

# Focus on implementing existing international fisheries instruments, advises COFI meeting in Rome

*A summary of important outcomes from the 26<sup>th</sup> Committee of Fisheries meeting held in Rome early this year, also from the Fourth Meeting of Regional Fishery Bodies that succeeded it.*

The Committee on Fisheries (COFI), the FAO's top policy-making body in fisheries, did a wide-ranging review of fisheries and aquaculture issues and of the FAO's programmes at its 26<sup>th</sup> Session in Rome from 7 to 11 March 2005.

The Session was attended by 117 Members of COFI, by observers from three other FAO Member Nations, the Holy See, and one non-Member Nation of FAO, by representatives from six specialized agencies of the United Nations and by observers from 51 inter-governmental (IGOs) and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). BOBP-IGO was also represented in the COFI.

The Committee commended the FAO on its fourth report on implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and associated instruments. It noted that the Code provided the basic framework for promoting sustainable fisheries and aquaculture. Member country representatives explained measures to implement the Code, including legislative enactments. The Committee urged further promotion of the Code's implementation, and additional guidelines in support of the Code, including one to implement the International Plan of Action for the Management of Fishing Capacity.

Critical to the sustained implementation of the Code was the need for institutional strengthening and human resources development in developing countries, especially

in small-island developing states. Many members informed the Committee about their particular needs concerning assistance. The FAO was thanked for the training it provided on implementing the Code and the IPOAs.

Some Members suggested that FishCode might focus greater attention on human resource development and awareness building about the Code, especially at the "grass roots" level.

Some members said they faced a heavy reporting burden on the Code. A proposal was made that detailed in-depth analysis be undertaken every four years, alternating with a general overview report on implementation every two years. This decision is to be finalised at the next session of COFI.

The Committee expressed the view that many international fisheries

instruments have been concluded since the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). Effort should now focus on implementing these instruments rather than on concluding new instruments. The Committee called for a "Decade of Implementation" for these instruments. Member countries were called upon to accept, ratify or accede to these instruments.

Many members said the ecosystem approach to fisheries management should be widely adopted, since fishing impacts not only the target resources but the ecosystem itself. However, others pointed out that while everyone agrees about the value of this approach, more understanding is needed on applying this approach practically.

Some members expressed concern at the slow rate of implementation of IPOA-Sharks. Many members provided information about illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in their countries and regions.

*Participants at the COFI Meeting in Rome.*



Some Members pointed out that there were linkages between IUU fishing and fishing overcapacity and that the management of overcapacity should be addressed on a global basis.

It was said that fishing vessels flying “flags of convenience” continued to undermine efforts to promote sustainable fisheries. In this connection, the Committee noted the positive comments about the 2003 FAO Expert Consultation on Fishing Vessels Operating under Open Registries and their Impact on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing, and urged members operating open registries to implement the Consultation’s recommendations as a matter of priority. Many members stressed the importance of effective fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance tools as primary defences against IUU fishing.

Many members referred to FAO’s work on fisheries subsidies. A distinction was made between two types of subsidies. Those that supported fleet expansion, leading to stock degradation and unsustainable fishing, should be phased out. But subsidies that improved scientific information or benefited small-scale fishers and contributed to food security, poverty alleviation and sustainable utilisation should be continued. Members urged the FAO to undertake studies to determine the impact of subsidies on fishing capacity, IUU fishing and fisheries management generally.

The Committee expressed condolences to countries and families hit by the December 2004 tsunami and observed a minute of silence in memory of the victims of the tsunami. The Secretariat provided an overview of the impact of the tsunami that killed an estimated 300 000 people and caused damage of approximately US\$ 7 billion. It was pointed out that the tsunami had its greatest impact on poor coastal fishing communities, many of which lost all or most of their livelihood assets.



*Mr A Bhattacharya, Joint Secretary (Fisheries), India at the COFI Meeting.*

The Secretariat expressed concern that rehabilitation could re-institutionalise factors leading to vulnerability and unsustainability. The Committee endorsed the FAO’s medium-to-long term rehabilitation strategy for fisheries and aquaculture in the affected countries.

The Committee thanked India for offering to host the third session of the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture in 2006 despite the difficulties posed by the tsunami.

The Committee expressed concern at the proliferation of international fora addressing fisheries matters, some of which lacked a sound technical and scientific bases for discussion.

The Committee commended the COFI Secretariat for a document on enabling responsible small-scale fisheries. It noted that a range of issues should be addressed so that small-scale fisheries made a greater contribution to rural development,

*Mr G Piyasena, Director General, Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, Sri Lanka at the COFI Meeting.*



sustainable livelihoods, poverty alleviation and food security. Some Members recommended that small-scale fisheries be given greater consideration in the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries through a specific Article or Appendix or through elaboration of additional Guidelines.

The attention of the Committee was drawn to the revised Code of Safety for Fishermen and Fishing Vessels and the Voluntary Guidelines for the Design, Construction and Equipment of Small Fishing Vessels that had been prepared by FAO, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The Committee welcomed the revised Code and Voluntary Guidelines and recommended the early publication by IMO of these documents.

The Committee stressed that COFI and FAO should continue to provide leadership and maintain an assertive role in fisheries.

Ministers who attended a Ministerial meeting on Fisheries on 12 March 2005 made a declaration about the tsunami. They urged donors and international financial institutions to “fulfil pledges they had made” about assistance to meet the effects of the tsunami.

The Ministers emphasised the need for fisheries and aquaculture rehabilitation to focus on rebuilding the livelihoods of fishers and fish farmers, providing adequate protection from this and other environmental threats, and improving sectoral efficiency, sustainability and governance.

The Ministers emphasised the need to “protect the rights of fishers and fishworkers, particularly those involved in subsistence and small-scale and artisanal fisheries, to a secure and just livelihood, as well as preferential access to fishing grounds and resources of affected areas.”

The Ministers emphasised the need “to rebuild and strengthen the capacity of affected fisheries sectors” in fishing abilities, data

collection, scientific analysis, assessments of fisheries resources, and effective fisheries management. They said the capacity of communities and stakeholders to engage in this process should be enhanced.

### **The Fourth Meeting of Regional Fishery Bodies, 14-15 March 2005**

Representatives from 29 Regional Fisheries Bodies (including the BOBP-IGO) took part in the Fourth Meeting of Regional Fishery Bodies (RFBs) in Rome on 14 and 15 March, 2005.

The meeting focused mainly on information exchange, administration and enhanced co-operation among RFBs.

Opening the meeting, Mr Ichiro Nomura, FAO Assistant Director-General of Fisheries, said that demands placed on RFBs had become heavier in recent years since the productivity of fish stocks had dwindled and fishing pressure increased. He recalled that the June 2004 Technical Consultation relating to IUU (illegal, unreported and unregulated) fishing had noted the key role of RFBs in combating IUU.

The meeting reviewed the decisions of the earlier COFI meeting (the 26<sup>th</sup>) that were relevant to RFBs.

- The FAO was requested to assist RFBs in issues concerning the biodiversity of the high seas.
- There was a COFI proposal to review the performance of RFBs in meeting the objectives of international instruments. COFI suggested that RFBs could be invited to take part in a meeting to develop parameters for such a performance review. There could perhaps be an expert consultation followed by a technical consultation.
- The COFI meeting recognised that there are many deficiencies in fisheries governance at a global level – for example in areas related to overcapacity, IUU fishing, catch allocation, and the behaviour of non-contracting

parties. RFBs may require capacity-building to deal with such issues.

Mr Jean-François Pulvenis, Director of the Fishery Policy and Planning Division of FAO described the perceived role of RFBs. Ms Judith Swan mentioned several fisheries circulars concerning RFBs. She said that recent international instruments had enhanced the role of RFBs in fisheries management.

The meeting noted the major role of RFBs in implementing the four International Plans of Action and the FAO strategy for improving action on the status and trends of capture fisheries.

The question of raising the public profile of RFBs was discussed. Some suggestions: Special events, use of electronic media, promotion of linkages between and among RFBs, websites.

Discussing IUU fishing, the meeting described it as a large and complex problem unlikely to be solved in the near future. "It has multiple drivers ranging from criminal greed to ignorance. It is global in effect and will require global as well as multiple solutions." The Meeting recognised that IUU fishing undermines the management efforts of RFBs. Additional information

was therefore needed to make management effective.

Mr Kevern Cochrane, Senior Fisheries Resource Officer of FAO delivered a presentation on ecosystem approaches to fisheries management (EAFM). The meeting discussed individual RFB activities and challenges relating to EAFM. The following suggestions were made to incorporate EAFM principles into RFB initiatives:

- Building awareness on EAFM among RFB member countries
- Evaluating existing management initiatives which may have embedded EAFM concerns
- Identifying weaknesses in existing management initiatives and practices, and strategies to strengthen the initiatives.

Mr Ellik Adler (UNEP Regional Seas Programme Coordinator) said that his programme worked with partner organisations. He discussed the question of stronger ties between UNEP and RFBs, and proposed seven areas for positive co-operation.

The meeting discussed the structure for the next meeting of RFBs. It was agreed that it should take up fewer topics with more in-depth discussion.

*BOBP-IGO exhibits on the Tsunami, at the COFI Meeting.*

