

COFI 29 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 31 JANUARY 2011

The 29th Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) convened in plenary sessions throughout the day on Monday. COFI elected the Chair and Vice-Chairs and designated members of a Drafting Committee, and adopted the agenda, addressed progress in the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) and related instruments, and discussed the decisions and recommendations of the 12th Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

Outgoing Chair of COFI 28, Zbigniew Karnicki, Poland, opened the meeting. Ann Tutwiler, Deputy Director-General of FAO, welcomed delegates and said FAO looks forward to the guidance and recommendations of the Committee on important issues on the agenda.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: Election of Officers: Mohammad Pourkazemi, Iran, was elected Chair of COFI 29 and Johan Williams, Norway, was elected as first Vice-Chair. The other elected vice-chairs include Canada, India, Chile, Spain and Zimbabwe.

The US was elected Chair of the Drafting Committee, and other elected members include: Angola, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, China, the Republic of Congo, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, the Russian Federation, Sweden and Syria.

Adoption of the Agenda: COFI delegates adopted the agenda (COFI/2011/1) as amended. An Asia-Pacific Fisheries Ministerial Conference to be held in Sri Lanka and fisheries in the Gulf of Guinea will be discussed under "other matters."

THE STATE OF WORLD FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE 2010: Árni Mathiesen, Assistant Director-General, Fisheries and Aquaculture Department, FAO, presented the State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2010 (SOFIA 2010) report, highlighting major changes in the last 15 years, including, a rapid increase in aquaculture production, rising demand for fish and fisheries products and a global call for responsible management.

PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CCRF

In the morning, the Secretariat introduced documents on: Progress in the Implementation of the CCRF and Related Instruments (COFI/2011/2); Results of the Informal 2010 Pilot Test of the Electronic Questionnaire for the CCRF (COFI/2011/2/Supp.1); and Safety at Sea in the Fisheries Sector (COFI/INF.14). Many countries highlighted their efforts to implement the CCRF, including through adoption of legal and regulatory frameworks, cooperation through regional fisheries management organizations

(RFMOs) and the development and implementation of national plans of action (NPOAs), among other means.

In the morning, BRAZIL called on COFI to ensure the economic viability of fisheries and aquaculture in developing countries by, *inter alia*, fostering technical capacity, and adopting a proportional approach to balancing environmental, social and economic priorities.

NEW ZEALAND emphasized that FAO should focus on setting global standards for fisheries management and assisting developing countries in applying those standards. She also called for: a stocktaking exercise to examine the roles of other fisheries organizations to avoid duplication of work; development of an international standard for sustainability; and capacity building for developing countries.

CHINA stressed the importance of data collection on fisheries and aquaculture. ICELAND emphasized that FAO is the most appropriate forum for addressing fisheries and negotiating technical agreements for their management. ARGENTINA highlighted progress in the implementation of the CCRF *inter alia*, the new system of individual fishing quotas and a new integrated vessel monitoring system.

MOROCCO underscored national strategies to ensure sustainability and increase competitiveness of the fishing sector. TANZANIA noted the need for FAO to support infrastructure development and technology transfer in developing countries to provide equal grounds for compliance with the CCRF by all countries. GUATEMALA mentioned the integration of fisheries and aquaculture policies and other initiatives under the framework of the Organization for the Fishing and Aquaculture Sector of the Central American Isthmus (OSPESCA). MEXICO noted financial constraints to the implementation of the CCRF.

The US highlighted the 2010 Comprehensive Oceans Policy and the completion of the NPOA for sharks, as well as efforts to reduce sea bird bycatch. MAURITIUS drew attention to challenges including development of marine aquaculture, intercoastal management and fleet capacity. Commenting on the CCRF implementation report, the REPUBLIC OF CONGO pointed to shortcomings including lack of regional differentiation and the absence of reference to capacity building and training in the conclusions.

The EU called for stronger implementation of the FAO Technical Guidelines on the ecosystem approach to fisheries. INDIA highlighted the need to address inland fisheries and also underscored the value of traditional knowledge in fisheries management. NAMIBIA emphasized the creation and adoption of NPOAs for sharks, as well as monitoring of shark fishing nations, and called for addressing over-capacity to prevent the deterioration of fisheries.

THAILAND noted the importance of stakeholder

participation, particularly in the implementation of NPOAs, and requested continued technical support from FAO to developing countries. With the REPUBLIC OF KOREA, GUATEMALA, TURKEY and the GAMBIA, she emphasized the important role of RFMOs in the development and implementation of NPOAs. SRI LANKA highlighted actions to implement the CCRF, including regulations to limit gear and port state measures to prevent IUU fishing.

The REPUBLIC OF KOREA called for wider participation of stakeholders in fisheries management, and regional and bilateral programmes to support sustainable fisheries and aquaculture in developing countries. CAMEROON underscored that developed countries and FAO should provide assistance to ensure implementation of the CCRF in developing countries. GAMBIA highlighted challenges to disseminating the CCRF and associated NPOAs to communities.

NORWAY expressed support for increased coordination with other UN agencies. He said COFI should endorse the guidelines on bycatch and discard, and certification, and highlighted the importance of the international instrument on small-scale fisheries.

In the afternoon, the MALDIVES highlighted shark conservation initiatives including a buy-back scheme for shark fishers and the establishment of a shark trust fund. The SEYCHELLES underscored specific threats and challenges in the Western Indian Ocean including vulnerability to climate change and, with KENYA, the impact of piracy.

The EU, with ANGOLA and GHANA, noted concern over the low level of responses to the questionnaire on CCRF implementation. INDONESIA requested FAO to strengthen data collection on inland fisheries.

VENEZUELA outlined: domestic technical norms for artisanal trolling; an updated register for high sea vessels; and rights for small-scale fisheries. SOUTH AFRICA highlighted his country's efforts including: developing an NPOA for sharks and establishing a working group to implement the ecosystem approach. UKRAINE, ALGERIA, GHANA, ECUADOR, SAUDI ARABIA and the RUSSIAN FEDERATION highlighted regulatory and policy measures undertaken to implement the CCRF.

BANGLADESH underscored the need for financial and technical assistance to support public-private initiatives such as a national working group on fisheries. IRAQ noted the importance of inland fisheries and called for support to rebuild fisheries infrastructure destroyed by conflict.

On sharks, JAPAN emphasized a species-by-species approach, rather than a total ban on shark finning, and, on sea bass, said that regulations should account for the circumstances of individual fisheries in different regions, instead of taking a global approach.

CANADA prioritized the further development and implementation of guidelines for responsible fishing and global tools to combat IUU fishing, as well as deeper and broader implementation of the ecosystem approach to fisheries and aquaculture. SUDAN reiterated calls for the establishment of a regional commission for the Red Sea and assistance for developing the aquaculture industry. The FAROE ISLANDS emphasized the need for broad consensus on priority issues and guidelines on bycatch management.

The SUBREGIONAL FISHERIES COMMISSION called for sanctions for noncompliance with the CCRF. BAY OF BENGAL PROGRAMME - INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION, PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM FISHERIES AGENCY and other IGOs presented their efforts related to the implementation of the CCRF. REGIONAL FISHERIES COMMITTEE FOR THE GULF OF GUINEA, called for funding to ensure developing country participation in COFI sub-committee meetings and technical consultations.

SOUTHEAST ASIAN FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT CENTER said combating IUU fishing is a priority in their region.

The BENGUELA CURRENT COMMISSION said the Benguela Current Convention will be signed soon. The AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION OF ALBATROSSES AND PETRELS stressed the importance of adopting the guidelines on bycatch and discard proposed by FAO. The WORLD BANK noted that the PROFISH partnership provides funding for sustainable fisheries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

The INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS called for prioritizing small-scale fishers in management plans. Noting with concern the increase of fisheries in decline, the IUCN called for new methods of implementing the CCRF and called for banning shark finning.

The Secretariat noted recurring themes, including: the need to increase the response rate to the CCRF implementation questionnaire, including possibly through electronic means; concern related to the IPOA on sharks; and the need for capacity building, particularly on the ecosystem approach to fisheries.

DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 12TH SESSION OF THE COFI SUB-COMMITTEE ON FISH TRADE

Ramiro Sánchez, Argentina, COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade Chair, introduced this item (COFI/2011/3 and INF.8) and reported on the 12th session of the sub-committee, which took place from 26-30 April 2010, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He noted meeting outcomes including agreement on: development of an evaluation framework to assess the conformity of public and private ecolabelling schemes by FAO; the utility of traceability initiatives and the role of FAO in providing technical assistance in implementing them; and development of a trade-specific questionnaire.

The Secretariat highlighted outcomes of further work since the sub-committee meeting, including the report of the Expert Consultation on the Development of FAO Guidelines for Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Inland Capture Fisheries, held from 25-27 May 2010, in Rome, Italy (COFI/2011/INF.13) and the report of the Expert Consultation to Develop a FAO Evaluation Framework to Assess the Conformity of Public and Private Ecolabelling Schemes with the FAO Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries, held from 24-26 November 2010, in Rome, Italy (FIR/R958).

Discussions on this agenda item will continue.

IN THE CORRIDORS

As delegates streamed out of plenary at the close of the opening day of COFI 29, the perennial issue in the minds of many delegates was IUU fishing, with several desiring that significant progress be made during the week. "Hopefully we'll see concrete policy change at this meeting," said one delegate. In the wake of the approval of the Agreement on port state measures to prevent and eliminate IUU fishing, some were eager to discuss specific steps to be taken by countries to combat IUU fishing.

At the evening reception, the buzz among some concerned the duplication of efforts and governance challenges associated with the plethora of processes addressing fisheries including the UN Straddling and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks Agreement, UN General Assembly resolutions and processes, the International Maritime Organization, the World Trade Organization, as well as multilateral environmental agreements and other initiatives such as the High Seas Task Force. "There are just too many fishermen trying to catch the same fish," quipped one seasoned delegate.