

BOBP-IGO's Governing Council Holds Fourth Meeting in Dhaka



The Fourth Meeting of the BOBP-IGO's Governing Council was held at the Bangladesh Agriculture Research Council, Dhaka, on 6-7 May 2008. Representatives of member-countries (Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka) took part, besides an observer from The WorldFish Center and the Secretariat of the BOBP-IGO.

Mr Manik Lal Samaddar, Special Assistant to the Chief Advisor, Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock (MoFL), Bangladesh, was the Chief Guest and chaired the inaugural session. Mr Syed Aatur Rahman, Secretary, MoFL, Special Guest; Mr Parikshit Datta Choudhury, Joint Secretary, MoFL; and Mr Rafiqul Islam, Director-General, Department of Fisheries (DoF) took part in the inaugural session, along with senior officials from the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council; DoF; the Bangladesh Coast Guard; and representatives from industry and the media.

Welcoming delegates, Dr Y S Yadava, Director, BOBP-IGO, said the Organisation had completed five years of existence as an IGO and was well-recognized internationally. It had fruitful relationships with the FAO, the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, USA, the Swedish International Development Agency and several other international organizations. He thanked member-countries for their support.

Dr Yadava said that global marine fisheries is passing through a crisis for several reasons, ranging from anthropogenic impacts to climate change to excess fishing capacity. He urged member-countries to harness all available expertise and



Delegates at the Fourth Meeting of Governing Council in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

management capacity, and foster regional cooperation to address the complex problems of marine fisheries.

Mr Rafiqul Islam said that though fisheries contributes about 5.3 percent to the GDP of Bangladesh and is the second-biggest foreign exchange earner after garments, most marine fishers are poor and lack significant fishing assets. Most of the 40 000 mechanised fishing boats in Bangladesh are unregistered. He referred to the 'knowledge gap' among fishers about sea safety, weather conditions and the right fishing gear – which affects their well-being.

Mr Islam recalled with appreciation the development work of the erstwhile BOBP in marine fisheries and its role in fostering regional cooperation.

Mr Abdulla Naseer, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Fisheries, Agriculture and Marine Resources, Maldives, and Chairman of the Governing Council, also

complimented the BOBP-IGO and called for continued co-operation among member-countries through the IGO to address emerging issues.

Mr Syed Aatur Rahman expressed deep concern and sympathy for the victims of cyclone Nargis that hit coastal Myanmar on 04 May 2008, and for victims of cyclone SIDR that devastated lives and livelihoods in southern coastal districts of Bangladesh, especially in Barisal.

Mr Rahman said Bangladesh is yet to realize optimum yield from its aquatic wealth in the Bay of Bengal (BoB). He called for collective action by BOBP-IGO to tap the resources of the Bay in a sustainable manner. He recalled the IGO's work on initiating preparation of a management plan for hilsa fisheries, and the national workshop on sea safety for small-scale fishers (January 2008, Chittagong). He hoped that its outcomes would be implemented. He said Myanmar should be brought into the fold of the BOBP-IGO to help better fishery resource management of the Bay.

In his inaugural address, Mr Manik Lal Samaddar welcomed delegates and expressed condolences to victims of cyclone Nargis in Myanmar.

Mr Samaddar described the BoB as a valuable resource in terms of food, trade, employment and biodiversity. Fisheries and aquaculture therefore enjoy huge potential. But while marine fish production is stagnating because of unsustainable fishing practices, aquaculture has limitations due to limited water area.

Mr Samaddar said the BOBP-IGO is helping popularize the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) and initiating action on monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS). The GCM should further enhance regional cooperation in fisheries and enable sustainable management and development of coastal fisheries in the region.

Mr Parikshit Datta Choudhury, Joint Secretary, MoFL proposed a vote of thanks.

Bangladesh was unanimously elected to chair the Fourth GCM. Dr Naseer (Maldives) thanked the Governing Council and the BOBP-IGO Secretariat for support during his tenure as chairperson of the Governing Council.

Report of the BOBP-IGO (March 2007-April 2008)

Dr Yadava presented the report of the BOBP-IGO for the period April 2007-March 2008. He described the BoB as a tropical ecosystem in a monsoon belt. Growth of capture fisheries over the past decade has been slowing, except in the Maldives. Millions of fishers in the Bay suffer the prospect of loss of livelihoods because of rising population, unsustainable fishing practices, habitat degradation and post-harvest losses. Further decline could be disastrous.

Dr Yadava described the activities carried out by BOBP-IGO under various heads. The safety at sea project implemented by the FAO through the BOBP-IGO (which is



the South Asia component of the global project); the regional workshop on 'Monitoring, Control and Surveillance for Marine Fisheries in the Bay of Bengal; two regional consultations on preparation of management plans for hilsa and shark fisheries; translation of the Technical Guidelines on Marine Fisheries of the CCRF into Bangla and Telugu; publication of theme-based annual calendars, laminated placards on safety at sea; the quarterly newsletter *Bay of Bengal News*; and digitization of the organisation's visual archives.

Other supporting activities implemented during the year: Assistance to the International Cooperative Alliance in implementing a training project on "Promotion of Community-based Fishery Resource Management by Coastal Small-scale Fishers in Thailand"; collaboration with the UNDP and the Government of Orissa, in preparing a report on development of marine fisheries in Orissa; an expert consultation on "Low Cost Fisheries Management Strategies and Cost Recovery" held at Georgetown, Guyana, 4-7 September 2007; and a technical consultation on "International Guidelines for the Management of Deep Sea Fisheries in the High Seas", held in Rome, Italy, 4-8 February 2008.

Mr G Piyasena, Secretary, Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, Sri Lanka, said that his country is engaging the BOBP-IGO in various ways to take forward implementation of safety at sea programmes. He thanked the BOBP-IGO Secretariat, the FAO

and member-countries who have supported safety at sea activities in the region.

Dr Abdulla Naseer said that safety-at-sea requirements of Maldives are unique in the sense that no serious accidents or mortalities occur. Fishing boats in the Maldives are well-equipped, different from those of other member-countries, and Maldivians are first-rate fishers. But the fleet is being modernized fast, and working knowledge on various communication and navigation devices needs to be improved. The Safety at Sea Project should include such training in its activities in Maldives. This would enable fishers to make multi-day fishing trips, as opposed to the single-day fishing in vogue now.

Dr Naseer said the incidence of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in Maldivian waters was increasing. Fishers often report the presence of IUU fishing vessels, but the EEZ is large and it's difficult for their Coast Guard to patrol the entire area. He urged the Governing Council to consider the issue of illegal fishing and member-countries to work closely in the matter.

Mr M K R Nair (India), complimented the BOBP-IGO for its excellent accomplishments during the year. He asked whether BOBP-IGO activities are sufficiently gender-centric.

Dr V S Somvanshi (India), said that statutory measures are needed to support the Safety at Sea Project. The standards aimed at under the Project cannot be sustained in a statutory void, he said.

Mr Rafiqul Islam (Bangladesh), suggested that CCRF should be adapted to the needs of member-countries. He expressed concern over IUU fishing, and emphasized the need for effective MCS in marine waters.

While acknowledging the good work done so far, he suggested that the Secretariat consider taking up more activities for which additional funds could be mobilized. A mission

and vision statement for the BOBP-IGO should be prepared for the next five years and placed for approval at the next meeting of the Governing Council. This should include a strategic action plan (SAP) for implementation.

Dr Giasuddin Khan (Observer, The WorldFish Center) complimented the BOBP-IGO for its work despite time and human resource constraints. He said that Bangladeshi fishers are more vulnerable to risks at sea than others; the minimum safety requirements on board fishing vessels should be promoted at the earliest. He urged a country-specific approach for proper implementation of the Code of Conduct.

He said the important work of the erstwhile BOBP over three phases should be reviewed to find out whether some useful follow-up could be done and recommendations still valid could be adopted. He said basic studies on the health of fish stocks are very important. Historical trends in fish production should be analysed to plan for the future growth of marine fisheries in the region.

Mr Piyasena, said that Sri Lanka was finalizing legislation for boat construction norms for presentation to Parliament. The Government proposed to convene a stakeholder consultation in this connection, and BOBP-IGO's assistance would be required to facilitate the process. He also said that a management plan was urgently needed for many important fishery resources that had got depleted. The Canadian International Development Agency was helping out with management plans for a few important fin and shell fish species, but more species needed to be included in the ambit of management plans. The BOBP-IGO could provide technical inputs for such plans.

Mr Piyasena said Sri Lanka fully endorsed the idea of a mission and vision statement for BOBP-IGO and formulation of a SAP.

Dr Naseer said the Dhivehi version of the CCRF, translated by the BOBP-IGO, was used extensively during the stakeholder consultations to finalise the new fisheries legislation of the country. Each and every participant at the Consultation was given with a copy of the Code.

He concurred with the idea of a mission and vision statement and a SAP for the BOBP-IGO. He said member-countries should guide the Secretariat in preparing the proposed road map, which was to be submitted to the Governing Council at its next meeting. The archives of the former BOBP and the documentation created by the BOBP-IGO should be put to maximum use, said Dr Naseer.

Dr Somvanshi was pleased with the programmes concerning safety of fishers, fishing boat construction and fish stocks. He said the outcomes of such programmes should be integrated into policy documents and legislation.

Responding to the various suggestions made, the Director of the BOBP-IGO said the objective of assimilating the principles of CCRF would be addressed in two stages. During the first, the document would be popularized among stakeholders by circulating translated versions of the main Code and its Technical Guidelines. Adapting the Code to meet local requirements should be attempted in the second stage.

About gender-focus activities, he said that the Secretariat proposed to conduct detailed studies on the role of women in fisheries. He asked member-countries to identify women consultants for the proposed study. About possible interventions in the cyclone-affected areas of Myanmar, he proposed that BOBP-IGO ask the concerned agency in Myanmar whether it would need technical inputs from BOBP-IGO.

The Chair remarked that BOBP-IGO had undertaken voluminous and important activities for development of marine fisheries

during the year. The report of the Secretariat for April 2007-March 2008 was adopted.

Report on the Third Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Meeting

The Secretariat presented the report of the Third Meeting of the TAC held at Beruwala, Sri Lanka, on 28-29 March, 2008.

Dr Giasuddin Khan enquired about the BOBP-IGO partnering organisations like SEAFDEC (South East Asian Fisheries Development Center) and BOBLME (Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem) that are active in marine fisheries. The Director, BOBP-IGO, said in reply that discussions have been going on with SEAFDEC on various activities. But the BOBLME is not fully functional yet. The Secretariat welcomed the suggestion of cooperation with these organisations.

The Bangladesh delegate said that a stock assessment exercise being carried out with support from the Islamic Development Bank and the Government of Malaysia would be completed within two years. India said the Fishery Survey of India could help out with stock assessment programme through bilateral or multilateral arrangements. The BOBP-IGO could facilitate such a process. The observer from The WorldFish Center suggested that capacity-building in stock assessment was vital and that this suggestion should be taken up on a priority basis.

Role of Technical Advisory Committee

The Director, BOBP-IGO said that the Third GCM had recommended that the Secretariat make a thorough assessment of the mandate and functions of the TAC and present a report to the Governing Council. The issue was raised at the Third Meeting of TAC. This meeting suggested that the TAC could *inter alia* play the following roles:

- (i) develop the work plan for the Organisation,



- (ii) suggest policy recommendations to the Governing Council, and
- (iii) identify emerging issues in fisheries.

In general, the TAC members were satisfied with the functions of the TAC and appreciative of the tasks accomplished by the TAC. Members also felt the BOBP-IGO is just about five years old; it might be premature to examine the role of TAC at this juncture. Such reviews could be conducted after 10 to 15 years.

The Bangladesh delegate suggested that the DoF would be more appropriate than the Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute (BFRI) to represent his country in the TAC.

The Governing Council suggested that a review of the role of TAC be taken up after five years *i.e.* in 2013. It also said that BFRI should continue to represent Bangladesh as a technical and research organisation.

The Governing Council accepted the Report of the Third Meeting of the TAC presented by the Secretariat.

IGO programme and activities for April 2008-March 2009

The Director, BOBP-IGO, presented the proposed programme and activities for April 2008-March, 2009.

The work plan proposed that BOBP-IGO continue with its capacity-

building and resource management activities. The Secretariat would carry out two scoping studies on management of small-scale tuna fisheries and management of tiger shrimp fisheries and four new studies on alternative livelihoods, impact of fuel price hike on marine fisheries, impact of climate change on marine fisheries and capacity-building for improving food safety in marine fisheries. In addition, a vision and mission document and a SAP would be presented in the next meeting of the GCM.

In response, the GCM agreed to the following changes in the activities:

- (i) For 'Fisherfolk Week' celebrations, the Secretariat will prepare documentaries on developmental issues relevant to the needs of each member-country.
- (ii) On the engagement of local consultants, the process shall be initiated in consultation with the focal point in each member-country.
- (iii) In the proposed study on "Impact of Fuel Price Hike on Marine Fisheries", a component on the impact on consumers and remedial measures may be included in the study.
- (iv) The Secretariat may develop a base paper on "Preparation of National Plans of Action on IUU Fishing".

Administrative Matters

The Governing Council approved the appointment of M/s Varadarajan & Co, Chartered Accountants, Chennai, as auditors for the BOBP-IGO for 2007 and 2008. It agreed to the terms of reference proposed for the post of Senior Programme Advisor. The Secretariat was asked to circulate the vacancy announcement widely and write to member-countries as well for further circulation within ministries and departments.

The Governing Council also agreed to the Secretariat's proposal to recruit a Policy Analyst. The GCM approved the terms of reference for the post and suggested that this post also be publicized widely.

The idea of secondment of technical personnel from member-countries to the BOBP-IGO Secretariat for a period ranging from 12 to 18 months was agreed to in principle. The GCM asked the Secretariat to submit a detailed proposal to member-countries.

Other Matters

The Governing Council suggested that in future the BOBP-IGO may also play the role of a management advisory body in the region for sustainable development of fish stocks in the Bay of Bengal. The Secretariat was asked to prepare a note on the proposal for the next meeting of the Governing Council.

The Governing Council unanimously agreed that Myanmar should be requested to join the BOBP-IGO. The Government of India was asked to take the lead in the matter.

The Governing Council thanked Bangladesh for hosting the fourth GCM and accepted India's offer to host the next meeting early in 2009. The Report of the Governing Council was adopted on 07 May 2008.