

COFI 30 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 9 JULY 2012

The 30th 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 heard a presentation from the FAO Director General and considered and approved the agenda and arrangements for the session and the designation of the Drafting Committee. Discussion on the revised Rules of Procedure of the Committee and related changes in practice was deferred to Thursday. For the remainder of the day, COFI discussed world fisheries and aquaculture: status, issues and needs, and progress in the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) and related instruments.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

Chair Mohammed Pourkazemi (Islamic Republic of Iran) opened the meeting. José Graziano da Silva, Director General, FAO, said FAO has narrowed its strategic objectives to: eradicating hunger and food insecurity; increasing production of agriculture and fisheries; improving rural populations' livelihoods, especially for women; enabling more inclusive food systems; and increasing resilience to threats and crises. da Silva commended the outcome of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD or Rio+20) regarding oceans.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: Adoption of the

Agenda: COFI delegates adopted the agenda (COFI/2012/1). Under "other matters," the ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN requested that time be allocated to discuss the threat of piracy for fishing business vessels.

Election of Officers: The current bureau will remain and a new bureau will be elected at the end of COFI30. The bureau comprises: Mohammad Pourkazemi (Islamic Republic of Iran) as Chair and Johan Williams (Norway) as first Vice-Chair. The other Vice-Chairs include Canada, India, Chile, Spain and Zimbabwe. The Drafting Committee, chaired by the US, consists of Argentina, Canada, Burkina Faso, Cyprus, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Oman, Sri Lanka, and Kenya.

Adoption of the revised Rules of Procedure of the Committee and related changes in practice (COFI/2012/9):

At the request of ARGENTINA and Peru, for the LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GROUP, this agenda item was postponed until Thursday.

WORLD FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE: STATUS, ISSUES AND NEEDS: Árni Mathiesen, Assistant Director-General, Fisheries and Aquaculture, FAO, presented the State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2012 (SOFIA 2012) report, reviewing production, demand and trade trends in aquaculture and fisheries sectors.

Richard Grainger, FAO Fisheries Information and Statistics, discussed: a new programme funded by FAO and Global Environment Facility for sustainable management of fisheries resources and biodiversity conservation in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ); a system to monitor interactions between the economy and the environment; work with International Maritime Organization (IMO) on guidelines to control discarded fishing gear and marine debris.

BRAZIL called on FAO to concentrate on the economic viability of fisheries and aquaculture practices to ensure food security, and stressed the importance of free trade in fisheries products.

BANGLADESH, supported by INDIA and NICARAGUA, called for the SOFIA report to be distributed more widely, translated into more languages, and include the effects of other sectors on fisheries. The EU, supported by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, NORWAY, ICELAND, CANADA, NAMIBIA, the US, and the PHILLIPPINES, asked that SOFIA be released before COFI meetings to ensure adequate time for delegates to consider the report.

MAURITIUS, supported by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, asked for clarification on where the 13% of fish stocks that are not fully exploited are located.

THAILAND opined that success stories on how countries are implementing fisheries measures would be useful.

ANGOLA said SOFIA should remain a specialized publication tailored to address critical fisheries challenges. Supported by MOZAMBIQUE, GHANA and BRAZIL, he called for continued FAO work on IUU fishing.

EU expressed concern about the increasing stress on global fish stocks, noting too many remain overexploited. He added that: limited data availability is a key challenge for many stocks; more work is needed to reduce aquaculture demand for fish feed; and the overshooting of catch targets by deep-sea fisheries warrants concern.

MOZAMBIQUE, supported by CHILE, noted the importance of discussions among Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs), and supported work by the FAO to help countries advance fishing in ABNJ.

SOUTH AFRICA said SOFIA provides guidance for policy development and decision-making and called on FAO to propose measures to improve ocean governance aligned with the Rio+20 outcomes. ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN suggested that FAO develop a detailed approach for mariculture, with BURKINA FASO adding that aquaculture production can help achieve the Millennium Development Goals. ICELAND emphasized gender mainstreaming in aquaculture, with CANADA and NAMIBIA noting the economic benefits of aquaculture. KENYA detailed a programme promoting the aquaculture sector and the food and jobs it provides.

NORWAY, supported by NEW ZEALAND, INDIA, the US, and BRAZIL, noted problems with the present categories of stock exploitation and suggested two alternative categories – stocks harvested at sustainable versus unsustainable levels – with additional sub-categories. NEW ZEALAND stressed the relevance of social issues, such as the poor treatment of fishing crews.

SENEGAL lamented that the imbalance of fishing capacity has not been addressed in the SOFIA report. COOK ISLANDS called for nations fishing along coasts of small-island developing states (SIDS) to reduce fishing efforts. MALDIVES lamented worldwide mismanagement of fisheries, saying RFMOs are incapable of solving global management issues.

SIERRA LEONE and SEYCHELLES called for increased coastal and flag state responsibility vis-à-vis IUU and capacity for fisheries management.

The US welcomed the focus on small-scale and artisanal fisheries. JAPAN lamented the expansion of purse seine fleet size in the Eastern and West and Central Pacific Oceans and its damaging impact on bigeye tuna stocks.

The PHILIPPINES expressed that, following Rio+20, COFI needs to support green growth. REPUBLIC OF KOREA announced their Green Growth Aquaculture Workshop in December 2012, focusing on issues regarding feed, waste discharge and escape.

SOUTHEAST ASIAN FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT CENTER recommended FAO continue working with partners to advance awareness of fisheries and aquaculture issues among Southeast Asian countries.

INFOPECSA noted the need for up-to-date market information, and reviewed their work on knowledge transfer and gender issues. THE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON FISHERIES COOPERATION AMONG AFRICAN STATES BORDERING THE ATLANTIC OCEAN said they have partnered with FAO to develop the African Network of Women in Fisheries, and called for a COFI sub-committee on gender issues.

THE BENGUELA CURRENT COMMISSION explained the fisheries management and assessment work of the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem, including an analysis of fisheries over the past decades to assess impacts of climate on fisheries. AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION OF ALBATROSSES AND PETRELS said it hopes to work with FAO to include by-catch information in future SOFIA reports. INFOPECHE noted its goal of boosting marketing of fisheries products from Africa.

WORLD FORUM ON FISHER PEOPLES and MANGROVE NETWORK expressed concerns that industrial fishing fleets intend to shift operations to tropical and subtropical areas. SUB-REGIONAL FISHERIES COMMISSION OF WEST AFRICA noted an advisory mechanism they are developing to increase fisheries governance capacity. LAKE TANGANYIKA TECHNICAL AUTHORITY highlighted improved national attention to riparian fisheries management.

GREENPEACE, PEW and IUCN said the categories for fish stock exploitation should not be oversimplified, expressed concern that only 13% of fish stocks are underexploited, and called for urgent action to restore fish stocks. INTERNATIONAL COALITION OF FISHERIES ASSOCIATIONS supported the “sustainable” and “unsustainable” categories for stock assessments, noting the goal is to fully exploit fish stocks.

CARIBBEAN REGIONAL FISHERY MECHANISM stressed the importance of FAO’s technical assistance, particularly to SIDS for improving governance frameworks. FISHERIES COMMITTEE FOR THE WEST CENTRAL GULF OF GUINEA called for more emphasis on aquaculture to increase supply of fish in Africa. PEOPLE’S COALITION ON FOOD SOVEREIGNTY stressed the need for prioritization of information relevant for improving the lives of small-scale fishers.

In response, the FAO Secretariat said it would consider advanced circulation of SOFIA; non-fully exploited stocks were so far not considered commercially attractive; use of wild fish stocks for fish meal production has decreased in preference for fish offal and waste; and that the fish-stock exploitation levels have already been changed to three new categories – non-fully, fully and over exploited.

PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT FOR RESPONSIBLE FISHERIES AND RELATED INSTRUMENTS, INCLUDING INTERNATIONAL PLANS OF ACTION AND STRATEGIES, AND OTHER MATTERS: David Douman, FAO, explained that the report (COFI/2012/3) provides an overview of the results of self-assessment questionnaires, but noted the very low response rates compared with previous years. He expressed alarm that where stock-specific harvest reference points were in place, the majority were either being approached or exceeded. On safety at sea and cooperation between FAO, IMO and International Labor Organization, he said new safety

standards for small-scale fishing vessels will soon be published. He noted that several countries lack legal and institutional frameworks for aquaculture but that about 75% of responding members indicate they are promoting responsible aquaculture practices.

Many delegates expressed concern about the low response rate. The EU stressed that stock-specific harvest reference points have often been exceeded and called for strengthened national policies. MAURITIUS suggested that the low response rates might be due to the questionnaire being voluntary. COOK ISLANDS said the low response rate does not reflect a lack of adherence to CCRF and added that having RFMOs report would also be useful. CHILE added that yes / no answers predetermine responses. CANADA said the questionnaire is the key tool for demonstrating commitment and identifying gaps and challenges. Supported by BRAZIL, she recommended developing an online system for electronic questionnaires.

Cyprus, for the EU, described progress on implementing the IPOAs such as an IUU-fishing policy introduced in 2010 and an EU Plan of Action on the conservation and management of sharks.

CAMEROON, supported by CÔTE D’IVOIRE, said putting the CCRF principles into practice is difficult when dealing with ethnically diverse and illiterate fishers and called for better implementation of Article 5 of CCRF on the special requirements of developing countries.

JAPAN underlined ongoing efforts to report on the NPOAs on seabird and sharks, and noted that Japan opposes shark finning and supports sustainable management of shark fisheries. MOZAMBIQUE welcomed interest and assistance for creating a regional coordination center for monitoring, control and surveillance, fisheries management initiatives, aquaculture and by-catch reduction. AUSTRALIA highlighted their activities, including on: sharks, banning wire traces, and assessing seabird interactions with gill and purse seine nets. Nicaragua, spoke on OSPESCA countries’ efforts on implementing responsible management, including entry into force of the Code of Ethics for Responsible Fisheries and Aquaculture in the States of Central America.

ECUADOR noted progress on CCRF relating to the value chain for equatorial tuna. VENEZUELA said they have approved fisheries and aquaculture laws and established technical standards governing the activities of artisanal fishers. CHILE described a new law against shark finning and testing and use of improved gear to prevent capture of birds and destructive trawling. CANADA requested more detailed analyses including catch limits, species-specific reporting, and shark finning prohibitions for vessels beyond national waters.

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN recommended that regional surveys be carried out and for FAO members to help combat IUU of sturgeon in the Caspian Sea. PALAU described a shark sanctuary and efforts to combat IUU fishing.

INDONESIA and CÔTE D’IVOIRE described work done to incorporate the principles of the CCRF into legislature.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Out of step with its biennial cycle of January meetings, the 30th session of COFI began its deliberations while transitioning to a new position in the FAO’s overall meeting sequence. A move intended to improve COFI’s flow of outcomes to coincide with other FAO meeting and resource-allocation cycles. At the end of the first day, the outcomes of COFI30 remains to be seen as, according to one delegate, “with COFI, you’re not going to know until Friday.” Nevertheless, it is clear that delegates came to this session with diverse aims, and the prominence of oceans in the Rio+20 outcome document, “The Future We Want,” helped to underscore the clear and potentially growing salience of ocean issues. Measures advancing the roles of port states and ecosystem approaches to fisheries management were among the priorities for some delegates, whereas others stressed that the FAO needs to concentrate on COFI’s current multi-year programme of work rather than take on new issues. Still other delegates expressed surprise at the removal of issues relating to the effect of climate change on fisheries and aquaculture saying that neglecting these issues decreases momentum built at Rio+20 regarding “greening the blue” economy.