

# Reforming Fisheries: An Interview with Mr Ichiro Nomura

The FAO's Assistant Director-General for Fisheries, Mr Ichiro Nomura, discussed a wide range of issues in an interview with Dr Y S Yadava of the BOBP-IGO on 17 August 2006 in Kuala Lumpur. The interview took place during a meeting of the Asia-Pacific Fisheries Commission's Regional Consultative Forum on "Reforming Fisheries".

**Y S Yadava:** Marine fish stocks have got depleted in most of the oceans. Over the years, marine fish production has stagnated and resources are under stress. On the other hand, demand for marine fish is expanding, leading to increased effort. How does the FAO view this development?

**Ichiro Nomura:** We are very concerned with developments in marine fisheries. Most of the fish stocks are overexploited and there are clear evidences of fishing down the food-chain. The reality has to be accepted. We must stem the trend. Fishery resources are not limitless. We can develop new markets of course, but the world can't keep enhancing effort to increase fish production from our oceans. Many fishery resources must recover to Maximum Sustainable Yield levels by 2015 – as resolved in 2002 by the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg.

Depleting stocks reflect poor fisheries management. I concede that the 2015 deadline may be unrealistic, but this should not be a pretext for inaction. It was a political decision and we must act on it. The FAO's Fisheries Department is striving for fuller implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries to improve the situation in marine fisheries.

**Yadava:** In marine fisheries, the small-scale sector is very significant player. But this sector is under threat on many fronts. Degradation of resources. Open access which means over-exploitation. Inter-sectoral

conflicts. It is large coastal communities, often the poorest of the poor, who are active in small-scale fisheries (SSF). They need more support and larger interventions than before – from governments, from donors, from the FAO. In this context, what are your views on sustainable development of SSF and the role of the FAO?

**Nomura:** It is fair to say that the international fishing community and the FAO governing body did not pay enough attention to SSF in the past. The issues were not perhaps addressed quite adequately. This is also a reflection of our agenda setting practice. But from 2003 onwards, SSF has been allotted a separate agenda in the Committee on Fisheries (COFI). It has got the recognition it merits, and we will continue to recognise its importance.

The FAO has served as a catalyst. But an important issue is how SSF can be tackled effectively at the national and local levels. FAO cannot be the main actor in this exercise. The main actors



Mr Ichiro Nomura

are the fishers and the national governments. COFI sessions can address the issues in the most appropriate way. I will try to see that SSF becomes a standard agenda item in all COFI sessions.

But SSF should not be addressed purely as a fisheries issue. That won't be a good strategy. Since SSF stakeholders are weak, they may lack political support. Their issues should be addressed in the larger

## Mr Ichiro Nomura, ADG (Fisheries), FAO, Rome.

Mr Nomura obtained a bachelor's degree in marine biology in 1974 from the University of Tokyo. He also has a master's in international law from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University (1979) and a master's in public administration from the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University (1980).

He started his career with the Fisheries Agency of Japan in 1974, and was attached to its International Affairs Division. During 1983-86, he served as the Fisheries Attaché in the Embassy of Japan based in Washington DC, dealing with matters such as bilateral fisheries issues, fish trade, import quotas, etc. For a short while, Mr Nomura moved out of fisheries and took part in the Uruguay Round of Negotiations (GATT) dealing with many agricultural commodities including rice.

Returning to the fisheries sector in 1992, he first served as Director for International Negotiations and later as the Director of the Resource Conservation Division and Director of Far Seas Fisheries in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of the Government of Japan. In April 2000, Mr Nomura moved to Rome as ADG (Fisheries).

Mr Nomura spent his schooldays in Kobe and a larger part of his higher education and career in Tokyo.

developmental context. The COFI also believes in this.

**Yadava:** Do you think a sub-committee on SSF under the COFI can be useful in providing thrust or focus to the sustainable development of SSF?

**Nomura:** This question is often being mooted. But a standing sub-committee of COFI for SSF may not be easy to set up, institutionally and financially speaking. The two COFI Sub-committees on Fish Trade and on Aquaculture needed a lot of preparatory work and justification before they could be set up. A sub-committee on SSF would require even more justification. The FAO Governing Body should be convinced of the need. In my personal opinion it may not be a very wise strategy. If such a sub-committee comes into being, only countries with an active SSF will be interested, developed countries without an SSF may not be interested. Thus a sub-committee on SSF will unintentionally restrict their participation, this won't help the SSF.

A sub-committee may also be counterproductive to the larger strategy of helping the SSF. Issues concerning SSF should be addressed in the full COFI body in the light of the diversity and vastness of related matters, and if possible even in a much bigger forum where other developmental issues (such as health, education, etc) concerning SSF can also be discussed. I'm sure COFI will retain interest in SSF and address its issues and problems. Any worry that SSF will disappear from the COFI agenda is unfounded. The Secretariat of COFI is very supportive of SSF.

**Yadava:** SSF contributes substantially to fish production and exports. Can't it be argued that the trade aspect merits the involvement of those countries that do not have small-scale fisheries of their own?

**Nomura:** It sounds like a forced argument. Some developed countries may not care for SSF as much as you expect. They may not think it as an important business. The fisheries industry, however, may be more concerned. Seafood also faces competition from other sectors (livestock, poultry, etc). I completely

agree that the interests of SSF should be protected, and the FAO considers it a very important client. It is in fact our mission to help SSF and we are very attentive to their needs and causes.

**Yadava:** The Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) will be 11 years old in October 2006. The Code is voluntary in nature, but all member-states should ensure its effective implementation in the interest of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture development. It is the FAO that piloted the Code a decade ago and coordinates its implementation even today. Is the FAO satisfied with the implementation of the Code? What needs to be done to accelerate implementation at the grassroots level?

**Nomura:** We are not at all satisfied with the state of implementation of the CCRF. We don't mean that it is not being implemented at all, but the implementation is far from satisfactory. The Secretariat feels quite frustrated and is struggling hard on the subject of assisting the member-states. The FAO can only play a catalytic role, strengthen training components and act as a forum for awareness raising. It also provides some direct assistance, for example through the FISHCODE Project.

In the last COFI meeting, some members suggested revision of the CCRF and its Technical Guidelines. I personally feel it is not necessary at the moment to make any revisions to the Code itself. The Code is comprehensive and well-drafted. There may be some need for revising Technical Guidelines.

**Yadava:** Is it correct to say that the present situation is due to lack of awareness of the Code and the need to implement it, among fishers and field-level functionaries of national governments?

**Nomura:** Communication on the Code seems to be very poor. People in SSF may not even know what CCRF is. On the contrary, they may be implementing many provisions of the Code unknowingly – provisions they do not know about and not

highlighted by their governments. There could also be some underreporting on the implementation of the CCRF, and the whole business might be better than what it seems in the reports we receive.

The FAO should help in better communication about CCRF with the help of local and national governments. Efforts in this regard need to be galvanized. At every meeting of COFI, the progress of CCRF implementation is a standard item on the agenda. But this may not be enough. More active implementation and discussion of it may be necessary. Which part of the Code needs prioritization for implementation should be decided at the country level.

**Yadava:** Do you think a ministerial meeting should be convened in conjunction with the 2009 Session of the COFI to take stock of the implementation of the CCRF?

**Nomura:** Yes, that's a good idea. We will take note of this suggestion.

**Yadava:** In conclusion, how do you think regional fishery bodies and inter-governmental organizations can support the FAO in sustainable development of marine fisheries?

**Nomura:** There are two types of Regional Fishery Bodies (RFBs) – those which are under the FAO umbrella and those that are not. There are also two types of RFBs in terms of different mandates. The first type of RFBs has a mandate from member-states to regulate and monitor fisheries within their jurisdictions. They can directly tackle and implement issues on behalf of their member-states. In other words, they have concrete tools to regulate and monitor. The FAO provides overall guidance to such RFBs if and when requested. It can further improve their coordinating role.

The other types of RFBs, which play an advisory role, are also assisting their member-states in better management of fisheries. The FAO has been convening biennial meetings of the RFBs at the margin of COFI, which have been appreciated by all. We can make these meetings more meaningful.