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SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL MEETING - JUNE 2000

A SUMMARY OF FAO, ACFR WORKING PARTY ON STATUS AND TRENDS OF FISHERIES MEETING
30 NOVEMBER-3 DECEMBER 1999, ROME

by

Assistant Executive Secretary

At its meeting during 3-16 June 1999, the Scientific Council considered NAFO representation at international meetings as valuable for the Council and **recommended** that *NAFO should be represented by the Executive Secretary or Assistant Executive Secretary at the 30 November-3 December 1999 Meeting of FAO ACFR in Rome*.

The Assistant Executive Secretary attended the meeting. The following is a summary (the full report is available at NAFO Secretariat).

INTRODUCTION

1. Meeting of the ACFR Working Party on Status and Trends of Fisheries was held during 30 November to 3 December 1999 at FAO Headquarters, Rome. Participants included 17 experts from regional fishery bodies (5 FAO and 6 non-FAO), international organizations and institutions concerned with fishery status and trends reporting. The Chairperson of the Advisory Committee on Fisheries Research (ACFR), Mr. M. Sissenwine, an expert from the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) and several FAO Fisheries Department staff also participated. A list of participating bodies is given at App. 1.
2. The Director of the FAO Fishery Resources Division, Mr. S. Garcia, opened the meeting on behalf of Mr. D. Harcharik, Officer-in-Charge, Fisheries Department. He informed members that they had been appointed for two years in their individual capacity in recognition of their expertise in the subject of the Working Party and their experience with the workings of regional fishery bodies or international organizations concerned with status and trends reporting for fisheries.
3. Mr. Garcia explained the background to the meeting. The First Session of ACFR (Rome, 25-28 November 1997) had identified research topics that need to be emphasized in the future in order to fill critical scientific gaps. One such area was fishery status and trends reporting. ACFR recognized that there is a "high demand for such information from policy makers, environmentalists who are increasingly concerned about fisheries, and the public". However, the Committee believed that current fishery status and trends reporting by FAO relied too heavily on traditional catch and trade statistics, whereas "there is a critical need for data relevant to fleet capacity, participation in fisheries, economic performance and distribution".
4. Another critical element of the research need identified by ACFR concerning statistics and status and trends was for the "design of quality criteria and quality assurance protocols". As planning for a Living Marine Resources (LMR) module of the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS) gathers momentum, ACFR advised that it was particularly important that FAO prepares itself with a scientifically based plan for improving data collection and assessments of status and trends of fisheries using a multifaceted approach which could benefit from more formal processes to involve regional fishery bodies (both FAO and non-FAO) and individual experts. ACFR stated that a multifaceted approach is needed including (a) an evaluation of the types of data and assessments that are needed by researchers and policy makers, (b) development of data collection mechanisms and design of a data management system, (c) establishment of a national commitment to provide data, and (d) arrangements

for involvement of regional fishery bodies, and non-FAO experts in a consensus seeking process for conducting assessments of status and trends.

5. As a mechanism to provide leadership on this, ACFR further proposed as a priority the establishment by FAO of this Working Party on Status and Trends of Fisheries. The Working Party will report to the Second Session of ACFR. The terms of reference for the Working Party are to:
 - a) Evaluate data needs for status and trends reporting on a global scale on marine fisheries, including fishery resources, fishing fleet capacity, participation in fisheries and economic performance, and propose a common template of essential information elements which could be used by the main providers of status and trends reports;
 - b) Propose arrangements for the involvement of regional fishery bodies and non-FAO experts in a consensus-seeking process for assembling, reviewing and disseminating fishery status and trends information (including reporting to COFI);
 - c) Advise on the relationship between FAO's data collection and status and trends reporting program and the Living Marine Resources module of the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS); and
 - d) Report on these to ACFR.
6. The Technical Secretary conveyed apologies from the North Pacific Marine Science Organization (PICES) and the Parties to the process for the establishment of the Southeast Atlantic Fisheries Organization (SEAFO) for their inability to participate in the meeting.
7. The Working Party appointed Messrs Garcia and Sissenwine as co-chairpersons and Messrs Grainger and Evans, from the FAO Secretariat, served as rapporteurs.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8. The value and success of FAO's status and trends reporting is amply demonstrated by frequent reference to the reports by policy makers (e.g. delegates to COFI), stakeholders (both the fishing industry and environmental NGOs), and the public (i.e. media reports). Status and trends reports have, to a substantial degree, stimulated recent conservation and management initiatives, such as the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the UN Fish Stocks Agreement, application of the Precautionary Approach, and the International Plan of Action for Fishing Capacity. Status and trends reporting will play a critical role in evaluating the performance of these and other initiatives.
9. Owing to the importance of status and trends reports, and the scrutiny they receive, the Working Party recommended that the global system of status and trends reporting be advanced by:
 - Increasing completeness by including some fisheries and fishery resources that are currently under-represented;
 - Expanding the scope of current reports which are primarily on catch and fishery resource information to include other dimensions of fisheries (e.g. reports on economic and social aspects); and
 - Enhancing quality assurance and credibility by (a) renewing commitment to collect and report fisheries data, conduct research, and build capacity, (b) greater involvement of regional experts, and (c) improving documentation, transparency, and peer review processes.
10. The Working Party endorsed FAO's recent development of an advanced Web-based fisheries information system for status and trends information (currently referred to as FIGIS) as a critical tool for advancing status and trend reporting.
11. A International Plan of Action to advance status and trends reporting on world fisheries should be prepared, including consideration of:

- Steps to complete development of a status and trends information database (e.g. develop user requirements, functional and technical design specifications and conduct prototype testing using case studies and address information exchange and quality concerns);
 - Capacity building and arrangements for using FIGIS, including protocols addressing the quality of information to be included in the system;
 - Development of cost-effective methods for acquiring and validating information on the status and trends of small-scale fisheries and multispecies fisheries;
 - An inventory of world fisheries and stocks;
 - Priority for expanding the scope of status and trends reporting;
 - Appropriate partnership arrangements with existing regional bodies, and other entities that can contribute useful scientific information, that specify roles and responsibilities;
 - Identification of needs and opportunities for new regional arrangements where appropriate arrangements do not now exist;
 - Practical guidelines for quality assurance incorporating peer review processes, with objective non-governmental scientific experts, into a system for status and trends reporting; and
 - The role of local, regional, and global scientific working parties as a vehicle for Status and Trend reporting, capacity building, and quality assurance.
12. Working Party stresses that development of the International Plan of Action to advance status and trends reporting should not delay initiatives FAO is already taking, such as the development of FIGIS.
13. Status and Trend reporting system envisioned by the Working Party should serve as a framework for status and trends reporting of additional indicators, in response to the need to monitor performance of recent and future international initiatives.

A framework of approaches for an International Plan of Action is currently being developed. The approaches were interpreted within two general areas:

Program and Project Approaches

- Database development for fishery status and trends
- FIGIS participation, structuring and capacity building
- Data collection systems in small-scale fisheries (including development of approaches in data poor situations)
- Global inventory of fisheries and stocks
- Development of an ecosystem approach to status and trends reporting

System and Management Approaches

- Expansion of scope of status and trends reporting and the development of new arrangements for reporting where none now exist
- Development of partnerships arrangements
- Development of criteria and methods for ensuring information security (confidentiality, transparency), information quality assurance (pedigree, robustness) and peer review (objectivity, best scientific evidence)
- Development of institutional mechanisms and a hierarchy of roles in local, regional and global working parties

List of Participating Bodies

ASIA PACIFIC FISHERY COMMISSION (APFIC)
COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF CCAMLR ANTARCTIC MARINE LIVING RESOURCES (CCAMLR)
FISHERY COMMITTEE FOR THE EASTERNCENTRAL ATLANTIC (CECAF)
GENERAL FISHERIES COMMISSION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN (GFCM)
INDIAN OCEAN TUNA COMMISSION (IOTC)
INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION (IOC)
INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR LIVING AQUATIC RESOURCES ICLARM MANAGEMENT (ICLARM)
INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF ATLANTIC TUNAS (ICCAT)
INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE EXPLORATION OF THE SEA (ICES)
NORTHWEST ATLANTIC FISHERIES ORGANIZATION (NAFO)
PERMANENT SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION (CPPS)
SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY(SPC)
WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION (WECAFC)
WORLD CONSERVATION UNION (IUCN)
WORLD RESOURCES INSTITUTE (WRI)
WORLD WILDLIFE FUND (WWF)