

FAO's International Plans of Action

A summary of four International Plans of Action which are “voluntary instruments” within the framework of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. A booklet that spells out rules and measures is available for each IPOA.

The Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) was adopted in 1995 by more than 170 members of the FAO. The Code is a collection of principles, goals and action elements, designed to help conserve and manage the world's fisheries. It represents a global consensus or agreement on a wide range of fisheries and aquaculture issues.

Four International Plans of Action (IPOAs) have since been elaborated within the framework of the CCRF. They are “voluntary instruments” which apply to all States and entities and to all fishers. Here's a summary of the four IPOAs.

International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks

This IPOA highlights the pressures faced by shark populations and aims to ensure their conservation and management. The plan applies to States in whose waters sharks are caught by domestic or foreign vessels, or States whose vessels catch sharks on the high seas. Such states should adopt a national plan of action to assess threats to shark populations, and implement strategies for sustainable catches. The Plan includes guidelines for a



shark plan, and sets out an outline for a shark assessment report.

The IPOA Sharks came into being in 1998, following a Technical Working Group meeting held in Tokyo in April 1998, and a final meeting in Rome held in October 26-30, 1998. IPOA Sharks describes the nature and scope of the problem, sets out the Plan's objective, and outlines principles and procedures for implementation.

The IPOA points out that for centuries, artisanal fishermen have sustainably fished coastal waters for sharks. But during recent decades, modern technology has increased effort and yield, and expanded the areas fished as well. Shark populations are therefore under tremendous pressure. Further, sharks take a long time to recover from overfishing (the reasons being low biological productivity because of late sexual maturity and few offsprings). The wide distribution of sharks and migration over a long area makes international co-operation in shark interventions imperative.

IPOA Sharks urges States that directly or indirectly facilitate shark fishing to evolve a shark plan in consultation with experienced regional fisheries organisations. Each State would be responsible for developing, implementing and monitoring its own plan. A typical shark plan should aim to

- ensure sustainable shark catch for direct and non-directed fisheries;
- assess threats, protect habits and ecosystems and introduce sustainable strategies;

- pay special attention to vulnerable and threatened shark stocks;
- involve all stakeholders in research, management and education; and
- enable species-specific collection of biological, trade and catch data.

Every four years the Shark Plan must be evaluated to determine efficient and cost-effective strategies. States that do not have a Shark Plan should periodically check their fisheries for changes in catch and landing data.

IPOA Sharks provides the outlines of a sample Shark Plan and a sample Shark Assessment Report to help member-States.



International Plan of Action for the Management of Fishing Capacity

This IPOA highlights issues related to excess fishing capacity in world fisheries, an increasing concern in the context of the CCRF. Excess fishing capacity contributes substantially to overfishing, the degradation of marine fisheries resources, decline of food production potential and significant economic waste.

The IPOA on management of fishing capacity aims to eliminate excess fishing capacity and ensure sustainable use of fishery resources. This IPOA was initiated by the Committee on Fisheries (COFI), implemented through a Technical Working Group organised by the FAO, and finalised in Rome at a meeting held from October 26 to 30, 1998.

Some of the guidelines for managing fishing capacity, based on the CCRF.

- States should implement the IPOA on management of fishing capacity directly or in co-operation with other States, regional fisheries/inter-governmental organisations. They should inform the FAO about action taken. FAO will provide regular updates about IPOA implementation.
- Plans should be implemented in three phases – assessment and diagnosis; adoption; and adjustment.
- Plans should consider all factors affecting capacity in national and international waters.
- The plans should promote conservation of marine ecosystems and sustainable use of fish stocks. They should focus on areas where overfishing is an established fact, and use only technologies that are environmentally sound. They should encourage efficient use of fishing capacity.
- The IPOA should be implemented in a transparent manner, in accordance with Article 6.13 of the CCRF.

Urgent Actions: Four sections cover items that need immediate action.

Section I deals with assessment and monitoring of fishing capacity. States should support effort and research at national, regional and global levels to improve understanding of this aspect. They should systematically identify fleets and fisheries that require urgent management. They should support the FAO in developing and maintaining compatible records of fishing vessels.

Section II deals with national plans of action for managing fisheries capacity. Plans should be developed, implemented and monitored, taking into account the effect of different resource management systems on fishing capacity. States should develop the means to monitor fishing capacity systematically and

accurately, they should consider socio-economic requirements, including alternative sources of employment and livelihood for fishing communities. States should review implementation of national plans at least every four years. States should co-operate regionally or internationally in research, training and information to ensure management of fishing capacity.

Section III: States should consider taking part in international agreements on management of fishing capacity. These could relate for example to the Law of the Sea, overfishing of high seas stocks, data collection on catches in the high seas and in coastal areas, or dealing with problem States that do not fulfil their responsibilities under international law.

Section IV: This relates to immediate actions for major international fisheries requiring urgent measures – priority being given to those harvesting transboundary, straddling, highly migratory and high seas stocks that are significantly overfished.

States should act to reduce fleet capacity applied to these resources.

International Plan of Action for Reducing Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries:

Seabirds are being caught incidentally in various commercial longline fisheries (such as those for tuna, swordfish and billfish). Incidental catch of seabirds may impact negatively on fishing productivity and profitability. A number of commissions, as well as countries such as Australia, Japan, New Zealand and the U.S. have studied and adopted seabird mitigation measures. The International Plan of Action for reducing incidental catch of seabirds in longline fisheries (IPOA Seabirds) was developed in 1998 through a meeting in Tokyo (March 1998) and a meeting in Rome (October 1998). IPOA Seabirds urges assessment of the problem; mitigation measures; research and

development; education, training and publicity; data collection programmes; and a variety of technical and operational measures.



International Plan of Action to stop illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU fishing) occurs in virtually all fisheries. It can cause an entire fishery to collapse. Examples of IUU fishing – violations of rules concerning fishing gear and fishing areas; misreporting or non-reporting of catches; reflagging of vessels (changing the flags of vessels to exploit countries that can't control fishing activity) What's the magnitude of IUU fishing? No one knows precisely, but it is believed that it accounts for a high percentage of total catches.

The IPOA-IUU was elaborated in draft at an expert consultation in Sydney in May 2000, adopted by consensus following further meetings at the 24th Session of COFI in March 2001, and endorsed by the FAO Council in Rome in June 2001.

The IPOA-IUU offers many tools for countries to combat IUU fishing – some designed for use by all, some to be used specifically by flag countries, coastal countries or port countries. It urges the adoption of national plans of action, co-operation between States, and research effort. It outlines internationally agreed market-related measures, and those to be carried out by regional organisations. The special requirements of developing countries are considered, reporting requirements are spelled out, the role of the FAO is explained.