

BOBP-IGO's Technical Advisory Committee Meets in Chennai

The second meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) of the BOBP-IGO, held in Chennai on February 5 and 6, 2007, reviewed past work and the future directions of the IGO. Representatives of Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka took part. Welcoming delegates, Dr Y S Yadava, Director of the BOBP-IGO, briefly discussed work during the year.

In his inaugural speech, Mr Ajay Bhattacharya, Joint Secretary (Fisheries), Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, said several activities had been carried out by the BOBP-IGO, most of which were relevant and useful for member - countries. He urged that synergies between countries should be built up to the fullest extent.

Dr Md Shiham Adam (Maldives), outgoing chairperson, thanked the Secretariat for its operation and support during his tenure as the TAC chair. Mr Ajay Bhattacharya was unanimously elected chairperson.

Report on BOBP-IGO activities

The Director of the BOBP-IGO presented a report on activities carried out by the Secretariat during the reporting period October 2005 to December 2006. He said the Bay of Bengal (BoB) region supported the livelihoods of some 50 million people directly and indirectly. But the capture fishery was declining, and might affect livelihoods, food availability and national economies in the member-countries.

However, the BoB can produce significantly more fish than present

landings through improved resource management brought about by scientific technological inputs, better all-round awareness, greater community participation in resource management and co-management.

The BOBP-IGO implemented the following activities during the period:

- A National Workshop on the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries was organised during 9-10 December 2005 in Colombo in co-operation with the authorities in Sri Lanka.
- A detailed assessment of the safety of small fishing vessels in India, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Thailand, the first of its kind, was carried out during October 2005 with the assistance of a consultant from Iceland.
- The IGO took part in a “scoping study” on Tsunami Rehabilitation:

Assessment of Policy Support for Sustainable Pro-Poor Fisheries in Tamil Nadu, India. It was commissioned by the UNDP and carried out in association with the World Bank, the DFID and the FAO.

- The Third International Fishing Industry Safety and Health Conference (IFISH-3) was organised in Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu, India from 1 to 4 February, 2006, in collaboration with the FAO and the Alaska Centre of NIOSH, United States. A thematic workshop on Post-tsunami Revival of Fisheries Sector and Rehabilitation of Fishing Communities was also organised at the same venue on 6 and 7 February 2006.

- The BOBP-IGO is publishing newsletters and translating FAO Technical Guidelines and International Plans of Action on marine fisheries into local languages. It has also brought out posters and calendars.

- The formidable task of digitizing a select photo collection of over 50 000 photographs is 80 percent complete. The digitized archive will constitute a rare and valuable



resource on small-scale and artisanal fisheries in the Bay of Bengal region.

– New activities: The IGO will partner the FAO in implementing the South Asian activities of a global FAO Project on ‘Safety at Sea for Small-Scale Fisheries in Developing Countries’. The 2-year project will start in May 2007 and will be implemented in all member-countries. The IGO will also be a partner in a FAO-IMO project on Small Fishing Vessel Safety in Sri Lanka and India in the wake of tsunami reconstruction and rehabilitation effort.

– Technical assistance was provided to the International Cooperative Fisheries Organisation of the International Cooperative Alliance in conducting a workshop for Fisheries Cooperatives in Sri Lanka; and to a Training Project on ‘Promotion of Community-based Fishery Resource Management by Coastal Small-scale Fishers in the Philippines’

– A study was carried out on ‘Development of Marine Fisheries and Post-harvest Sectors in Orissa’ in collaboration with the UNDP.

Commenting on the presentation, Dr Adam said that Maldives had witnessed a constant increase in tuna production; the new-generation fishing fleet introduced in the country might further increase it. Maldives is trying to introduce aquaculture of species such as groupers; if technical support and expertise were made available, this could give a fillip to aquaculture production.

In response to a query from Mr Parikshit Datta Chowdhury of Bangladesh, the Director, BOBP-IGO said that while funds were sufficient for the IGO’s core functions, its Secretariat was small and could benefit from staff secondments provided by member-countries. Such a practice would give the staff concerned wide exposure and experience and would therefore help the countries concerned as well.

– Dr V S Somvanshi of India complimented the BOBP-IGO on its excellent work. He referred in particular to popularization of the Code of Conduct in the region, technical support for post-tsunami rehabilitation, and digitization of the IGO’s photo collection.

– Dr Adam expressed happiness with the IGO’s work programmes. Its review of sea safety issues in the Maldives was the first of its kind. It would lead to guidelines for safety and construction of better fishing vessels.

– Responding to a query from Dr Adam, the Director, BOBP-IGO said that a web portal for fisheries scientists and institutions in the BoB region, already undertaken, was making progress. So far, information on some 80 fisheries scientists/ institutions had been placed in the portal.

– Mr Abeywickrama of Sri Lanka thanked the IGO for its support. He cited in particular the technical support provided for the development of fisheries cooperative societies in Sri Lanka. Mr J W Rathnayake (Sri Lanka) mentioned the IGO’s support for post-tsunami rehabilitation. More support was needed for sustainable development of marine fisheries.

– Mr Rathnayake and Mr B S Yadav (India) discussed the issue of capacity enhancement of the Sri Lankan Coast Guard with support from the Indian Coast Guard (ICG). Mr Yadav said that some initial meetings had taken place on this issue. Mr Ajay Bhattacharya, chairperson of the meeting, said the Indo-Sri Lankan Joint Working Group was working on the issue. It was also discussed with the Fisheries Minister of Sri Lanka who visited India recently.

– Mr Bhattacharya expressed appreciation of the Scoping Study prepared by the BOBP-IGO in association with UNDP, DFID and the World Bank. He said the Government of India proposed to take up a similar study in three more coastal states.

Proposals from Member-Countries:

Discussing the status of marine fisheries in Bangladesh, some major constraints to sustainable development, and some of its national priorities, Dr Rahman said that the BOBP-IGO could take part in HRD for marine resource assessment, development of mariculture technology and marketing and exchange of technical know-how among member-countries. A joint management plan for hilsa should be considered on a priority basis between India and Bangladesh, and possibly Myanmar as well.

Discussing marine fisheries resources availability, production and management in India and current problems, Dr Somvanshi said the recently published National Marine Fisheries Census 2005 revealed that some three million people depended on marine fisheries for their livelihood – a much higher figure than what was earlier believed. About under-exploited resources, he said only some 30-35 000 metric tonnes of tuna was being harvested, against a potential of about 2 46 000 metric tonnes. The TAC noted that the marine fisheries sector in India needs more management inputs and also sound strategies for harvesting species like tuna that are grossly under-exploited.

Fisheries in the Maldives cannot be discussed without discussing tuna fisheries, Dr Adam said. In recent years, the tuna fishery has been inhibited by the growth of bait. Also important is the coastal fishery, which includes resources such as scads, jacks, breems, emperors, wahoo, sharks, groupers, marlins, bait fishes and the aquarium fishes. The government’s priorities include socio-economic betterment of fishing communities, diversification and post-harvest improvement, pearl culture, manpower development and sustainable fishing practices.

On the scope of BOBP-IGO’s work, Dr Adam noted BOBP’s strength in

documentation and manpower building. Issues like community-based fisheries management, in which BOBP had taken part earlier, needed new inputs. Studies on the socio-economics of reef fishing communities and on innovative methods of catching bait fish could also be considered. Dr Adam emphasized the need for a regional management plan for shark fisheries. The BOBP-IGO could play an important role in developing a management plan for shark fisheries covering India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

Mr Abeywickrema said the tsunami had inflicted damage estimated at US \$ 900 million on physical assets in Sri Lanka. More than 75 percent of the fishing fleet had been either destroyed or damaged. The Government was striving for speedy recovery. He expressed concern at the quality and seaworthiness of new fishing vessels provided to fishers who had lost their boats to the tsunami.

On other priorities for fisheries development, Mr Abeywickrema described efforts to set up a state-of-the-art fish market complex, improve the deep-sea fishing capacity of fishers, better the infrastructure and revive the shrimp sector. Licensing of fishing vessels and awareness-creation programs had been undertaken.

Secretariat: Work Plan

The Director, BOBP-IGO presented the work plan for 2007. He said the IGO would continue translating CCRF documents into local languages. He sought the co-operation of member-countries in organising a fisherfolk week during the current year. The Secretariat proposed two new programmes for implementation in 2007: on monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS), and on management of hilsa and sharks.

Proposal on Monitoring, Control and Surveillance

Presenting a proposal on MCS, the Director, BOBP-IGO said that an

effective and implementable legal framework was essential for resource management and conservation. But lack of data, manpower, and awareness were major constraints to an effective MCS regime. The proposed programme would bridge this gap through HRD activities, strengthening the legal framework, mobilizing expertise and motivating stakeholders.

Mr B S Yadav described the work of India's Coast Guard (ICG) in implementing MCS in fisheries. Sri Lanka requested training assistance for their Coast Guards by the ICG.

The Maldivian delegation said that a draft Fisheries Master Plan to be submitted to the President included plans to implement an MCS. Only longlining was permitted for foreign fishing vessels in the EEZ, and registration of fishing vessels was not mandatory. But logbooks had been introduced for fishers. Maldives has an enabling legal system to support full introduction of MCS, but regional and international collaboration are necessary for the success of the MCS programme.

The Bangladesh delegation said the main problem it faces in implementing MCS is lack of manpower to enforce existing laws like registration of trawlers and motor boats. Catch size monitoring is also difficult for the same reason. Piracy and robbery are other important MCS issues. Bangladesh needs the BOBP-IGO's support for hands-on training and technical support in satellite monitoring of stocks.

The TAC agreed to convene a regional Workshop on MCS in June/ July 2007 in Bangladesh, subject to the concurrence of the Government of Bangladesh. It suggested that BOBP-IGO Secretariat seek technical support for organising the Regional Workshop from FAO or other agencies such as the MCS Network.

Proposal on management of Hilsa and Sharks

The Secretariat presented a detailed overview of the proposed programme on management of Hilsa fisheries in India and Bangladesh and management of shark fisheries in Maldives, Sri Lanka and India. Dr Rahman proposed that Myanmar be also included in the Hilsa management plan. He said that Bangladesh has established some management plans for Hilsa but a lot more needs to be done, especially in cooperation with neighboring countries such as India and the Myanmar. He suggested a joint management policy, especially with regard to the juvenile fishery.

The TAC agreed that the following agencies could help prepare a management plan on Hilsa fisheries: Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute; Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, Bangladesh; Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute, India; and the Fishery Survey of India. An appropriate co-operating agency from Myanmar would also be identified. The first meeting will be held in July/ August 2007 in India subject to government concurrence.

Mr Md Shainee of the Maldives expressed appreciation of the idea of a regional action plan on sharks. The TAC identified the following institutions for the activity — Fishery Survey of India; Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, India; Marine Research Centre, Maldives; Ministry of Fisheries, Agriculture and Marine Resources, Maldives; National Aquatic Resources Research and Management Agency, Sri Lanka; Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, Sri Lanka. The TAC agreed to convene the first meeting in September 2007 in Sri Lanka subject to government concurrence.

Third TAC meeting: The Committee agreed to convene the third meeting of the TAC during late 2007 in Sri Lanka, subject to government concurrence.