

Committee on Fisheries Examines Various Global Problems at 27th Meeting in Rome



FAO Headquarters, Rome

A summary of the discussions and decisions of the 27th session of the FAO's Committee on Fisheries, which met in Rome early in March.

The 27th session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) was held from 5 to 9 March, 2007 at the FAO headquarters in Rome. Senior government officials from more than 100 countries plus observers took part. Mr A Hettiarachchi of Sri Lanka chaired the meeting.

The Committee on Fisheries (COFI), a subsidiary body of the FAO Council, was set up in 1965 at the 13th session of the FAO Conference. The Committee provides a global forum to review the FAO's programmes, examine major issues in international fisheries and aquaculture, and negotiate global agreements and instruments.

The 27th session discussed progress in the implementation of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF); rehabilitation of fisheries and aquaculture in countries affected by the 2004 tsunami; social issues in small-scale fisheries; combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing; implementing the ecosystem approach to fisheries, including deep-sea fisheries; strengthening regional fishery management organizations (RFMOs) and their performances. The COFI also heard a presentation of the "State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA) 2006" before the meeting officially opened.

At the opening session, Mr David A Harcharik, FAO's Deputy Director-General, pointed out that the FAO's Fisheries Department had been renamed Fisheries and Aquaculture Department, in view of the growing importance of aquaculture.

Code of Conduct: Many members provided information on measures they had adopted to implement the Code. These included efforts to disseminate information about the Code, particularly among small-scale fishing communities, and progress in international plans of action (IPOAs). The Committee agreed that progress had been made in implementing the Code; but members needed to do more both individually and collectively.

Capacity and overcapacity in fisheries: The Committee reaffirmed linkages between overcapacity, allocations, overfishing and IUU fishing, and highlighted the need for both national and regional action. Some members said that while addressing the problem of overcapacity, the right of developing States to develop their own fisheries and participate in high-seas fisheries should be taken into account.

Many members described national initiatives to combat IUU fishing. Some members referred to monitoring, control and surveillance

programs and vessel monitoring systems as basic tools to curb IUU fishing.

Regional Fishery Bodies: Recent conferences have urged FAO to strengthen its role on setting up a global capture fishery statistics database to provide information on fish stocks. In view of the primary role of regional fisheries management organizations and regional fishery bodies in data collection, it has been recommended that FAO should consolidate the catch data of RFBs into a single database under the general guidance of the CWP (Coordinating Working Party on Fishery Statistics).

Support on Code of Conduct: Many members thanked the FAO for the technical assistance it provided to support implementation of the CCRF and related instruments, especially on the management of inland and marine capture fisheries and the development of sustainable aquaculture. They asked that a greater share of the FAO's budget be allocated to fisheries and aquaculture to enhance capacity-building.

Reconstruction of livelihoods after the tsunami: Members commended the FAO for prompt and sustained support in tsunami rehabilitation, in areas such as damage and needs assessment, planning for sustainable rehabilitation, donor coordination, etc.

Many members said that massive and uncoordinated assistance triggered by the tsunami and the higher efficiency of new vessels had raised concerns about over-capacity. The Committee said this issue should be addressed, with FAO assistance as needed, through effective fisheries management arrangements.

Members were told that many boats provided through emergency assistance failed to meet minimum safety standards. FAO and other UN agencies should address the problem in collaboration with affected countries.

The Committee welcomed the emphasis in the tsunami rehabilitation programmes of some members in areas such as institution-building for fisheries management, habitat restoration, safety at sea, infrastructure rehabilitation, post-harvest activities and aquaculture development.

The Committee recommended that FAO should report more extensively on lessons learned from post-tsunami rehabilitation, and disseminate results widely. Some members stressed the need for better donor coordination, inclusion of local expertise, and greater

emphasis on technical assistance in the face of severe natural disasters. Some members called for greater flexibility in procedures by the FAO to enable more rapid response to emergencies. Many members also urged further work on early warning systems for fishing communities. Members should strive to develop proper disaster management frameworks and supporting legislation.

COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade: The Committee noted the importance for developing countries of international trade in fish and fish products. Many members stressed the need for technical advice and assistance from FAO to improve market access for small-scale fisheries from developing countries. Some expressed concern about the increasing complexity of safety and quality requirements for fish and fish products, and the burden they imposed on developing countries. Many members noted the need for simple and practical traceability schemes for small-scale fisheries.

Ecolabelling: On the draft International Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Inland Capture Fisheries, the Committee

recommended that FAO undertake further work on minimum requirements and criteria for ecolabels in inland capture fisheries.

Guidelines for Fish Trade: The Committee noted that an expert consultation had been held in Washington DC, USA, in January 2007, on technical guidelines for responsible fish trade. The Committee agreed that FAO should convene a technical consultation to consider these guidelines.

COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture: The Committee highlighted the importance of addressing socio-economic impacts of aquaculture, improving planning and policy development, ensuring food safety and human health, developing best management practices, developing risk assessment methodologies and guidelines for better management of aquaculture. The Committee asked FAO to implement the recommendations of the third session of the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture – particularly the need for technical assistance to members.

The Committee underscored the need for better information and data on aquaculture in support of sustainable development. The





Mr A Hettiarachchi, Chairman of the 27th session of COFI



Dr Faathin Hameed, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Fisheries, Agriculture & Marine Resources, Maldives at the COFI meeting.

Committee also recognised the role of certification and better management practices as part of an ecosystem approach to aquaculture; the FAO was requested to conduct expert workshops to develop guidelines on aquaculture certification. Thailand and Brazil confirmed their readiness to host such workshops in Bangkok and Brasilia.

Chile and Thailand confirmed offers to host the fourth and fifth sessions of the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture in 2008 and 2010 respectively.

Social issues in small-scale fisheries: The Committee noted the precarious living and working conditions of small-scale fishers – which resulted from insecure rights to land and fishery resources, inadequate health and educational services and social safety nets, exclusion from wider development processes. The opportunities of small-scale producers, processors and marketers to benefit from globalization were often compromised by inadequate access to markets and deficiencies in financial services, know-how and capacity. Sustainable fisheries was a pre-requisite for sustainable livelihoods of fishers, it was pointed out.

The Committee stressed that policies and development programmes must be tailored to specific needs in particular

locations, countries and regions and types of small-scale fisheries. Some members urged greater clarity in defining and classifying different categories of small-scale fisheries.

The Committee noted the positive experiences of several countries in mainstreaming small-scale fisheries into national development policies. It was desirable that lessons from these experiences should be shared through case-studies, south-to-south and fisher-to-fisher exchanges. The Committee stressed that human rights principles should be recognized and adopted to eradicate poverty and bring about responsible fisheries practices.

The Committee expressed support for the “strategy of action” noted in paragraph 23 of COFI/2007/6. It stressed the need for a rights-based approach to managing small-scale fisheries that respects the interests of present and future generations, ensures resource sustainability, and optimizes the flow of benefits to fishing communities.

Several members cited successful examples of capacity-building and empowerment in small-scale fisheries – such as literacy programmes, leadership training, and strengthening of fisher organisations. Differing views were expressed on the potential of small-scale fisheries to alleviate poverty.

Traditional forms of fishing rights and tenure, wherever these existed in the past, must be recognised, the

meeting said. The poor must be protected from any adverse impacts resulting from the transition to rights-based fisheries management – by creating opportunities in areas outside harvesting, including aquaculture. Cross-sectoral policies were needed to integrate fisheries into coastal area management, and reduce the vulnerability of fishers and coastal communities to disasters.

The Committee considered different options to give greater prominence to small-scale fisheries in the FAO’s Programme of Work. The Committee noted the strong support from many members for a COFI Sub-Committee devoted to small-scale fisheries.

The Committee welcomed Norway’s proposal for a broad-based international conference focusing on small-scale fisheries.

Combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing: The Committee thanked the FAO for capacity-building activities to enhance implementation of International Plans of Action to combat IUU fishing. Many members described their fight against IUU fishing as one of high national priority because of its economic, biological and social consequences.

The Committee noted the strong support for a Norwegian proposal to develop a new legally binding

instrument concerning port state measures to combat IUU fishing. An expert consultation is to be convened in the latter half of 2007 to prepare a draft agreement and a technical consultation on the text of the instrument.

Ecosystem approach to fisheries including deep-sea fisheries, marine debris and lost and abandoned gear: Members reported on the progress they were making to implement an ecosystem approach to fisheries (EAF). They commended the FAO's efforts to raise awareness in this context, and urged the FAO to complete and distribute quickly technical guidelines on the social, institutional and economic considerations in EAF. Many developing countries requested greater FAO support for capacity-building and technical assistance on implementation of EAF.

Several members raised the issue of the threats posed by climate change. A proposal was mooted for an FAO study to identify key issues in climate change and fisheries and discuss how the fishing industry can adapt to climate change. It was suggested that FAO should take the lead in informing fishers and policy-makers about the likely consequences for fisheries of climate change.

COFI agreed that FAO should convene an expert consultation, no later than August 2007, to prepare draft technical guidelines for management of deep-sea fisheries in the high seas. It was agreed that the guidelines should include standards for identifying vulnerable marine ecosystems beyond areas under national jurisdiction and the impacts of fishing activities on such ecosystems. Some members called for a moratorium on high seas fisheries until the impacts of fishing activities on these ecosystems could be assessed.

The meeting reaffirmed the important role of marine protected areas (MPAs) in biodiversity conservation and fisheries



Small - scale fishers - Bangladesh

management. The FAO was encouraged to complete early its technical guidelines on design, implementation and testing of MPAs.

COFI agreed that FAO should continue its work on biodiversity mapping as an important contribution to the implementation of EAF.

Many members expressed concern on the safety at sea of fishing vessels, particularly small vessels. FAO was urged to continue collaboration with IMO. It was suggested that FAO should develop guidelines on best practices for safety at sea. COFI should consider developing an IPOA (International Plan of Action) on the subject.

Strengthening regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs): Japan informed the Committee about a joint meeting of five RFMOs for management of tuna stocks, held in Kobe, Japan, in January 2007. Many members supported the idea of joint meetings of non-tuna RFMOs with a mandate and objectives similar to those of the tuna RFMOs. FAO was asked to provide assistance and advice for the process.

Many members requested FAO to continue supporting RFMOs and RFBs (regional fishery bodies) on issues of concern to them such as overcapacity, improvement of fleet

statistics, and issues that undermine the effectiveness of RFMOs.

FAO's Programme of Work in Fisheries and Aquaculture: The Committee expressed dissatisfaction with the level of the budget assigned to the Fisheries and Aquaculture Department, which was not commensurate with the importance of its work and the expectations of the international community. The Committee urged relevant FAO Governing Bodies to allocate more resources to the department. Many members stressed that major activities of the department should be funded by the regular FAO programme. They expressed concern at the increasing proportion of extra-budgetary funding for support to these activities. They requested a more detailed report on such funding, in the interest of greater transparency and accountability.

Other matters: Some members noted the active role of NGOs in promoting responsible and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture round the world. They stressed the need to develop, within the framework of COFI, a fair and equitable process to promote dialogue between members and NGOs.

It was agreed that the 28th session of the Committee would meet in Rome in the first quarter of 2009.