</sup> Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia.

<sup>3</sup> Asian Institute of Technology.

<sup>4</sup> United States Agency for International Development.

13. The Commission was informed that the Secretariat has updated and maintained the APFIC Web site (<http://www.fao.org/apfic/en/>) following a request from the 77th Executive Committee. The Web site is now used to disseminate communications on upcoming APFIC events as well as the working papers and prospectus and background documents for such events.

14. The Secretariat produced three APFIC technical publications as outputs of APFIC meetings and technical subjects.

## **Responses of the Commission**

15. The Commission acknowledged the wide range of activities that had been undertaken in response to the recommendations of the 35th session and expressed its appreciation of the work undertaken by APFIC and the APFIC Secretariat from 2018 to 2021.

16. The Commission appreciated FAO's support to initiatives to develop capacity and strengthen regional cooperation in support of the Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA) and combating of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in the region. The APFIC members were encouraged to ratify the PSMA and further regional cooperation on this issue. The Commission requested FAO to continue providing technical assistance and advice to APFIC members through its TCP. The importance of cooperation with relevant regional bodies was emphasized.

17. The Commission requested the APFIC Secretariat to continue to provide resource persons to technical meetings and workshops.

## **Report of the 77th meeting of the APFIC Executive Committee**

18. The Commission was informed of the activities of the APFIC Executive Committee and the report of its 77th meeting (APFIC/21/03, APFIC/21/INF 3, APFIC/21/INF 4 and APFIC/21/INF 9) which was convened in Chiang Mai, Thailand from 5 to 7 March 2019 and hosted by the Government of Thailand.

19. The Commission welcomed the information papers on fisheries and aquaculture prepared by the Secretariat and noted the importance of improved access to market information.

20. The Commission recognized the importance of training for reporting on SDG14b. It highlighted the importance of continued work on antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in aquaculture.

21. The Commission noted the survey work conducted by the RV Dr. Fridtjof Nansen in the Bay of Bengal and that the compilation of a Bay of Bengal overview would be useful.

Concomitantly, Thailand noted that a second survey in the southern areas of the Andaman Sea would be important. Bangladesh also requested FAO for a second survey of its waters in the Bay of Bengal. It was also noted that the results of the surveys would assist members in reporting on the UN Fish Stocks Agreement.

22. The Commission noted the importance of Asia as a major fish producer and that APFIC members need a strong voice in international fora such as the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) and its technical committees to contribute to the development of international guidelines, such as the FAO Guidelines on Sustainable Aquaculture (GSA).

23. The Commission endorsed the report of the 77th Executive Committee meeting.

## **Overview and report of the APFIC regional webinars**

24. The Commission was informed that the Commission session is usually preceded by the Regional Consultative Forum Meeting (RCFM). The APFIC RCFM works in partnership with other regional organizations and members to develop outcomes and recommendations; these are forwarded to the Commission for deliberation and endorsement (APFIC/21/04; APFIC/21/INF 6).

25. During 2020 and 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic has prevented the physical convening of the 8th APFIC RCFM and other APFIC regional consultative workshops. To compensate for this and adapt to the challenges presented by COVID-19, the APFIC Secretariat organized a series of technical webinars to replace the 8th APFIC RCFM. The series of technical webinars largely took place prior to the virtual 36th APFIC session and covered eight themes that are relevant to fisheries and aquaculture of the APFIC region:

1. Inland fisheries connectivity, irrigation and water management
2. Review of illegal fishing in the APFIC region
3. AMR is simple to understand, yet it is often misunderstood
4. Multispecies stock assessment for management
5. Pushing the frontier of aquaculture development with innovation
6. Subsidies and current negotiations at the World Trade Organization (WTO)
7. Information and communication technologies for small-scale fisheries (ICT4SSF)
8. Characteristics and performance of co-management in Asia

### *Advantages*

26. The Commission was informed that the virtual format allowed a much broader participation and knowledge sharing opportunity. This modality enabled the typical number of participants at the RCFM (usually between 50 and 75) to be substantially increased to between 150 and 350 for each webinar. Alongside government staff, participation of researchers, civil society organizations (CSOs) and the private sector was also notable. Participants from APFIC member countries and FAO members in the region who usually have trouble participating in the APFIC RCFM and workshops were also able to join.

27. This broad participation was due to the low cost of these webinars, primarily related to the organization of technology and webinar facilitation and the absence of travel costs. The presenters provided their inputs on a voluntary basis.

28. The webinar format can be adapted to an APFIC workshop format, with a limited number of participants, to develop concrete recommendations and outcomes. This also enables the use of breakout groups.

#### *Limitations of the virtual webinars*

29. The virtual format is an excellent way to showcase work that has been completed and to disseminate the findings and recommendations, but the large numbers of participants prevent the use of workshop breakout groups and thus the effective canvassing of opinions and recommendations. Therefore, there is only limited specific feedback from the events, which can be forwarded to the Commission.

30. The virtual format webinars lasted between 2.5 and 3.5 hours which is longer than an equivalent technical session in the APFIC RCFM.

31. The presenters and resource persons at the APFIC webinars were willing to provide their input at no cost. This situation is somewhat unpredictable when it comes to attracting volunteers and may become less realistic as demands on time rise.

### **Responses of the Commission**

32. The Commission congratulated the Secretariat on the organization of the webinars and commended the high level of participation.

33. It concurred that the virtual format is efficient and effective for increasing participation and cost saving, particularly in adapting to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; it recognized that there were still some limitations for those with poor Internet connectivity.

34. The Commission agreed that the virtual approach could be used for other workshops and events of the Commission; developing a hybrid format in the future should be considered.

35. With regard to virtual format workshops and decision-making events, the Commission recommended the development of rules of procedure and terms of reference, especially in the cases of decision-making events, to ensure effective outcomes.

### **Aquaculture innovation, knowledge sharing and capacity development in the APFIC region**

36. The Commission considered the working paper and regional overview of 'Aquaculture in the Asia-Pacific' prepared by the Secretariat (APFIC/21/05 and information paper APFIC/21/INF 7).

37. The overview provides a summary of emerging issues in aquaculture in the region. It also introduces the possible showcasing of the innovations that abound in the APFIC region in the aquaculture sector. It notes that the size and dynamic nature of the aquaculture sector in Asia can contribute to SDGs related to food security, nutrition, poverty alleviation and sustainable resources utilization. But this also presents numerous challenges that also need to be addressed.

38. The Commission was informed of innovations in farming technologies and system performance improvements covering the entire value chain.

39. The Commission was also informed of the FAO Aquaculture Platform as a new initiative under development by the FAO-RAP. This is intended to act as vehicle to pool, share and facilitate access to knowledge of best practices in sustainable aquaculture and coordinate access to this knowledge among training institutions and national agencies. The Aquaculture Platform is also an instrument for coordinating stakeholder access to relevant training and networking.

## **Responses of the Commission**

40. The Commission was informed of some national initiatives and innovations that are being implemented by members with good results; in some cases they are being transferred to other countries. These cover: the use of aquaculture mechanization and information communication technology (ICT) to improve or intensify production; environmental approaches to reduce effluent discharges; certification; integration of systems; improved biosecurity; and business insurance for small-scale aquaculture.

41. The Commission noted some areas in which training and technical advice are needed, including culture of indigenous or high-value species, aquaculture mechanization and transfer of knowledge to small-scale aquaculture farmers. Potential areas for cooperation or training include: training to promote technology in green and healthy aquaculture as well as education and technical advice in the development and application of IT-based smart aquaculture.

42. Regional organization partners expressed interest in cooperating in capacity development, with the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA) offering support to promote sustainable aquaculture and innovation; INFOFISH offered support in developing capacity in market analysis for aquaculture products. The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) highlighted the importance of social protection programmes for small farmers.

43. The Commission concurred that there is a clear case for increasing access to knowledge and skills in sustainable aquaculture production practices.

44. The Commission also noted that dissemination and scaling up of innovative technologies, systems and practices at national levels and regional levels can be facilitated through cooperation and knowledge sharing with other countries.

45. The Commission agreed on the importance of the FAO Aquaculture Platform and welcomed this initiative. Several APFIC regional partners offered their support to the initiative.

## **Developing capacity in assessment of the sustainable management of marine and inland fisheries**

46. The Commission was informed of the current limitations in the assessment of marine and inland fisheries in the region (APFIC/21/06; APFIC/21/INF 8).

47. The overall trend in the state of the world's marine fish stocks is one of increasing exploitation and increase in the number of overfished stocks and global catch is stagnating. Despite this global picture, the recorded landings from the two main APFIC fishing areas (FAO Fishing Areas 57 Eastern Indian Ocean and 71 Western Central Pacific) indicate steady growth trends in marine capture fisheries. However, at the national level, a mixed picture emerges, indicating that coastal fishery resources are heavily fished and often show signs of overexploitation.

48. In inland fisheries, catches also appear to be increasing and now represent 24 percent of total regional capture fishery production. However, there are plausible reasons for considering that the total inland fishery catch figure may be underestimated.

49. The Commission was further informed that the APFIC region represents some of the least assessed fisheries in the world. This has implications for management decision-making and tracking the sustainable use of fishery resources. It also limits the members' ability to report on SDG 14.

50. FAO places high priority on developing capacity for improving the assessment of marine fisheries but this will take time and requires policy vision and investment to achieve results. It was noted that there is the potential to create a capacity development programme through subregional approaches within the APFIC region for leveraging project and capacity development funding in cooperation with regional fishery organizations and national fishery agencies.

## **Responses of the Commission**

51. The Commission emphasized the importance of fishery management grounded on science for sustainable marine and inland fisheries. The Commission was informed of national efforts for stock assessments in both marine and inland waters.

52. The Commission acknowledged the challenges related to lack of adequate capacity for conducting stock assessment and analyses and welcomed the development of an FAO initiative for capacity development to improve stock assessment for marine and inland applications. It further encouraged collaboration with regional fishery bodies and regional fishery management organizations.



53. The Commission requested the Secretariat for further details on the FAO initiative for capacity development to improve stock assessment for marine and inland applications.

## **Addressing current limitations to the effective function of APFIC**

54. The Secretary introduced working document APFIC/21/07 as a review of the limitations on the effective function of APFIC as requested by the 77th Executive Committee Meeting.

55. The APFIC Strategic Plan 2018–2023 (APFIC/21/INF-5), endorsed by 35th session of APFIC, recognizes that APFIC performance and impact are constrained by limited human and financial resources but does not provide operational solutions for developing an effective programme of work that is not subject to the uncertainties of the FAO Regular Programme and FAO policies on financial support to FAO regional fishery bodies (RFBs).

56. The 77th Executive Committee recommended that the Secretariat prepare some options for the future operation of the Commission while setting out financial and operational procedures to achieve this. The Secretariat has prepared an overview of the principal issues but has been unable to develop a comprehensive policy document for decision. This is due to the rapidly changing context of APFIC financial support and the move to virtual meetings. The Secretariat requested additional guidance from the Commission on how to proceed.

57. The Secretariat provided preliminary ideas of possible ways to streamline planning and seek financial resourcing of APFIC-related work and activities. These comprised:

- Re-phasing the APFIC biennial work plan to coincide with the biennial FAO Regular Programme financial planning (this has the additional advantage of the APFIC session being convened in a non-COFI year);
- Developing a trust fund/project for APFIC to support participation in APFIC meetings and technical workshops (this requires donor or member country contributions);
- Examining administrative arrangements required to enable APFIC to act as a coordinating or executing body for regional initiatives and programmes (this is unlikely as APFIC would need an autonomous budget and full-time Secretariat);
- Moving the Commission to completely virtual format, reducing travel costs (noting there are still staff time implications and the need for a regular for studies and background work); and
- Suspending regular activities of the Commission (to release the Secretariat and FAO resourcing for subregional activities supported through FAO projects and FAO Regular Programme aligned activities).

## **Responses of the Commission**

58. The Commission recognized the importance of APFIC as a regionally focused platform and requested broader discussions and consultations among members related to APFIC's future.

59. The Commission noted that the virtual and hybrid version of the APFIC session would reduce cost of participation, however, recognized the limitations of such a format.

60. The Commission requested further information on the potential for the establishment of APFIC subcommittees for subregional arrangements.

61. The Commission did not support modifying the number of participating members for a quorum, as this may have implications for other bodies.

62. Noting the complex set of issues relating to the Commission and its functions, the Commission recommended the creation of an ad hoc working group to be better informed of the legal and financial implications of the future of APFIC. It further requested that the written report of the working group be discussed at the 78th Executive Committee Meeting.

63. As COVID-19 continues to generate tremendous difficulties globally, the Commission did not support mandatory contributions from APFIC members. The Commission therefore requested that the ad hoc working group also look into the feasibility of establishing a multidonor and or multicountry trust fund project to support the work of the Commission.

64. The Commission also requested further information from the Secretariat on FAO policies on funding of other FAO regional bodies and whether these are applied consistently across the bodies, and whether lessons could be learned from other FAO bodies on funding options or approaches.

## **2021–2023 Work programme and budget of APFIC**

65. The Commission was presented with a detailed outline of the biennial work plan for May 2021 to July 2023 in document APFIC/21/08. The calendar of activities was presented covering proposed regional workshops and regular meetings of the Commission. These extend beyond the work plan endorsed by the 77th Executive Committee, created by the long intersessional period and changing context presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

66. The Commission was informed that the Commission's work would continue in virtual format for the foreseeable future, driven by pandemic-related travel restrictions, as well as the lack of budget for activities.



67. Despite this, four FAO-supported regional meetings and consultations are foreseen. The Commission Web site will be updated in this context.

68. Other recurrent activities of the APFIC Secretariat as part of their FAO functions include: support to regional workshops and meetings of partner organizations and member countries and ad hoc technical advice.

#### *Financial matters relating to the operation of the Commission*

69. The budget and financial constraints placed on the work of APFIC were reported in detail to the 77th session of the Executive Committee (APFIC/21/INF 4).

70. The Secretariat informed the Commission that all funding for the fisheries and aquaculture work programme of FAO-RAP must be generated from income from projects serviced by Secretariat staff. This includes the costs of the APFIC Secretariat and the convening of APFIC Executive Committee meetings and technical workshops.

71. Under the rules of procedure, the costs of participation in the APFIC session are borne by the members. The precedent is that the session's organization costs are borne by the Chair country.

### **Responses of the Commission**

72. The Commission was informed that Thailand has provided an officer on loan to support the work of the APFIC Secretariat.

73. The Commission endorsed the work plan based on the working paper (APFIC/21/08) with a request to include the convening of an ad hoc working group on the future of APFIC in the work plan and budget.

### **Statements of non-APFIC FAO member observers and partner organizations on their work programmes and achievements**

74. The Chair invited observers and regional organizations to take the floor to make short statements of their regional priorities and ongoing programmes. In response to this agenda item the regional organizations participating in the meeting provided the following reports:

#### **Lao People's Democratic Republic (the)**

75. Lao People's Democratic Republic (the) informed the Commission that although a landlocked country, inland fisheries are very important as a source of protein and income for their people. The threats to the sustainability of inland fisheries in the country include high market demand for fish, IUU fishing, climate change and competing use of water resources. Lao People's Democratic Republic (the) requested FAO support on stock assessment and monitoring and sustainable aquaculture development.

## **The Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO)**

76. The BOBP-IGO noted that COVID-19 has endangered lives, severely affected small-scale fisheries in the region, raised a question on the sustainability, resilience and the future of production systems, and underscored the need for national, regional and international cooperation. The BOBP-IGO has contributed 41 years to the development of small-scale fisheries in the region, the most recent efforts being collaborative work with FAO on: (i) the study on the 'Techno-economic Performance Review of the Main Global Fishing Fleets', which brought out salient features on economic performance including profitability, sharing of revenue and cost structure; (ii) the manual on 'Safety at Sea for Small-scale Fishers,' which has now been translated into 16 languages; and (iii) organizing two regional workshops and adoption of a subregional action plan to combat IUU fishing. The BOBP-IGO will also be involved in the execution of the GEF-funded Phase 2 of the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Project.

## **International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF)**

77. The ICSF appreciated regional webinars and looked forward to the upcoming and future series in fisheries and aquaculture. It stressed the importance of reliable catch statistics and the ecosystem approach in small-scale fisheries. The ICSF suggested more information on co-management, gender-disaggregated data, human development of fishing and aquaculture communities, social welfare, poverty eradication, food security, healthy lives and well-being, sustainable use of aquatic resources, climate change impact, gender equity, social development and decent work. The organization also advocated for increased fishers' knowledge and recalled the adaptability of community-based co-management structures in meeting supply-side disruptions caused by the pandemic. The ICSF encouraged APFIC to strengthen the participation of CSOs in its meetings. The ICSF strongly recommended APFIC member countries to celebrate the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022 (IYAFA 2022) with the active participation of men and women in fishing communities and local governments.

## **Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)**

78. The IOTC informed the Commission that it is responsible for the sustainable management of tuna and tuna-like resources in the Indian Ocean. This includes large tuna, billfish and neritic tunas. The IOTC is part of FAO with 30 members, sharing 14 members with APFIC. The IOTC is a science-based organization and has nine scientific working groups and a scientific committee; it also has a fisheries compliance working group that monitors how well the members are implementing IOTC conservation and management measures. The IOTC has a more focused mandate than APFIC in terms of the resources covered, but it does have a range of capacity development activities to strengthen national fisheries management and operations. When this effort is combined with the work that APFIC conducts with its members on the ground, it transcends and undoubtedly strengthens fisheries management on a grander scale. The IOTC is currently putting considerable effort into improving the stock status of yellowfin tuna and developing an allocation regime, which are both difficult tasks. The IOTC and APFIC

are linked by geography, marine resources, by FAO and by their respective memberships. It is important that the secretariats keep in touch and the organizations' build on each other's initiatives and successes.

## **INFOFISH**

79. The INFOFISH intergovernmental organization informed the Commission that since 1987 it has carried out development work and trained over 4 000 persons in many disciplines. The organization has an extensive communications network and regularly disseminates INFOFISH International and INFOFISH Trade News and organizes conferences important for promoting fisheries trade and investment in the region. Due to the pandemic, the organization has adopted new communication technology to provide uninterrupted information dissemination; it cited the APFIC technical webinar series as an example and looked forward to continued collaboration with FAO in general, and with APFIC in particular.

## **Mekong River Commission (MRC)**

80. The MRC informed the Commission of signs of overfishing with the net preserve value of the fisheries sector expected to decline by USD 23 million by 2040 in Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (the), Thailand and Viet Nam. The MRC also described policy priorities on improving productive capacities; protection of critical habitats, resource enhancement, co-management, transboundary management and shifting from subsistence to commercial production by professional fishers and fish farmers. To assist countries in achieving these goals the MRC is supporting its member countries through basin-wide strategies and monitoring programmes, basin-wide technical guidelines and basin-wide studies and assessments. The MRC Secretariat encouraged collaboration with all external parties for improved management of the Lower Mekong River Basin.

## **Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA)**

81. NACA informed the Commission that it attaches great importance to its cooperation with FAO and has maintained close contact and cooperation over the years. APFIC and NACA have a high level of interaction in aquaculture to serve member countries in the Asia-Pacific region. NACA has adjusted its way of working with more online activities, including webinars, training courses, online consultations, and online publications and has plans to establish a networking mechanism to mobilize member resources by initiating subject-focused networks, led and participated in, by competent member institutions. Such mechanisms will provide more active opportunities for communication and cooperation in aquaculture among NACA members, as well as in the region and the world. NACA is looking forward to continuing and enhancing the close partnership with APFIC to serve the sustainable development of aquaculture in the region.

## **Regional Plan of Action to Promote Responsible Fishing Practices including Combating IUU Fishing in the Region (RPOA-IUU)**

82. RPOA-IUU highlighted the importance of developing regional capacity on fishery assessment and monitoring, which is crucial for combating IUU fishing, and is ready to cooperate with other regional institutions on this. RPOA-IUU has contributed to the study on 'Review of Illegal Fishing in the APFIC Region' which provides insight on further efforts needed to combat IUU fishing in the region and is willing to cooperate on actions following the study. RPOA-IUU also informed the Commission of the following activities: (i) Collaboration with the ATSEA-2 Project on conducting research about baseline estimates of illegal fishing in the Arafura and Timor seas and RPOA-IUU Area of Implementation; (ii) organization of workshops and seminars to estimate economic and biodiversity loss caused by IUU fishing; (iii) development of the 'Commitment by RPOA-IUU on Vessels Without Nationality'; (iv) organization of the RPOA-IUU Ministerial Meeting with the theme 'Strengthen Regional Commitment to Combat IUU Fishing'; and (v) organization of the 'International Workshop on Eradication of Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported Fishing for RPOA-IUU Participating Countries and Pacific Countries' in July 2021.

## **Southeast Asian Fishery Development Center (SEAFDEC)**

83. SEAFDEC has been cooperating with FAO on various GEF-funded projects and initiatives in the APFIC region that combat illegal fishing as well as capacity development for ASEAN fisheries officers with regard to negotiations on WTO international trade issues related to fisheries subsidies. SEAFDEC is also collaborating on a strategy related to increasing aquaculture production for sustaining fish supplies in the ASEAN region. SEAFDEC will celebrate the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA) 2022, in alignment with the ASEAN Resolution and Plan of Action on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security for the ASEAN Region Toward 2030. SEAFDEC thanked Japan for its support.

## **WorldFish**

84. WorldFish endorsed and supported Agenda Items 4 and 5 of the 36th APFIC session. These endorsements and support included innovation, knowledge sharing and capacity development in aquaculture and developing capacity in fisheries assessments for sustainable management of marine and inland fisheries. WorldFish provided a range of recommendations and identified gaps related to the present status of fisheries and aquaculture in the region, which are viewed as important to addressing the future sustainability of fisheries and aquaculture. These include technological innovations including ICT, aquaculture mechanization, socio-economic and environmental considerations including data collection, analysis and assessments of fish stocks, the importance of the implementation of the Small-scale Fisheries (SSF) Guidelines as an essential participatory instrument for promoting inclusive, equitable and sustainable fisheries, as well as the importance of marketing, trade and financing, including insurance and economic studies.

## **Other matters**

85. Recognizing the critical importance of aquaculture, and the need to exchange and discuss reliable information to further enhance its contribution to sustainable development, FAO, at the request of its members, is collaborating with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA) of the People's Republic of China and NACA, to organize the Global Conference on Aquaculture Millennium + 20 (GCA +20), from 22 to 27 September 2021, in Shanghai, China. The Commission encouraged all APFIC members and interested parties to attend the conference. Further information is provided at <https://aquaculture2020.org/>.

## **Election of officers**

86. China was elected as Chair country of APFIC. China thanked the Commission for its selection as Chair country and was pleased to accept the role for the biennium June 2021 to June 2023 and looked forward to cooperating with APFIC members on all areas of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture.

87. Thailand was elected as Vice-chair country of the Commission, noting that the election of the new Chair country in 2023 should remain open to all members.

88. India, Malaysia and the Philippines were elected to serve as members of the Executive Committee.

## **Date and place of the 37th session of APFIC**

89. China informed the Commission that it is pleased to host the 37th session in 2023; the date and place will be communicated to the APFIC Secretariat in due course.

90. China also offered to host the 78th Executive Committee meeting in 2022 with the exact date and venue to be announced later.

91. The APFIC Chair concluded by appreciating the active participation of the delegates and declared the 36th session of APFIC closed.

## **Adoption of the report**

92. The report of the Thirty-sixth Session of the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission was adopted on 7 May, 2021.

## **Appendix A – Agenda (APFIC/21/01)**

### **WEDNESDAY, 5 MAY 2021 MORNING, 10.00 – 12.00**

#### **Opening ceremony**

- Welcome remarks by FAO
- Welcome and introductory remarks by the APFIC Chair, Director-General  
Department of Fisheries, Thailand
- Introductory remarks by the APFIC Secretary and introduction of the delegates

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#### **Adoption of the agenda and arrangements for the session**

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**Agenda Item 1:** Intersessional activities of APFIC

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**Agenda Item 2:** Report of the 77th Executive Committee meeting

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### **WEDNESDAY, 5 MAY 2021 AFTERNOON, 13.00 – 16.00**

**Agenda Item 3:** Overview and report of the APFIC regional webinars

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**Agenda Item 4:** Aquaculture innovation, knowledge sharing and capacity development in the APFIC region

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**Agenda Item 5:** Developing capacity in assessment for the sustainable management of marine and inland fisheries

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### **THURSDAY, 6 MAY 21 MORNING, 10.00 – 12.00**

**Agenda Item 6:** Addressing current limitations to the effective function of the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission

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**Agenda Item 7:** Work plan and budget of APFIC

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**Agenda Item 8:** Statements of non-APFIC FAO member observers and partner organizations on their programme work and achievements

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**THURSDAY, 6 MAY 21  
AFTERNOON, 13.00 – 16.00**

**Agenda Item 8 (cont.):** Statements of non-APFIC FAO member observers and partner organizations on their programme work and achievements

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**Agenda Item 9:** Other matters

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**Agenda Item 10:** Election of officers

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**Agenda Item 11:** Date and venue of the 37th session of APFIC

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**FRIDAY, 7 MAY 21  
MORNING, 09.00**

**Report available to delegates for review**

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**FRIDAY, 7 MAY 21  
AFTERNOON, 13.00**

**Adoption of report**

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**Closing of the session**

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## **Appendix B – List of participants**

### **Australia**

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Neil Hughes

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## **Appendix C – List of documents (APFIC/21/Inf 1)**

### **Working papers**

APFIC/21/01	Draft agenda
APFIC/21/02	Intersessional activities of APFIC
APFIC/21/03	Report of the Seventy-sixth Executive Committee Meeting
APFIC/21/04	Overview and report of the APFIC regional technical webinars
APFIC/21/05	Aquaculture innovation, knowledge sharing and capacity development in the APFIC region
APFIC/21/06	Building capacity in assessment for the sustainable management of marine and inland fisheries
APFIC/21/07	Addressing current limitations to the effective function of the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission
APFIC/21/08	APFIC's 2021–2022 programme of work and budget

### **Information papers**

APFIC/21/Inf1	Provisional list of documents
APFIC/21/Inf2	Provisional list of participants
APFIC/21/Inf3	Report of the Thirty-fifth Session of the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission, Cebu, the Philippines, 11–13 May 2018
APFIC/21/Inf4	Report of the Seventy-seventh Session of the Executive Committee of the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 5–7 March 2019
APFIC/21/Inf5	APFIC Strategic Plan 2018–2023
APFIC/21/Inf6	The APFIC technical webinar series
APFIC/21/Inf7	Issues in aquaculture in the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission region (2020)
APFIC/21/Inf8	Issues in fisheries in the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission region (2020)
APFIC/21/Inf9	Analysis of member country responses to the 2018 FAO questionnaire on implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF)

## **Appendix D – Statements by observers**

### **Lao People’s Democratic Republic (the)**

Kaviphone Phouthavong, Deputy Director General, Department of Livestock and Fisheries (DLF)

On behalf of the DLF, I would like to thank APFIC and FAO-RAP as well as the Government of Thailand for inviting me to participate in this important meeting as an observer.

Lao People’s Democratic Republic (the) is a land-locked country but inland fisheries play a vital role in food and nutrition security for rural farmers. More than 90 percent of capture fisheries and aquaculture is small scale; people in rural areas depend on fisheries resources for their daily protein intake and income generation.

Lao People’s Democratic Republic (the) has issued the Fisheries Development Policy for the sustainable utilization of fisheries resources, balancing the need for food security and protection of biodiversity. Promotion of small-scale aquaculture for improving nutrition sufficiency and income among farmers is the main priority for sustainable aquaculture development.

The fisheries sector in Lao People’s Democratic Republic (the) continues to face various issues and challenges, such as high market demand for fish, IUU fishing, climate change, expansion of agriculture and water resources development. In addressing these issues the DLF will continue to cooperate and strengthen its collaboration with other organizations at regional and international levels, as this is crucial for achieving sustainability in the development and management of fisheries resources.

The DLF would like to request support from FAO and other organizations on research and development in capture fisheries and aquaculture, especially human resource development for stock assessment and fish catch monitoring as well as innovations for sustainable small-scale aquaculture.

## **Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO)**

Yugraj Yadava, Director

At the outset, the BOBP-IGO would like to thank APFIC for inviting us to this important event. We also offer our appreciation to the Government of Thailand for successfully hosting the 36th session of APFIC in these troubled times.

The world today is passing through an unforeseen and unprecedented catastrophe. COVID-19 has not only endangered our lives but has also raised a question on sustainability, resilience and the future of our production systems. It has told us unequivocally that no country, how powerful it may be, can stand alone and the fate of humanity depends on cooperation, sharing and caring.

We, the fishery people, have long emphasized the need for regional and international cooperation. This need is now growing stronger. The BOBP-IGO has a long history in South-South cooperation and it is this fact that has made the BOBP-IGO and APFIC close allies in the region.

We are very happy to note the developmental activities carried out by APFIC during the intersessional period. Even in these difficult times and with travels banned, APFIC is finding newer ways to reach people through webinars. We hope that this 'new normal' will be continued to keep the regional discussions alive and moving.

Counting from the time the BOBP-IGO was established as an FAO field programme, we have completed 41 years of developing small-scale fisheries in the region. During this period, we have experienced devastating cyclones, tsunamis and earthquakes. However, none of them perhaps rival this pandemic in terms of its persistence and reach. The sector is losing millions of dollars owing to break in production, labour issues, marketing problems and trade impediments. As most of the fishers in the region are small scale or artisanal, they are bearing the brunt of this pandemic.

On a brighter side, during the last two years, the BOBP-IGO and FAO conducted a 'Global Study on the Techno-Economic Performance of Major Fishing Fleets'. Covering a number of countries from the region – Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Japan and Republic of Korea, the study has brought out salient features on economic performance including profitability, sharing of revenue and cost structure. On the safety at sea issue, during 2020, the BOBP-IGO and FAO issued a manual: 'Safety at Sea for Small-Scale Fishers' which was so well-received that it has now been translated into 16 languages with a special English version for the Caribbean Islands. The Bahasa Indonesia version is under preparation.

The BOBP-IGO was also successful in organizing two regional workshops and adopting a subregional action plan to combat IUU fishing in collaboration with FAO. Further, Phase 2 of the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Project is now ready to be launched and we will be working with FAO in implementation of activities in our member countries.

I now conclude my statement and once again thank APFIC for this invitation.

## International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF)

Manas Roshan

The ICSF would like to thank the APFIC Secretariat for inviting us to participate in the virtual 36th session of APFIC.

Regarding Agenda Items 1 and 3, the ICSF would like to congratulate the APFIC Secretariat for organizing a series of regional webinars, including the one on co-management of small-scale fisheries and the forthcoming one on gender in SSF / SSA fisheries / aquaculture. The ICSF strongly supports ground-up, contextual and evolutionary marine and inland community-based co-management projects and programmes in the region, focusing, *inter alia*, on gender equity, paying special attention to fishers' knowledge and institutions, and their tenure rights to land and water. Community-based co-management structures, it is worth recalling, have proved more adaptable to meeting supply-side disruptions arising from SARS-CoV-2 protocols and the COVID-19 pandemic in several APFIC countries. The ICSF urges APFIC members to further promote co-management in marine and inland fisheries, to apply the guiding principles of the SSF Guidelines and to promote and protect a human rights-based approach in all such initiatives.

The ICSF believes that paying special attention to social development and decent work can contribute to effective fisheries management and sustainable development. The ICSF welcomes the report of the 77th Executive Committee Meeting (Agenda Item 2) with regard to improving data to better reflect the current situation in the region. Such data should include not only data on fisheries and aquaculture production, fishing fleets, area under aquaculture, employment and so forth but also gender-disaggregated, sectoral data on human development of fishing communities, fishers, fishworkers and aquaculture farmers, especially with regard to their access to education, health, sanitation, housing, nutrition and food security – to cite a few issues. Fisheries departments may be encouraged to collect such data from relevant ministries and departments, if needed. Broadening the scope of data in the above terms will also be useful to demonstrate how various targets under the SDGs regarding poverty eradication, food security, healthy lives and well-being as well as sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources are being met in relation to fishing and aquaculture communities. If data permit, it will be further useful to see how far these SDG targets are threatened by climate change and extreme weather events.

Agenda Item 4 (on aquaculture innovation, knowledge sharing and capacity development of developing countries in the APFIC region) draws attention to the capacity development needs or knowledge required for enhancing the sustainable growth of the sector. The ICSF thinks that capacity development needs should be broadened and complemented to identify those for enhancing social benefits of vulnerable and marginalized fish farmers and dependent communities as well. Moreover, occupational safety, health and social protection of all aquaculture workers should be guaranteed through the facilitation of decent work.

Regarding Agenda Item 6, the ICSF supports the need to improve reporting of catch statistics to reliably indicate the status of harvested fish stocks in marine fisheries,

as well as the status of associated and dependent species, within the framework of an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries and respect for biodiversity and aquatic habitats, as well as traditional knowledge of fishers and fish farmers. The ICSF welcomes a basin approach to estimating fish stocks in riverine and floodplains fisheries, especially to understand the status and health of inland fisheries resources and to ensure equitable benefits flowing from the conservation and sustainable use of aquatic biodiversity to all relevant stakeholders, particularly those disadvantaged downstream communities sharing the basin.

The ICSF welcomes the suggestion to move the Commission to a virtual mode and to enable its member countries to participate in all APFIC meetings in a cost-effective manner. The ICSF requests APFIC to use this opportunity to strengthen the participation of CSOs in its meetings, particularly those that are active in small-scale, marine and inland fisheries and aquaculture.

Last but not least, recognizing the contributions of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture to employment, income and food security as well as the cultural richness of small-scale fisheries along the value chain in the region, the ICSF strongly recommends APFIC member countries to celebrate the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture in the Year 2022, especially with the active participation of men and women of fishing communities and local governments. It is an effective way to express solidarity with small-scale fisheries and aquaculture communities and their food systems in the region.



## INFOFISH

Shirlene Anthonysamy, Director

It is a great honour for INFOFISH to be associated with this 36th session of APFIC. Let me congratulate the Commission and Secretariat for the commendable range of activities that has been carried out.

INFOFISH was set up in 1981 as an FAO project, with headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; it later became an intergovernmental organization with 12 member countries in 1987. Since its inception INFOFISH has actively carried out fisheries developmental activities for the benefit of its member countries and the industry at large. In collaboration with FAO and other international agencies such as CFC<sup>5</sup>, IFAD<sup>6</sup>, USDA<sup>7</sup>, ESCAP<sup>8</sup>, SEAFDEC and NACA, over 4000 persons have been trained on a wide range of disciplines.

In this respect the dissemination mechanism of the organization, which is responsible for regular publications such as INFOFISH International and INFOFISH Trade News, an extensive communication network, as well as trade and commodity conferences such as TUNA and SHRIMP plays an important role in promoting fisheries trade and investment in the region.

Amid the new challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to acknowledge that the regional industry continues to grow while its needs are developing. There is an urgent need to strengthen domestic markets and local stakeholders for the survival of the industry with additional regulatory requirements and increased emphasis on safety and quality issues.

With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have adapted to the new circumstances, made some changes in our approach and adopted new communication technology. Accordingly, webinars, podcasts and online training are currently being used as vehicles to ensure that information dissemination and activities for member countries continue uninterrupted.

INFOFISH appreciates and acknowledges the growing cooperation and collaboration with APFIC and is honoured to be part of APFIC's technical webinar series, which started on 28 January 2021, by providing organizational support. We highly appreciate the content discussed at the eight webinars conducted to date which has been beneficial to INFOFISH member countries.

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<sup>5</sup> Community Fisheries Centre.

<sup>6</sup> International Fund for Agricultural Development.

<sup>7</sup> United States Department of Agriculture.

<sup>8</sup> Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

INFOFISH looks forward to continued collaboration with the APFIC Secretariat and its member countries in areas of mutual interest particularly in organizing online workshops /training programmes and capacity development activities in relation to markets, marketing, market access and technical issues. INFOFISH is also happy to share complimentary access to the fortnightly published INFOFISH Trade News and the bimonthly INFOFISH international magazine to the APFIC Secretariat.

Once, again we are thankful to the APFIC Secretariat for this opportunity and for being able to witness the tremendous efforts being made by the APFIC Secretariat.

## Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)

Christopher O'Brien, Secretary

The IOTC is responsible for the sustainable management of tuna and tuna-like resources in the Indian Ocean. This includes the large tuna, billfish and neritic tunas. The IOTC is part of FAO; it has 30 members and shares 14 members with APFIC.

The IOTC is a science-based organization and has nine scientific working groups and a Scientific Committee; it also has a fisheries compliance working group that monitors how well the members are implementing IOTC conservation and management measures.

The IOTC has a more focused mandate than APFIC in terms of the resources covered, but it does have a range of capacity development activities to strengthen national fisheries management and operations. When this effort is combined with the work that APFIC conducts with its members on the ground, it of course transcends and undoubtedly strengthens fisheries management on a grander scale.

The IOTC is currently putting much effort into improving the stock status of yellowfin tuna and developing an allocation regime. Both difficult tasks. The Commission will meet next month, and the sustainable management of yellowfin tuna will be the focus of its attention.

The IOTC and APFIC are linked by geography, marine resources, by FAO and by their respective memberships. It is important that the secretariats keep in touch and the organizations build on each other's initiatives and successes.

Thank you for the opportunity to say a few words today.

## Mekong River Commission Secretariat (MRCS)

So Nam, Chief Environment Management Officer

On behalf of the MRCS, I would like to thank Thailand's Department of Fisheries for hosting the session and acting as the current Chair, and FAO-RAP for inviting the MRC Secretariat to this 36th session of APFIC.

The Mekong River provides water, food and energy security for about 70 million people (predicted to grow to over 100 million by 2025) who mostly have a staple diet of rice, fish and other aquatic animals and plants. It has the world's third most diverse fish population, with 1 148 fish species, after the Amazon and Congo river basins. The inland capture fisheries of the Lower Mekong River Basin (LMB) are the world's largest, with the total fish catch estimated at 2.3 million tonnes worth USD 11 billion/year.

Although the total fish catch appears to have increased over the past 15 years according to the State of the Basin Report 2018, signs of overfishing with catch per unit effort (CPUE) declining and fish size getting smaller are being detected. According to the macroeconomic assessment report of the MRC Council Study, the net preserve value of the fisheries sector is expected to decline by about USD 17 million by 2020 and approximately USD 23 million by 2040 in all Lower Mekong countries – Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (the), Thailand and Viet Nam.

To address the current and emerging fisheries management issues, riparian governments have focused their policy priorities on improving productive capacities; protection and conservation of critical habitats and resource enhancement; fostering of community-based, co-management and transboundary management approaches; and promotion of the shift from subsistence to commercial production by professional fishers and fish farmers producing for the markets.

To complement the national measures, the MRC strives to foster regional efforts towards the sustainable management and development of Mekong fisheries by sharing technical expertise on fisheries management, raising awareness on the sector's significance for the Mekong's environment and its people, and promoting an integrated approach with other sectors. The MRC supports its member countries through the following four key activities:

**Basin-wide strategies** such as the approved Mekong Basin-wide Fisheries Management and Development Strategy and its Project-based Action Plan (2021–2025) that promotes dialogue, understanding and learning to foster the sustainable management and development of fisheries and aquatic resources in the LMB.

**Basin-wide monitoring programmes with more than 25 years** to track the status and trends of fisheries and deploy different methods. The MRC has shared such knowledge and experiences with SEAFDEC's Inland Fisheries R&D Center and also would like to share them with APFIC member countries. **The time series data** collected from these long-term basin-wide fisheries monitoring programmes have been used by diverse stakeholders from

governments, NGOs, research and academic institutes, and the private sector in the LMB, the Asia-Pacific region and over the world for supporting planning and management of Mekong fisheries resources.

**Basin-wide technical guidelines** such as the **transboundary fisheries management guidelines** that are applicable tools to help guide the joint actions of government agencies at national, provincial and local levels, regional and international organizations, development partners, other CSOs, fisheries research institutions, and fishing community groups for the regional efforts to sustainably manage the transboundary fisheries resources in the LMB. Recently, the MRC in partnerships with other regional and international organizations such as FAO, SEAFDEC and the WFC<sup>9</sup> has finalized **two Technical Guidelines (TGs)**: (1) transboundary fisheries management and (2) restoration and protection of key fish habitats with transboundary significance for the LMB. recently the MRC and FAO have been working on a concept note and application for seeking funds from the GEF to implement these two TGs.

**Basin-wide studies and assessments** that increase knowledge and evidence for better management of Mekong fisheries resources. Over the past 10 years, the MRC in partnerships with research and academic partners around the world have jointly published **many technical reports and papers** in peer-reviewed journals to inform decision-making and planning for sustainable fisheries management in the LMB.

The MRC Secretariat and its member countries warmly welcome any interested APFIC member countries, regional and international organizations and development partners for enhanced partnership and cooperation in the context of implementation of these regional activities. This will contribute to sustainable management and development of fisheries and the environment in the Mekong region.

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<sup>9</sup> World Fisheries Congress.

## **Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA)**

Jie Huang, Director-General

NACA sincerely appreciates FAO's invitation to participate as an observer at the 36th session of APFIC. We congratulate the Commission and the Thai government for successfully organizing and hosting the session and congratulate APFIC on its achievements during the last work period. We appreciate the effective adjustments made by the Commission in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the new international situation. NACA, as a regional intergovernmental organization on aquaculture born out of an FAO/UNDP project 31 years ago, attaches great importance to cooperation with FAO and has maintained close contact and cooperation with FAO-RAP during the past years of development. APFIC and NACA have a high level of interaction in the aquaculture sector to serve our member countries in the Asia-Pacific region, the highest aquaculture and fisheries production region in the world. NACA has adjusted its work with more online activities, including webinars, training courses, online consultations and online publications. We also plan a networking mechanism to mobilize our members' resources by initiating subject-focused networks led by member institutions. We believe the mechanism will provide more active opportunities for communication and cooperation in aquaculture among our members, as well as in the region and the world. NACA is looking forward to continuing and enhancing our close partnership with APFIC to serve the sustainable development of aquaculture in the region.

### **Comments on Agenda Item 4**

NACA thanks FAO-RAP for its efforts in aquaculture innovation, knowledge sharing and capacity development in the APFIC region. We congratulate FAO-RAP for successfully driving progress in knowledge sharing and capacity development in the region despite the difficult conditions of the current COVID-19 pandemic. NACA appreciates FAO-RAP's use of NACA as a regional communication mechanism to actively inform and contact us about the work that has been done. NACA believes that aquaculture innovation, knowledge sharing and capacity development are important drivers for the sustainable development of aquaculture in the region. We are willing to participate in this process actively and look forward to cooperating with FAO-RAP further.

### **Comments on Agenda Item 5**

NACA would like to thank and congratulate FAO-RAP for its achievements in developing capacity in assessment for the sustainable management of marine and inland fisheries. NACA mainly works in aquaculture, but also addresses culture-based fisheries. We plan to invite NACA members to organize a regional webinar on culture-based fisheries at the end of this month. As stated in the report, the region recognizes that overfishing is a major risk to the sustainable development of capture fisheries management. We believe that culture-based fisheries compensate for this risk. We suggest that the impact and role of culture-based fisheries on fisheries management should also be considered in this assessment. We are willing to participate in extensive cooperation with FAO-RAP on culture-based fisheries and other relevant aspects.

## RPOA-IUU Secretariat

Arip Hidayatulloh, Alternate RPOA-IUU Secretariat Coordinator, Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, Republic of Indonesia

The RPOA-IUU Secretariat expresses its gratitude and appreciation to APFIC for organizing this meeting.

The RPOA-IUU Secretariat would like to highlight a conclusion from yesterday's session, especially regarding the importance of developing effective monitoring and assessment capacity for marine fishery management in the Asian region. This is crucial because it is also relevant to our effort in combating IUU fishing. Therefore, the RPOA-IUU Secretariat is willing to help and cooperate with APFIC and other relevant bodies to develop effective monitoring and assessment capacity in the RPOA-IUU working area.

Previously, the RPOA-IUU was given the opportunity to participate in the FAO-APFIC study 'Review of Illegal Fishing in the APFIC Region'. We appreciate the findings of the study, which indicated that our endeavours to combat IUU fishing still require greater effort. As Secretariat of the RPOA-IUU, we are pleased to facilitate further implementation of this study.

The RPOA-IUU also worked closely with the ATSEA-2 project on conducting research on 'Baseline Estimates of Illegal Fishing in the Arafura and Timor Seas and the RPOA-IUU Area of Implementation'. The results of the study showed that IUU fishing has generated economic and biodiversity losses. RPOA-IUU thus plans to conduct workshops/seminars about the estimation of economic and biodiversity loss caused by IUU fishing.

The RPOA-IUU would also like to provide updates regarding its current activities. Currently, we are developing the 'Commitment by RPOA-IUU on Vessels Without Nationality'. This reflects RPOA-IUU participating countries' commitment to combating IUU fishing and strengthening cooperation toward that goal.

Recognizing the importance of recalling commitment among RPOA-IUU participating countries, RPOA-IUU will organize the RPOA-IUU Ministerial Meeting on 4 June 2021, the day before International IUUF Day. The theme will be 'Strengthen Regional Commitment to Combat IUU Fishing'. The meeting aims to consolidate the spirit of International IUUF Day through the endorsement of a Joint Statement and strengthen commitment to combating IUU fishing among RPOA-IUU participating countries.

Moreover, in July 2021, in cooperation with the Government of the Republic of Indonesia, we will organize an 'International Workshop on Eradication of Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported Fishing for RPOA-IUU Participating Countries, and Pacific Countries'.

Lastly, we are very grateful to FAO and APFIC for continuous and significant support to RPOA-IUU. We hope that we can continue to work closely on reducing illegal fishing in the region.



## **Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC)**

Malinee Smithrithee, Secretary-General of SEAFDEC and Chief of the SEAFDEC Training Department

On behalf of SEAFDEC, I would like to express our sincere appreciation for the invitation extended to SEAFDEC to participate at this meeting and to observe the initiatives in the Asian and APFIC region that are closely aligned with our activities which also aim to enhance sustainable development of fisheries and aquaculture in the Southeast Asian region.

For decades, SEAFDEC and FAO-RAP have collaboratively developed and implemented a number of regional and subregional initiatives covering improvement of fisheries management and combating IUU fishing. Early this year, SEAFDEC participated in a virtual event as part of a series of APFIC webinars on review of illegal fishing in the APFIC region. During this webinar, SEAFDEC shared recent progress and the way forward to combating IUU fishing. We reported on the ASEAN member states' regional fishing vessel record, the ASEAN network on IUU fishing, capacity development activities to support implementation of port state measures and the ASEAN catch documentation scheme.

With regard to international fish trade related to WTO fisheries subsidies, SEAFDEC is collaborating with FAO headquarters and its regional office to set up a regional capacity development programme for fisheries officers of ASEAN member states. The goal is to define reference points so proper management measures can be designed. The scientific reference point for overfishing and overcapacity is one of the key elements which will be further discussed under the WTO fisheries subsidies negotiation.

Additionally, there are two regional projects which have been developed for implementation in the Andaman and Gulf of Thailand subregions. Firstly, the second phase of the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem project with financial support from the GEF and NORAD, covering priorities that are relevant to regional promotion of implementation and capacity development on ecosystem approaches to fishery management (EAFM), combating IUU fishing and responsible approaches to reducing pollution from fishing activities. The second subregional project is on the development of a large marine ecosystem for the Gulf of Thailand or GOTFISH project with a series of activities and events to develop capacity in the Gulf of Thailand subregion on EAFM.

Regarding aquaculture sector development, SEAFDEC will join FAO-RAP in emphasizing the need for increased aquaculture production in the coming years as one of the strategies for sustaining fish supplies in the ASEAN region. Under this work, FAO and SEAFDEC will share knowledge about and innovations in regional aquaculture systems to improve sustainability in the aquaculture sector.

SEAFDEC will join FAO in celebrating the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAF) in 2022 which aims to enhance regional awareness and action to



support the contribution of small-scale artisanal fisheries and aquaculture toward sustainable fisheries development for the region. This is the key action in the ASEAN Resolution and Plan of Action on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security for the ASEAN Region Toward 2030.

All activities of SEAFDEC have been undertaken in close collaboration with our member countries that number 10 ASEAN member states and Japan. I could not end this statement without commending their contributions to our activities, especially the Government of Japan which has provided continuous support to SEAFDEC activities over time.

In closing, I hope that the objectives of this meeting will be accomplished, leading to the sustainability of fisheries and aquaculture, which is the ultimate goal of APFIC members as well as the member countries of SEAFDEC.

## **WorldFish**

Gareth Johnstone, Director-General (submitted in absentia)

WorldFish has been working with and supporting APFIC countries since its inception in 1975. We have a long and rich history of collaboration with FAO. WorldFish and FAO have a common interest in promoting improved and coherent action for the effective linking of research outcomes to regional and national policy-making and promoting sustainable fisheries and aquaculture for environmental sustainability, equity, food security and nutrition in the Asia-Pacific region.

WorldFish recognizes the opportunities and challenges highlighted in the narratives presented in Agenda Item 4 and Agenda Item 5 and supports the suggested actions. We provide additional inputs and details below.

WorldFish and One CGIAR are committed to transforming the world's food system towards healthy, nutritious and equitable outputs with less environmental impact than the current situation. However, we recognize that a sustainable food system transformation will not be possible without considering fisheries and aquaculture, the two central aquatic food systems, and their complex interaction with food production systems on land. We look forward to working with FAO and finding new and innovative ways to support APFIC to ensure fish and aquatic foods fully contribute to transforming the food system to deliver better human and environmental health outcomes.

### **Comments on Agenda Item 4**

WorldFish recognizes the emerging challenges to the aquaculture sector both within the industry (AMR, disease, environmental quality) and externally (climate change, fishmeal supply, demands of markets and trade barriers).

We agree that transformative changes of aquaculture farming systems and technologies are needed in APFIC regions to significantly improve environmental and social standards and sector performance in social and ecological benefits for better public health and acceptance.

Furthermore, we are concerned that the APFIC countries are at high risk from increasing natural disasters and extreme weather associated with climate change. There needs to be more preparedness as climate change will increase the vulnerability of the aquaculture sector.

### ***Innovation***

In response to the many challenges faced in the APFIC region, WorldFish believes that the aquaculture sector should be more dynamic and vibrant to ensure continued development and adoption of innovative technology and farming systems to mitigate and adapt to

these risks. We want to see more significant efforts to apply the ecosystem approach to aquaculture (EAA), spatial planning for aquaculture, agroecology, adaptation to climate change and the development of GSA. The aquaculture sector needs to step up, take greater responsibility and use innovation and partnerships to address the many challenges for sustainable growth and contribute to the SDGs related to food security and nutrition, poverty alleviation and sustainable resource utilization.

We support regular dissemination of successful innovations such as rice–fish farming systems, integrated multitrophic aquaculture, the ecosystem approach to aquaculture, recirculating aquaculture systems, culture-based fisheries, natural fish feed and macroalgae/microalgae culture. Innovations need to have demonstrable benefits in governance, quality, diversification, environmental performance, biosecurity and traceability, including risk assessment before scaling up.

We support the approach to promoting innovations across farming technologies in on-farm and culture practices, and business models, marketing and trade. We want to see more technical support on aquaculture innovation, upscaling and technology transfer on voluntary and mutually agreed terms to increase efficiency, combat environmental degradation, adapt to climate change and support innovation in national aquaculture strategies. We also recognize the need for financial aid, the provision of credit and crop insurance schemes, and commitment to aquaculture innovation, upscaling and technology transfer.

### ***Application of ICT***

WorldFish fully endorses and supports the use of ICT and big data to improve aquaculture production and management systems within the sector. The approach at the farm level and market and sector levels seems appropriate. It broadens the analysis to the food system where big data, the Internet of Things and digital technologies can support smart, resilient and sustainable food systems. Furthermore, digital innovations play an increasingly important role in shaping the behaviour of actors in fish and aquatic food supply chains and in developing new modes of value chain governance.

WorldFish would also like to see emphasis on a ‘Blue’ big data revolution and growing agritech investments to support the delivery of a flexible, intelligent and transparent (FIT) food system. A FIT data-driven food system can optimize how fish, and aquatic foods are harvested, farmed, traced, processed, traded, stored, transported, marketed, distributed and made accessible and safe for human consumption.

Lastly, in any new area of technology development, we encourage precaution to ensure that digital technologies are inclusive and accessible to all.

### ***Knowledge sharing, capacity development, communication***

WorldFish fully endorses greater emphasis and investment made in knowledge sharing, capacity development and communication. We are fully supportive of using innovative information and communication technologies and data-rich technology to share, translate

and communicate data, knowledge and insights with the most significant numbers and broadest kinds of stakeholders in fast, compelling, engaging and cost-effective ways. We support the strengthening of existing networks and collaborations among research and extension institutions and the private sector to facilitate practical and hands-on training as well as knowledge sharing, capacity development and the communication needs of universities, vocational and technical colleges, governments, the private sector and so forth.

The notion of a regional aquaculture platform is also welcome as a vehicle to pool, share and facilitate access to knowledge of best practices in sustainable aquaculture and coordinate access to this knowledge among training institutions and national agencies.

## **Comments on Agenda Item 5**

### ***The need to improve reporting***

WorldFish fully endorses the need to improve reporting and the critical work of collecting and analysing national data for the sustainable management of marine and inland fisheries. Quality data, where data collection, analyses and reporting are carefully planned, are prerequisites for evidence-based policy-making and robust science. Recent research has illustrated that investments in evidence-based management pay dividends in terms of sustainably managed fisheries. We support all efforts to strengthen data collection and analysis further, as evidenced by the hilsa fishery in both Bangladesh and Myanmar associated with the GEF-FAO Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Project.

We support the use of catch data and statistics in science-based information and practices for managing fish stocks. Research suggests that where fish stocks are assessed, they increase, and where they are managed intensively, the stocks are above target levels or rebuilding.

We strongly endorse implementing the SSF Guidelines as an essential participatory instrument for promoting inclusive, equitable and sustainable fisheries management, including co-management. The guidelines should be the foundation for developing and testing fisheries monitoring systems appropriate for small-scale fisheries, understanding that these are co-designed with end-users to ensure local legitimacy and sustainability. We support evidence-based analysis and application of fisheries performance indicators and fisheries improvement plans to guide governments and private sector operatives. WorldFish is researching, developing and testing low-cost, open-source monitoring software solutions for fisheries managers and stakeholders to improve reporting and drive science-based decision-making. Unmonitored small-scale fisheries exacerbate their exclusion from decision-making processes and the equitable sharing of benefits in the Blue Economy.

We also encourage APFIC to strengthen production and consumption data on fish and fish products in data collection and consider the broader aquatic foods systems context, such as value chains in which sustainable fisheries management is a cornerstone. We encourage APFIC to consider the economic and social valuation of key fisheries and the importance

of nutrition as a key driver of fisheries management, particularly in coastal and inland fisheries. Many of the advances made in these areas are through 'Illuminating Hidden Harvests' initiatives. A significant area where data collection requires strengthening is national and regional adherence to gender-disaggregated data standards in fisheries.

### ***Capacity to assess marine fish stocks***

WorldFish supports the comprehensive monitoring of marine fish stocks in the region, particularly those not covered by regional fisheries management organizations' agreements. We strongly support the continued development and implementation of National Plans of Action to Combat IUU Fishing (NPOA-IUU) and associated catch documentation schemes. WorldFish also endorses the utilization of fishery-dependent data generated through such efforts at national levels and subnational levels to design fisheries management measures and encourages capacity development for members to support this goal. WorldFish also strongly endorses the implementation of the SSF Guidelines as an essential participatory instrument for promoting inclusive, equitable and sustainable fisheries.

We support improvements to the transboundary management of the hilsa fishery in the Bay of Bengal and nationally in Myanmar, Bangladesh and India, and coordinate management objectives with programmes that enhance coastal fisheries such as multiple-use marine protected areas (e.g. Lampi Island Marine National Park).

### ***Inland fishery assessment***

WorldFish recognizes that inland fisheries are typically small scale, remote, dispersed and informal. Characteristics that are challenging when monitoring and evaluating fish catches. WorldFish fully endorses a comprehensive national inland fishery monitoring system across various waterbodies and fishery types.

WorldFish supports collaborations across the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and FAO to provide practical guidance to help water planners, managers and civil engineers in the design, construction, operation and maintenance of irrigation systems. For example, see the FAO-CGIAR guidelines' Increasing the Benefits and Sustainability of Irrigation Through the Integration of Fisheries.'

We support greater efforts in land-use reforms and more research and innovations in rice field fisheries in Asia and Southeast Asia to support integrated agriculture systems that increase profitability per unit area of production for poor small-scale farmers. These approaches also reduce pesticide application and allow small indigenous fish species to thrive, thereby improving the diets of farmers' households.

We support improved management of floodplain capture fisheries and combining these efforts with climate change risk assessment, as we have seen under the GEF-FAO FishAdapt project in Myanmar. Community-based fisheries and aquaculture in lowland flood-prone rice-growing areas connected to the floodplains using enclosures and inlet/outlets to control water levels and allow migration of wild fish and retention of cultured fish have

demonstrated increased production of both wild and cultured fish during monsoon rice cultivation. Further trials using rice fields as nursery grounds for fry and fingerlings, an intermediate step between hatchery and grow-out in aquaculture ponds, have also yielded significant returns for farmers.

Fish catch and biodiversity impact monitoring and assessment of fisheries co-management on biodiversity and productivity in Bangladesh have provided evidence of improved management. Fish production increases of over 40 percent have been recorded in Bangladesh and are particularly evident in small indigenous and critically endangered species, the former being of particular nutritional value to children in the first 1 000 days.

WorldFish encourages APFIC countries to review legislation surrounding the allocation of fishing rights, rules and regulations specifically relevant to Bangladesh, Myanmar and Cambodia to improve inland fisheries management of leased fisheries by fisher associations. We support valuation studies that have, for example, calculated the use-value of Myanmar's inland (artisanal) hilsa fishery at USD 730 million. Using such data can help APFIC governments invest in new ways of financing inland fisheries management.



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