

# Secretariats of Regional Fishery Bodies Meet in Rome

Some 40 regional fishery bodies (RFB) exist on this planet. They are diverse in size, age, and scope. Some are a part of the FAO (such as the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission or IOTC), some are not. Some are global, some regional. The BOBP-IGO, for example, is an RFB in the Bay of Bengal region. Each body has its own development mandate, its own acronym, its own headquarters and secretariat, its own funding mechanism.

The secretariats of the RFBs have set up a network. The First Meeting of the Regional Fishery Body Secretariats Network (RSN-1) was held at the FAO headquarters in Rome on 12-13 March 2007, soon after the meeting of COFI (Committee on Fisheries) – reported on pages 5-8 of this issue of BBN. Twenty seven secretariats, including that of the BOBP-IGO, took part, along with representatives of the FAO and office-bearers of some other organizations.

Here are some highlights of what was discussed and decided at RSN-1.

- Mr Ichiro Nomura (Assistant Director-General, FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department) opened the meeting. He said the FAO would continue to support the RSN. He said that illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing was one of the greatest threats to sustainable and responsible fisheries. Effective fisheries governance, regional and global, was essential to tackle the problem.
- The Secretary of COFI, Dr Ndiaga Gueye, said that COFI-27 had acknowledged the strong input of regional cooperation in facilitating the implementation of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and related instruments. He pointed out that COFI had urged that RFMOs (regional fisheries management organizations) should be strengthened, and best practices developed for them.

The Chairman, Prof Denzil Miller, highlighted several issues from the COFI-27 Draft Report as being important for RFBs. These included

- Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) and the problem of fisheries bycatch;
- The suggestion that with the increasing number of organisations engaged in international fisheries, the FAO should assert its leadership as the universally representative fisheries institution. Strong and ongoing cooperation between the RSN and FAO is globally important.
- Continued discussion and work on harmonization of catch documentation.
- A Norwegian proposal for an international conference on small-scale fisheries.
- Measures to combat IUU fishing.
- Threats posed by climate change to the EAF, along with development of technical guidelines to include standards for management of deep-sea fisheries on the high seas.
- Strengthening RFMO performances, particularly the outcomes of the 2007 Tuna RFMOs Meeting.
- The request of many COFI Members for FAO to continue supporting RFMOs and RFBs on such issues as overcapacity and improvement of fleet statistics.

## Small Scale and Inland Fisheries

- RSN-1 noted that small-scale fisheries received significant attention in COFI, and that this trend is likely to continue in





future. It was acknowledged that small-scale fisheries increasingly interacts with large-scale fisheries.

Mr Nomura acknowledged that COFI has not been very clear in its approach to small-scale fisheries. He asked for RSN's advice on how the theme of small-scale and inland fisheries should be addressed at future COFI meetings. He also invited RSN inputs on agenda items for the next meeting of the Advisory Committee on Fisheries Research, to be held prior to the next COFI meeting.

- RSN-1 agreed that the profile of small-scale and inland fisheries should be raised so as to attract sufficient resources. It was strongly suggested that a document outlining some of the key issues should be developed well in advance of COFI-28 to allow endorsement by the RFBs concerned.
- It was noted that the RSN can provide a useful contribution on priority actions for small-scale and inland fisheries to be communicated to FAO and other sector stakeholders. It can also provide guidance and advice should an extra-budgetary FAO programme for small-scale fisheries be developed.
- RSN-1 agreed that a Norwegian proposal for a global meeting on small-scale fisheries would offer

a unique opportunity for inputs from RSN members.

- The meeting discussed external factors affecting fisheries management. These included governance and overcapacity concerns in small-scale and inland fisheries, effects of climate change and impacts from land-based pollution.
- Disaster preparedness by small-scale fishing communities and the need to improve inter-agency cooperation with other international organisations dealing with fisheries issues, such as CITES and WTO, were also discussed.

Concern was expressed about lack of information on combating IUU fishing. The information systems needed were lacking too, especially in developing countries. A lack of human and financial capacity to deal with unregistered vessels was a cause for concern. Additionally, it was noted that IUU fishers often engage in criminal activities unrelated to fishing.

#### **Coping with overcapacity**

- RSN-1 discussed overcapacity and difficulties in dealing with it, such as lack of essential data, unreliable statistics, lack of political will, and valuation of resources. It was noted that one approach that has met with some success is the development of alternative livelihoods. It was suggested that information in this context should be shared. A precautionary approach to overcapacity (*i.e.* limiting fishing capacity wherever this was possible and avoiding wanton deployment of excess capacity) was suggested by some members.
- Mr Kevern Cochrane, Senior Fishery Resources Officer, FAO, presented an update on information requirements concerning the ecosystem and fisheries management by RFBs. During discussions, it was

pointed out that developing countries needed more support to improve their ability to implement EAF. The need to address threats posed by climate change and its potential effects on fisheries was also stressed. RSN-1 acknowledged that the calamitous predictions often made about the potential effects of climate change made the jobs of fisheries managers harder and more complex.

RSN-1 recognised that different approaches to the EAF will be taken in different types of fisheries, such as small-scale and industrial fisheries as well as marine and inland fisheries. RSN-1 agreed that education and information exchange are key elements for an effective EAF.

RSN-1 noted that considerable resources may often be required for RFBs to fully engage in the EAF, since a wide range of expertise (including scientific, legal and socio-economic) was necessary to fully address all EAF requirements. But a gradual expansion of more traditional fisheries management approaches would also be helpful; this had already been implemented by a number of RFBs and national fisheries management organisations.

- RSN-1 discussed the possible role of an RSN website in facilitating and coordinating information exchange. This could assist the Network to avoid duplication of its activities, promote the RSN's visibility and provide information on meetings. But a strong website that was systematically vetted and updated would require resources. It was agreed to circulate a concept note for further consideration, with an option for FAO to host the site.
- The next meeting of RSN may be held in 2009, immediately following COFI-28, with an informal meeting of participants being scheduled for noon on the first day of COFI.