

# BOBP-IGO holds Third Technical Advisory Committee Meeting in Sri Lanka

The Third Technical Advisory Committee of the BOBP-IGO discussed and approved the Organisation's workplan for the period April 2008-March 2009 at a meeting in Beruwala, Sri Lanka, on March 28-29, 2008. Senior fishery representatives from the four member-countries and an observer from the FAO took part. Mr Neomal Perera, Deputy Minister of Fisheries & Aquatic Resources, Sri Lanka, was the chief guest at the inaugural session.

Dr Yugraj Singh Yadava, Director of BOBP-IGO, welcomed the chief guest and the delegates. He said that the TAC plays the important role in the BOBP-IGO of identifying key issues for intervention. He urged member-countries to thoroughly review past work and set future directions.

Mr G Piyasena, Secretary, Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (MoFAR), Sri Lanka, said that member-countries had the will and capacity to work closely with the BOBP-IGO. He hoped the meeting would yield important outputs for sustainable development and management of fisheries in the Bay of Bengal region.

In his inaugural address, Minister Neomal Perera described the BOBP-IGO as a unique regional fisheries body to help governments improve the quality of life of small-scale fishers in the region and strengthen their livelihood opportunities. He recalled with appreciation the three-day Regional Consultation in Sri Lanka on "Preparation of Management Plans for Shark Fisheries". He hoped the fruitful partnership between Sri Lanka and the BOBP-IGO

would continue. Mr Indra Ranasinghe, Director General (Fisheries Development), MoFAR, proposed a vote of thanks.

Mr P Sivaraj (India), acting chairperson, said the BOBP-IGO was doing a commendable job in promoting the sustainability of marine fisheries in the region. He appreciated the Organisation's efforts in 2007-08. Sri Lanka was unanimously chosen to chair the third meeting of the TAC.

#### Report on BOBP-IGO activities

Dr Yadava presented the BOBP-IGO's report for April 2007-March 2008, and detailed the status of various activities undertaken as per the agreed work programme.

**Safety at Sea:** The South Asia Component of the Global Project on "Safety at Sea for Small-scale Fisheries (GCP/GLO/200/MUL)" implemented by the FAO (Fisheries Industries Division) through the BOBP-IGO was initiated in May 2007.

The project seeks to analyse data to identify the causes of accidents; educate and train trainers,

extensionists, fishermen and inspectors; strive for better fisheries management measures and safety regulations; develop improved communication systems; and apply FAO draft guidelines for construction and repair of small FRP fishing vessels.

The Alaska Center of the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), USA, also assists the project. It funds a component on surveillance and monitoring of fishing-related accidents at sea.

During the year, National Workshops were organized in Negombo, Sri Lanka (11-12 October 2007); Chennai, India (3-4 December 2007); and Chittagong, Bangladesh (21-22 January 2008). Government officials, fishers, boatbuilders, other service providers and NGOs took part. At these workshops, gaps in information, service and policy on sea safety issues were identified. National action plans for pilot-scale implementation were designed.

The joint FAO-IMO Project on "Tsunami Reconstruction and



*Participants at the Technical Advisory Committee Meeting.*

Rehabilitation in Sri Lanka and India on Small Fishing Vessel Safety” was also initiated during the period. This project assesses the standards of boats built and distributed to fishers as part of tsunami relief. It introduces construction and equipment standards for small fishing vessels, on the basis of the FAO/ILO/IMO Voluntary Guidelines for the Design, Construction and Equipment of Small Fishing Vessels.

Mr Oyvind Gulbrandsen, FAO/BOBP-IGO Consultant, did a detailed assessment in November-December 2007 of the quality of construction and design of small-scale fishing vessels in India and Sri Lanka. He would provide guidelines for the construction of FRP fishing vessels and wooden fishing vessels (below 24 meter in length), commonly used in India and Sri Lanka, and also guidelines for FRP boatyards in the region.

The FAO Fishery Officer (Mr Roger Kullberg) attached to the Safety at Sea Project made field visits to Patuakhali, Kuakata and Barisal in Bangladesh from 23 to 29 January 2008. He studied and assessed the quality of fishing boats – their construction, availability of communication and safety equipment, and safety preparedness of the crew, etc.

The Regional Workshop on “Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (RW-MCS) for marine fisheries in the Bay of Bengal” was held in Chittagong, Bangladesh, on 16-18 January 2008. Twenty-three representatives from ministries and departments of fisheries; the Coast Guard and the Navy; the Mercantile Marine Department; fisheries research institutions; boatbuilders and fish exporters of the region; experts plus the FAO took part. The Chittagong Resolution (see page 42) was a significant outcome of the workshop.

**Resource Management:** Two Regional Consultations were organised – to discuss management plans for hilsa fisheries, covering

Bangladesh and India (and Myanmar as observer country); and a management plan for shark fisheries covering India, Maldives and Sri Lanka.

The Hilsa consultation was organised in Barrackpore (Kolkata), India, on 14-15 March, 2008. Eleven delegates took part. After reports and discussion on the current status of hilsa fisheries resources, the Consultation recommended an action plan to initiate a management plan. A detailed report on the ‘Hilsa Consultation’ is available on pp 16-18.

Likewise, a regional consultation on shark fisheries (held in Beruwala, Sri Lanka, 24-26 March, 2008) agreed on an action plan. The detailed report on the ‘Shark Consultation’ can be seen on pp 47-50.

**Miscellaneous:** The BOBP-IGO’s attractive 2008 desk calendar focused on sea-safety measures. A single-sheet wall calendar and a set of six laminated placards on distress signals and checklists were prepared as awareness material for fishers.

The BOBP-IGO has published a newsletter and 12 posters in English on the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF), and initiated a process to translate them into Bangla, Dhivehi, Oriya, Sinhalese, Telugu and Tamil. Archiving is being done of over 50 000 photographs relating to three decades of the programme.

**Supportive activities:** The BOBP-IGO collaborated with UNDP and the Government of Orissa in preparing a report on “Development of Marine Fisheries and Post-harvest Sectors in Orissa”. It helped implement a training project on “Promotion of Community-based Fishery Resource Management by Coastal Small-scale Fishers in Thailand”. It took part in an expert consultation on “Low Cost Fisheries Management Strategies and Cost Recovery,” held in Georgetown, Guyana, 4-7 September 2007; and in a technical consultation in Rome



*Mr Neomal Perera, Deputy Minister for Fisheries & Aquatic Resources, Government of Sri Lanka.*

(4-8 February, 2008) to formulate international guidelines for the management of deep-sea fisheries in the high seas.

### **Discussion on BOBP-IGO activities**

**Catch statistics:** Mr Simon Funge-Smith (FAO) said that while the quantity of fish catch has gone up in the region, the landings show a disturbing trend since we are fishing down the food chain. The BOBP-IGO should inform national governments and the FAO about this trend.

Mr Sk Mostafizur Rahman (Bangladesh): A management plan for protection of shark fisheries is needed in Bangladesh too, because in recent years large quantities of shark juveniles are being caught in Bangladesh waters. Bangladesh should therefore be included in the BOBP-IGO’s management plans for shark. (The TAC asked the Secretariat to raise the issue at the next Governing Council meeting.)

**Utilization of tuna:** Dr Champa Amarasiri (Sri Lanka) said that coastal fishing effort in Sri Lanka can’t be increased further. Offshore waters offer some scope; even here, reports of over-exploitation of yellowfin tuna suggest the need for caution. Mr Sivaraj said that India’s offshore waters are yet to be exploited for tuna and tuna like species. Dr Shiham Adam (Maldives) said that Indian Ocean skipjack stocks are resilient, and are not being over-exploited.

Mr Funge-Smith said the FAO is considering a Regional Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) on improved utilization of tuna, to be implemented through INFOFISH, Kuala Lumpur. Some BOBP-IGO member-countries might also be included in the Regional TCP. He suggested that member-countries could consult the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), and raise issues with the IOTC Working Party on Tropical Tunas, which would be held later this year. Dr Amarasiri said that member-countries ought to prepare their own plans before approaching the IOTC.

Delegates suggested a BOBP-IGO strategy consultation on tuna fisheries, which would include representatives of industry as well. The Director of BOBP-IGO should attend the next meeting of IOTC, it was felt.

Mr Rahman suggested joint stock assessments by member-countries. The Indian delegate said the Fisheries Survey of India (FSI) could carry out regional surveys of stocks. BOBP-IGO said it could support the participation cost of one technical person from each member-country in the fishing vessels of FSI, after agreements among member-countries. The delegate from Sri Lanka pointed out that accessing data from joint surveys was at times difficult. This negated the objectives of such surveys.

The TAC advised the Secretariat to encourage multilateral agreements among member-governments. If possible, key institutions should be identified for easy and timely dissemination of data among the stakeholders.

### **Proposals and priorities from member-countries**

**Bangladesh:** Mr Rahman identified areas in marine fisheries where BOBP-IGO could play a major role in tapping the potential of his country's marine waters – such as information networking among member-countries on fish stocks and creation of a fish data base;

management plans on important fish species; an effective regional MCS system; regional cooperation in weather forecasting; and networking of community-based organisations in fisheries.

He said member-countries should harmonize management practices for shared stocks – including ban on destructive fishing practices and declaration of closed seasons for fishing.

**India:** Mr P Sivaraj said the activities of the BOBP-IGO were in line with India's priorities. Activities such as safety at sea and MCS have been included in India's 11<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan. The BOBP-IGO is playing an important role in creating awareness among fishers and promoting sustainable fisheries in India. It should step up efforts to disseminate the CCRF so that it reaches a critical mass of stakeholders. Mr Sivaraj suggested that the BOBP-IGO should help transfer useful technologies from one member-country to another, especially in small and medium-sized boat construction.

**Maldives:** Dr Shiham Adam said that while tuna continued to be the mainstay of fisheries in the Maldives, coastal fisheries (especially reef fisheries) are an important source of income and livelihoods for communities in the outer atolls of the Maldives. The rapid expansion of tourism has increased the demand for reef fishes.

Dr Adam said that reef sharks in the Maldives are being severely depleted and gulper sharks are being over-exploited. The other fisheries that need attention include aquarium fishes, sea cucumbers and lobsters. At present, Maldivian ornamental fishes have limited direct access to foreign markets; they are mostly exported to Sri Lanka and re-exported from there to markets abroad. One of the priorities for Maldives is to develop mariculture so as to reduce the effort on wild stocks. The Government has announced 11 potential sites to be

leased out on a long-term basis for aquaculture.

**Sri Lanka:** Dr Amarasiri said that Sri Lanka's priority is to develop the coastal tuna longline fishery. The skills and capacities of small-scale tuna longliners must be upgraded, fish handling and processing must be improved both on-board and after landing. To ensure a continuous supply of low-cost good-quality bait, Sri Lanka plans to initiate milk fish farming and to introduce bait fishery in coastal areas. The country needs a tuna fishery management plan and a fleet development plan to exploit tuna resources in a sustainable manner, Dr Amarasiri said.

### **Discussion on country proposals**

Initiating discussions on the country proposals and priorities, Dr Adam said that development of milk fish hatcheries for bait fishing is important to the Maldives. Listing some collaboration options, Dr Yadava said that at present India imports milk fish from the Philippines. The Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA), Bangkok, could be approached to develop milk fish farming in the region.

Dr Funge-Smith endorsed the proposal of the Secretariat for associating NACA with milk fish farming. He said that the Philippines has good technology in milk fish farming and is now moving towards a cage-based milk fish culture. He, however, cautioned that issues related to disease transfer should be carefully considered. He also said that NACA had already developed technology for grouper fisheries.

Referring to the MCS priorities of Bangladesh, Dr Yadava said that countries may like to first develop their national MCS action plans through stakeholder consultations. He said the Secretariat is networking with FAO and other international agencies to explore the scope for external assistance and funding. Mr Funge-Smith suggested that the BOBP-IGO discuss possible



*The Technical Advisory Committee in progress.*

collaborations with the FISHCODE programme and the IUU Monitoring Network of DFID. He also suggested that information networking should be strengthened.

#### **Presentation on Regional Programmes/ Activities/ Issues of topical importance**

The Secretariat proposed four new activities during 2008-2009.

##### **a) Preparatory studies on alternative livelihoods for fishers:**

A few comprehensive socio-economic studies could be taken up. Eventual aims: to encourage fishers to think beyond fishing and reduce fishing effort, and reduce the vulnerability of fishers to various shocks.

Mr Ranasinghe said that mariculture, aquaculture, construction work and dress-making had been tried out on a pilot basis as alternative livelihoods for fishers in Sri Lanka during the last four years. Of these, aquaculture (sea bass farming in the Negombo lagoon) was the most successful.

Mr Ranasinghe said that good technical guidance is a pre-requisite for any alternative livelihood activity.

The FAO Representative said that Spain is supporting FAO in implementing the Asia-Pacific Rural and Agricultural Credit Association (APRACA) programme in which Sri Lanka is proposed to be included.

##### **b) Study on impact of fuel price hike on marine fisheries:** This will

address the problem of small-scale fishers and develop a coping strategy for them.

Dr Adam said that Maldives had proposed a subsidy scheme for fishers to offset the effect of price hike. He suggested that the study may look into fuel efficiency. The Bangladesh delegate said that a fuel subsidy for fishing boats was introduced 10 years ago in his country. Mr Ravikumar, FAO Regional Sea Safety Coordinator, said that fishers tend to increase engine power without any genuine need to do so. It is more of a rat race and needs to be curbed. The chairperson said that the Cey-Nor Foundation in Sri Lanka, which looks into marketing aspects, offers fishers guaranteed prices. The scheme has been working well for the last seven years; presently, 19 varieties of fish species are covered under this scheme. Mr Funge-Smith said that subsidies can keep the prices of fish artificially low, resulting in their over-exploitation.

##### **c) Study of the impact of climate change on fisheries:** This will record and monitor research efforts in member-countries in tracking the impact of climate change, particularly on coastal fisheries. Information will be disseminated.

##### **d) Study on capacity-building in food safety in marine fisheries:** The aim is to improve handling of fish on board and at fishing

harbours or fish landing sites, and raise awareness among stakeholders about measures necessary to strengthen safety and improve hygiene.

The delegate from Sri Lanka said that waste disposal at the Beruwala Fishing Harbour has been very successful; this could be a model for other harbours in the region. Mr Funge-Smith suggested that the Secretariat look at the FAO-TCP Project on 'Cleaner Fishing Harbours' implemented in India.

#### **Secretariat: Work Plan**

Presenting the BOBP-IGO's work plan for the period April 2008-March 2009, Dr Yadava said the IGO would continue with its capacity-building and resource management activities. It would carry out two scoping studies on management of small-scale tuna fisheries and management of brood stock of tiger shrimp, besides the four proposed new activities.

The TAC endorsed the work plan and asked the Secretariat to present it at the next meeting of the Governing Council.

#### **Secretariat: Review of Role of TAC**

The Secretariat requested the TAC to evaluate its own role, as recommended by the BOBP/IGO's Governing Council. The representative of FAO suggested that TAC should develop the Organisation's work plan, make policy recommendations to the Governing Council and identify emerging issues in fisheries.

Some members felt that a review of the role of TAC was premature since the BOBP-IGO is only about five years old. Such reviews can be conducted after 10 to 15 years.

The TAC adopted the report of the meeting, recorded its deep appreciation to the Government of Sri Lanka for its hospitality, and agreed to hold its next meeting early 2009 in Bangladesh, subject to the concurrence of the Government.