

THE 30TH SESSION OF THE FAO COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES: 9-13 JULY 2012

The 30th session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) convenes today at the FAO headquarters in Rome, Italy. During the week, delegates are expected to discuss: world fisheries and aquaculture: status, issues and needs; progress in the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) and related instruments; decisions and recommendations of COFI's two sub-committees on aquaculture and fish trade; ocean governance and relevant outcomes from the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD or Rio+20); recent major developments and future work in selected fisheries and aquaculture activities of the FAO, including an update on the development of International Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries and combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing; FAO's programme of work on fisheries and aquaculture; and COFI's multi-year programme of work.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FAO COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

The Food and Agriculture Organization Committee on Fisheries, a subsidiary body of the FAO Council, was founded at the 13th FAO Conference in 1965. Currently COFI is the only global intergovernmental forum where major international fisheries and aquaculture problems are addressed. Responsible for review of the FAO work programme on fisheries, COFI also undertakes periodic reviews of international fishery problems and examines possible solutions. COFI also reviews and makes recommendations on specific matters referred to it by the FAO Council or the Director-General or at the request of member countries. COFI currently has 137 members and has two subsidiary bodies: the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture and the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade.

COFI convened negotiations for two major international instruments adopted by the FAO Conference: the CCRF and the Agreement to Promote Compliance with International Conservation and Management Measures by Fishing Vessels on the High Seas (Compliance Agreement).

The CCRF, adopted in 1995, is a voluntary code containing principles and standards on the conservation, management and development of all fisheries. Its provisions encompass: the capture, processing and trade of fish and fishery products; fishing operations; aquaculture; and fisheries research and integration of fisheries into coastal area management.

Implementation of the CCRF has been facilitated through the adoption of four International Plans of Action (IPOA): Reducing Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries (IPOA-Seabirds); Conservation and Management of Sharks (IPOA-Sharks); Management of Fishing Capacity (IPOA-Capacity); and Prevent, Deter, and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IPOA-IUU). These IPOAs and related provisions of the CCRF are implemented through National Plans of Action (NPOA) and technical guidelines.

The Compliance Agreement, adopted in 1993, requires flag state parties to act to ensure vessels flying the state's flag do not undermine international conservation and management measures. The Agreement establishes a record of fishing vessels authorized for fishing on the high seas.

COFI also contributed to the adoption of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1982 and the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of UNCLOS relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks (UN Fish Stocks Agreement) in 1995. Issues covered by COFI have included vessel and gear marking, food security, aquaculture, international trade, fleet capacity, and by-catch and discards. In recent years, COFI has focused on: management of fisheries capacity; IUU fishing; sharks; and seabirds. COFI meets every two years at FAO headquarters in Rome, Italy.

COFI 24: The 24th session of the Committee on Fisheries (26 February to 2 March 2001) established the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture and adopted the IPOA-IUU under the CCRF.

COFI 25: The 25th session of COFI (24-28 February 2003): approved the Strategy for Improving Information on Status and Trends of Capture Fisheries and recommended its approval by the FAO Conference; reaffirmed the need to implement measures against IUU fishing; recognized the importance of the CCRF and associated IPOAs in promoting sustainable fisheries; and encouraged members to advance NPOAs to implement the IPOAs on fishing capacity, IUU fishing, sharks and seabirds.

COFI 26: The 26th session of COFI (7-11 March 2005) called for a decade of implementation measures to ensure responsible fisheries, including by putting into practice the CCRF and its associated instruments. COFI also encouraged FAO to develop further guidelines to support the CCRF, including for the IPOA on fishing capacity. Guidelines on seafood ecolabelling were also adopted.

COFI 27: The 27th session of COFI (5-9 March 2007) addressed the implementation of the IPOAs on fishing capacity, IUU fishing, sharks and seabirds. COFI also encouraged

members to join or cooperate with the International Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Network and to develop a legally binding instrument based on the Model Scheme on Port State Measures to Combat IUU fishing and the IPOA-IUU.

COFI 28: The 28th session of COFI (2-6 March 2009) recommended the development of best practice for safety at sea and that technical guidelines be published offering best practices for the IPOA on seabirds. The Committee supported further work on guidelines for ecolabelling of fish and fishery products from inland capture fisheries and recommended that FAO provide technical advice to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) on the matter of listing proposals for commercial-aquatic fisheries and to the World Trade Organization (WTO) on fish-subsidy negotiations. Reaffirming the threat to sustainable fisheries posed by IUU fishing, COFI noted the importance of negotiating a legally binding agreement on port state measures.

COFI 29: The 29th session of COFI (31 January - 4 February 2011) approved Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Inland Capture Fisheries, and FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture. The Committee also considered: reports on the implementation of the CCRF and the IPOAs; climate change as it affects fisheries and aquaculture; improving integration of fisheries and aquaculture development and management with biodiversity conservation and environmental protection; and governance of small-scale fisheries.

INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

IPC-12: The 12th meeting of the UN Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea (ICP or Consultative Process) convened at the UN Headquarters in New York from 20-24 June 2011 to discuss: sustainable development, oceans and the law of the sea; an overview of progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of oceans- and seas-related outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development; new and emerging challenges for the sustainable development and use of oceans and seas; and the road to Rio+20 and beyond.

66TH SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY: The UN General Assembly resolution on Sustainable Fisheries (A/Res/66/68) called on states to, *inter alia*: achieve sustainable fisheries by prioritizing work on the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation; cooperate via sub-regional, regional and global organizations to address the effects of climate change on fish stocks and habitats; and submit catch and effort data to the FAO. States are also urged to continue working to implement the Compliance Agreement and to develop appropriate national and, where necessary, regional plans to implement the FAO's IPOAs. Further sections provide attention to: IUU fishing; monitoring, control and surveillance and compliance and enforcement; fishing overcapacity; large-scale pelagic drift-net fishing; fisheries by-catch and discards; sub-regional and regional cooperation; responsible fisheries in the marine environment; capacity building; and cooperation with the UN system.

OCEANS DAY AT DURBAN: Oceans Day was held in Durban, South Africa, on 3 December 2011, on the sidelines of the 17th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This third Oceans Day, which was convened by the Global Forum on Oceans, Coasts and Islands, focused on seven discussion sessions: oceans and coasts at the UNFCCC and at Rio+20; climate change and African fisheries; evidence of climate change from the large marine ecosystems; progress on major oceans and climate issues; oceans and climate issues in small island developing states; capacity building and public education; and monitoring action on oceans and climate.

FIFTH MEETING OF THE AD HOC OPEN-ENDED INFORMAL WORKING GROUP TO STUDY ISSUES RELATING TO THE CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF MARINE BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY BEYOND AREAS OF NATIONAL JURISDICTION (BBNJ): The Working Group convened at UN Headquarters in New York from 7-11 May 2012. Delegates discussed three issues: sharing of benefits from marine genetic resources, area-based management tools, such as protected areas, and environmental impact assessments, capacity building, and the transfer of marine technology; the organization of intersessional workshops aimed at improving understanding of these issues and clarifying key questions as an input to the work of the Working Group; and the identification of gaps and ways forward with a view to ensuring an effective legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

Following substantive debates on whether to recommend the launch of formal negotiations on a new implementing agreement to UNCLOS, the Working Group recommended that the General Assembly task it to continue to consider all issues under its mandate as a package with a view to making progress on ways forward. The Working Group also adopted terms of reference for two intersessional workshops that are expected to improve understanding of issues before the Working Group and thus lead to a more informed and productive debate at its next meeting in the second half of 2013. The Working Group's recommendations will be submitted to the General Assembly at its 67th session in September 2012.

ICP-13: The 13th meeting of the Consultative Process convened at UN Headquarters in New York from 28 May to 1 June 2012. The meeting focused on: types, uses and the role of marine renewable energies in sustainable development; ongoing or planned marine renewable energies projects and work at the global and regional levels; and opportunities and challenges in the development of marine renewable energies, including for cooperation and coordination. A Co-Chairs' summary of discussions from the meeting will be forwarded to the General Assembly for consideration at its 67th session.

UN CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: The UNCSD and its preparatory meetings took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from 13-22 June 2012. The section on oceans in the outcome document, "The Future We Want," stresses the importance of the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and coastal areas; highlights the work of UNCLOS and other intergovernmental processes on oceans; and recognizes the extant work of the *Ad hoc* Working Group on BBNJ, which includes committing to address the issue in some manner before the end of the 69th session of the UN General Assembly. Additional paragraphs address, *inter alia*: the threat of alien invasive species; sea-level rise and coastal erosion; ocean acidification and fertilization; maintaining or restoring depleted fish stocks, including through development and implementation of science-based management plans; implementation of the UN Fish Stocks Agreement by its parties and the FAO's CCRF and IPOAs and technical guidelines; eliminating IUU fishing; recognizing the need for transparency and accountability in fisheries management by regional fisheries management organizations; encouraging states to eliminate subsidies that contribute to IUU and overcapacity, without prejudicing ongoing WTO negotiations; capacity-building strategies for conservation and sustainable use, including through improved market access for fish; access to fisheries and markets by subsistence, small-scale and artisanal fishers and indigenous peoples; contributions of coral reefs; and the importance of area-based conservation measures, including marine protected areas.