

# Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission Explores Changing Role

The 29<sup>th</sup> session of the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission (APFIC), held from 21 to 23 August 2006, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, reflected its new role as a consultative forum on major issues, and as an adviser to governments and other members of APFIC. Forty-three participants from 14 member countries, plus observers from nine inter-governmental, international and regional organizations took part.

The Commission reviewed the activities of APFIC since its previous session; considered a paper on the status and potential of fisheries and aquaculture in Asia-Pacific; discussed the report of APFIC's Regional Consultative Forum meeting (see pages 29 - 32). It adopted a workplan on major issues APFIC should take up at its

next session, and heard comments from APFIC donors and partners.

Dr Y Bhg Dato' Junaidi bin Che Ayub, Director-General, Department of Fisheries, Malaysia, welcomed participants. Dr Ndiaga Gueye, Chief, International Institutions and Liaison Service, FAO welcomed the participants on behalf of Mr Ichiro Nomura, FAO Assistant Director-General. An opening address was delivered (on behalf of Tan Sri Dato' Sri' Abi Musa Asa'ari bin Mohamed Nor, Secretary-General, Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry, Malaysia) by Tuan Haji Mokhtar bin Ismail, Under-Secretary. The speakers urged participants at the session to look at regional recommendations that could form the basis of collaborative work by the Commission's members.

## APFIC: Activities since previous session

The APFIC secretariat summarized the main activities undertaken since the 28th session. One of these activities is the recently launched website <http://www.apfic.org>, which has proved to be an excellent medium for information dissemination, especially after the December 2004 tsunami. It also facilitates links with other regional fishery bodies and meets the needs of fishers' professionals in the APFIC region.

The APFIC secretariat has organized four successful regional consultative workshops, with a range of regional institutions. Two of these (in March 2005 and 2006) related to post-tsunami rehabilitation of fisheries and aquaculture; one to low-value and trash fish; and another to mainstreaming fisheries co-management. APFIC also organized the regional consultative forum referred to earlier, and several background reviews that provided preparatory inputs for the forum.

The APFIC secretariat has actively pursued collaboration with regional and international organizations such as the BOBP-IGO, INFOFISH, International Collective in Support

*Delegates to the 29th session of APFIC in Kuala Lumpur.*



of Fishworkers (ICSF), the Mekong River Commission, NACA, SEAFDEC, etc. A consortium formed with five of these bodies pooled intelligence on the tsunami's impact and facilitated coordination of tsunami responses.

### **Overview of fisheries and aquaculture**

The session discussed an APFIC overview of the "Status and potential of fisheries and aquaculture in Asia and the Pacific". The overview highlighted the fundamental importance of fisheries and aquaculture for the national economies of APFIC member-countries and for their contribution to nutrition, jobs and livelihoods. The region is a dominant world player in fisheries and aquaculture. (In 2004, the region accounted for 49 % of the global production of captured fish and 91% of global aquaculture.)

The main challenges to fisheries and aquaculture relate to (i) marine coastal fisheries (integrated coastal management, increasing benefits through better management); (ii) pelagic offshore fisheries (access to resources); (iii) demersal offshore fisheries (sustainable expansion); (iv) inland fisheries (competing water uses and environmental impacts from external factors); (v) aquaculture (site and feed constraints, increasing trade-related issues).

Some main messages from the overview were that APFIC member-countries would continue to be major suppliers of fishery products. The share of aquaculture is increasing, but there are several significant constraints. The changing trends in regional and international trade, production methods and consumption will impact the prices of fish and its availability. Major issues for the sustainable development of the sector include illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) and international trade. During discussion on the subject, several members expressed the need to

improve information-sharing on fisheries and aquaculture to enable better resource assessment and management. Such arrangements should be possible at the sub-regional level.

Many members pointed out that the costs of food safety development, plus the costs of eco-labelling and certification would lead to the further marginalization of small-scale fishers and farmers, and aggravate poverty. The Commission suggested that it could possibly look into the pre-harvest aspects of aquaculture and fisheries, as this was an area that directly affected small-scale producers. The Commission also called for greater collaboration among APFIC member-countries in improving training and capacity-building in food safety and trade.

### **Low-value and trash fish**

The session discussed APFIC's findings and recommendations on low-value/ trash fish emerging from two regional consultative workshops on the subject.

On the basis of reviews of low value/ trash fish conducted by APFIC in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, the People's Republic of China, the Philippines and Thailand plus a similar study in Vietnam (carried out by the Australian Centre

for Agriculture Research), the APFIC secretariat said the percentage of low value/ trash fish recorded in these countries ranged from 4 percent to 38 percent of the total marine capture landings, with a weighted average percentage across the region of 25 percent. Applying this ratio to the landed catch in 2003 gave a figure of 9.8 million tonnes being used for livestock/ fish, and 29.5 million tonnes used for human consumption. (The Commission noted Vietnam's doubts about the veracity of these figures, and said they would be further reviewed.)

The Commission said that the term "trash fish" is misleading; its use should be discouraged. It agreed with the following definition: "*Low value fish*" refers to fish that are generally of relatively low economic value and typically small sized. They can be used for either human consumption or as animal feeds (both fish and livestock). They may be used directly in both aquaculture to feed other fish or processed into fish meal/ oil for incorporation into formulated diets. The same is true for human food, where the fish may be consumed directly, or further processed often using traditional methods of processing small fish.

The Commission strongly recommended action on three fronts

*Some of the member-country delegates to APFIC.*



on issues relating to low value fish production in the APFIC region: Improved management of fisheries; improved utilization of low value fish for human consumption; and improved feed for aquaculture.

**Suggested action to improve management of fisheries included:**

- Reduce trawling and push net effort and fishing capacity (and clearly monitor the effects of capacity reduction).
- Improve the selectivity of fishing practices/ fishing gear, in particular gear to increase the size of fish captured.
- Introduce mechanisms for rights-based fisheries and co-management (to facilitate a reduction in the ‘race for fish’).
- Establish mechanisms to identify and protect juvenile nursery areas (refugia/ closed areas, seasonal closure).
- Provide alternative income-generating activities.
- Link fisheries and aquaculture policies to policies in other sectors (particularly agriculture) and to more general development policies.

**Suggested action to improve utilization of low-value fish for human consumption:**

- Improve post-harvest fish handling for human consumption and enhance food safety measures.
- Develop new fish products through processing.
- Promote the benefits of fish for improving food security and reducing poverty in the region.

**Suggested action to improve feeds for aquaculture:**

- Fast-track the change-over from direct feeding to pellet feeding (shrimp aquaculture is already based on pellet feed);
- Reduce the fish meal content of aquaculture feeds;
- Invest in feed research for inland/ marine species; and
- Encourage integrated fish farming for the culture of herbivorous and omnivorous species.

**Selected issues of regional importance: co-management, governance and institutions**

The Commission discussed a document on “Mainstreaming co-management” based on APFIC workshops and background papers. There have been several successes with co-management – which is based on decentralization, and a partnership between government and local communities using this approach. But these have been supported by donors in pilot projects rather than by governments. The challenge is to find a way to make co-management a mainstream practice of both government and non-government organizations and communities.

The Commission agreed with the following definition for fisheries and aquaculture co-management:

***Fisheries/ aquaculture co-management is a partnership approach where government and the fishery/ aquaculture resource users share the responsibility and authority for the management of a fishery or fisheries/ aquaculture resources in an area, based on collaboration between themselves and with other stakeholders***”.

It recommended that to mainstream co-management the member-countries should:

- ensure that co-management addresses key national policy objectives such as reducing

**What is APFIC?**

The Asia- Pacific Fishery Commission (APFIC) was established in 1948 as Indo-Pacific Fisheries Council. The name changed to Indo-Pacific Fishery Commission in 1976, and its present name in 1994. Set up under the aegis of FAO (Article XIV of FAO Constitution), the Commission works from the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, Thailand. The Commission covers the Indo-Pacific area (including inland waters). The Commission is mandated to “promote the full and proper utilization of living aquatic resources by the development and management of fishing and culture operations and by the development of related processing and marketing activities in conformity with the objectives of its members”.



overexploitation of fish stocks, and reducing poverty;

- review, develop and amend national fishery policy and legislation, where necessary, to support fisheries and aquaculture co-management;
- invest adequate resources in developing co-management;

*APFIC discussed and recommended a number of actions on low-value fish production.*



- ensure appropriate budgets for fisheries co-management practices at all levels;
- define and communicate the respective roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders;
- assist in the empowerment of communities, and ensure equitable distribution of the benefits of co-management; and
- facilitate human and institutional capacity-building at all levels across communities and scales, in particular ensure that government staff at all levels are adequately skilled and experienced to facilitate the implementation of fisheries co-management.

### Policy Challenges

The APFIC secretariat had commissioned a policy analysis to examine the main policy directions being taken in fisheries and aquaculture, and the main drivers of policy change. The study examined national policies relating to extension of fishing effort to offshore areas, creation of alternative livelihoods to assist fishers to leave fisheries, growth targets for aquaculture and capture fisheries, co-management initiatives and prioritising poverty alleviation targets. Although the details of fisheries and aquaculture policy differed between countries, the study found a surprising degree of similarity between the main policy directions and strategies. Almost all policies in the region stated food security, poverty alleviation, community/ co-management and decentralization, fishing capacity reduction, improvements in administrative efficiency, and cross-sectoral collaboration as policy objectives.

Discussing the Forum's findings, the Commission highlighted some more points: (i) the need to enhance the economic and social status of fisherwomen whose roles are critical in poverty alleviation; (ii) fisheries management and aquaculture growth; (iii) the allocation of money



*APFIC discussed co-management (partnership between government and local communities) in both aquaculture and fisheries.*

to reduce fishing capacity and to address IUU fishing; (iv) the management and resolution of conflicts between large-scale and small-scale fisheries; (v) better and more secure livelihoods of small-scale fishing communities through *inter alia* better safety at sea, conditions of labour and health; (vi) the encouragement of policy harmonization across the region while respecting policy differences resulting from differences in economic and social development; (vii) regional and bilateral cooperation and agreements to better regulate fisheries and strengthen MCS; (viii) the need for better information and research to inform policy-making; and (ix) the potential of biotechnology in better fish utilization.

The Commission concluded that, in general, the region is well served by policy and strategies. But future work should focus some more on policy implementation – policy development by itself is not enough. Better participation by stakeholders in formulating policy will improve implementation.

### Emerging issues

The APFIC Secretariat informed the Commission about two emerging issues revealed by the 2006 edition of APFIC's *Status and potential of fisheries and aquaculture in Asia and the Pacific*. These were illegal,

unreported and unregulated fishing and aquaculture and fishery products standards and trade. (see article on pages 29-32, for more information).

The Commission reaffirmed that the overarching focus of APFIC should be small-scale fisheries and rural aquaculture that lead to poverty reduction, especially for women and socially deprived communities. It recommended the following two priority areas to be included in the next workplan of APFIC:

#### (i) Managing fishing capacity:

This should include reducing and combating IUU fishing; improving co-management in both the small-scale and large-scale sub-sectors; a special focus on low value fish; developing management plans at all levels, including region-based plans; resource assessments; and promoting regional and sub-regional cooperation.

**(ii) Fish trade and standards:** This should include both aquaculture and capture fishery products; issues of eco-labelling and traceability; better pre-harvest management; bilateral cooperation; and improved sharing of information and human capacity building.

APFIC's workplan for 2006-2008 was also discussed. The Commission agreed to host the next session in Indonesia in August 2008.