

Salient aquaculture issues discussed at the fifth session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI)

Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 12–14 May 2009

Alessandro Lovatelli

Aquaculture Management and Conservation Service
FAO Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, Rome, Italy
Alessandro.Lovatelli@fao.org

The fifth session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) was held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates from 12 to 14 May 2009. The Commission reviewed a range of regional issues and activities of importance to the conservation and management of fisheries and aquaculture. Members addressed intersessional activities and provided country reports. Administrative and financial reports were also considered. It was noted that as of 31 December 2008, eight Members had deposited their instruments of acceptance for the RECOFI Agreement.

The Commission discussed the report of the Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA) including the fourth meeting of the WGA (see FAN issue April 2009 No. 42), Regional Aquaculture Information System (RAIS), development of a regional strategy for aquatic animal health (see FAN issue December 2008 No. 41), sustainable marine cage aquaculture development (see FAN issue April 2009 No. 42) and a legal and policy framework for aquaculture.

Members also reviewed the structure and functioning of the Commission (see Box 1), its organization and *modus operandi* and terms of reference for RECOFI National Focal Points. In considering the programme of work and budget for the May 2009–May 2011 biennium the Commission approved seven activities for implementation.

Harmful Algal Blooms – Among the emerging issues discussed at the session, several Members recognized that the phenomenon of harmful algal blooms (HABs) was an urgent technical issue to be addressed. Although this phenomenon was not new in the region, recent outbreaks had caused serious damages to fish cage culture throughout the region, particularly in Oman and the United Arab Emirates where commercial companies had lost their entire production. It was noted that red tide also seriously affected capture fisheries and therefore it was agreed that the two RECOFI Working Groups on aquaculture and fishery management should plan for the current biennium (2009–2011) a joint activity covering this issue in close cooperation with other regional organizations, such as the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME).

Regional Aquaculture Information System (RAIS) – The Commission welcomed the official launching of RAIS (see FAN issue April 2009 No. 42) with the distribution of the RAIS User Manual and congratulated the Secretariat and all

BOX 1

Strengthening RECOFI

At the fifth session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI), the Commission agreed to hold an *ad hoc* intersessional meeting in the Islamic Republic of Iran to consider ways and means to enhance RECOFI's role. Members recognised the need to make the Commission more efficient and to accelerate its growth. It is expected that the *ad hoc* intersessional meeting will consider funding options in order to strengthen the Commission and achieve planned activities which the current funding does not allow. With respect of the funding RECOFI activities, some Members indicated the benefit of seeking funds from organizations and institutions that had not funded traditionally Commission activities. It is also expected that the *ad hoc* intersessional meeting will address issues such as the role of the Chair in facilitating sessions and promoting intersessional activities, the possibility to exercise fisheries management power as per the Commission's status and seeking cooperation and partnership with other organizations in the Region that are involved with aquaculture, fisheries and related issues.

the WGA Focal Points for the achievement. Furthermore, the Government of Kuwait's extrabudgetary support that permitted the establishment of this regional information system was acknowledged. In order to further develop and consolidate this web-based information system it was strongly recommended to fully launch the communication strategy developed by the RAIS National Coordinators/National Focal Points as well as to establish national networks of authorized data entry users. It was also noted that to ensure the system's utility and visibility all Members should continue to input validated national data and information.

Regional Aquatic Animal Health Strategy – The Commission Members recognized that the issue of aquatic animal health was very important in aquaculture. Health threats relevant to the sustainability of aquaculture and the protection of capture fisheries included, *inter alia*, exotic

pathogens, diseases, contaminants, transboundary movement of aquatic animals. The urgent need to harmonize national programmes on aquatic animal health was reiterated along with the development of national strategy on aquatic animal health. The Commission endorsed the “Proposal for a regional programme for improving aquatic animal health in RECOFI Member countries” along with its components, elements and activities developed by the WGA. Furthermore, it noted that the report of the regional aquatic animal health workshop provided an excellent roadmap for Members to follow. It included actions and activities that would be implemented incrementally, some at the national level while others as regionally coordinated activities.

Marine Cage Aquaculture Development – The Commission noted that although there was a growing interest in developing cage aquaculture in the region, there were technical, physical and policy constraints that were faced currently by Members. The major constraints identified in the establishment of fish cages had been the limited availability of suitable farming sites characterized by shallow waters, highly fluctuating salinity and temperature levels and inadequate sea currents. Other limitations identified included: (i) price competition from wild-caught fish; (ii) inadequate farming technologies for the region (i.e. introduction and poor adaptation of existing technologies used elsewhere); and (iii) the limited availability of endemic candidate species of commercial importance suitable for cage aquaculture (currently many existing operations farmed the Gilthead seabream, *Sparus aurata*, and the European seabass, *Dicentrarchus labrax*, voluntarily introduced from the Mediterranean). The Commission further endorsed the two guiding proposals formulated by the WGA for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) framework and licensing procedure and encouraged strengthening regional collaboration to promote further sustainable marine cage aquaculture.



Delegation of Oman. From left to right: Dr Ibrahim Al-Busaidi, Director General for Fisheries Development, Ministry of Fisheries Wealth; Mr Dawood S. Al-Yahyai, Director, Fishermen Training Institute and RECOFI-WGA Chairperson; Mr Fahad Saleh Ibrahim, Acting Director, Aquaculture Centre



Participants to the 5th RECOFI session

The table below lists the aquaculture activities endorsed by the Commission for the current biennium May 2009 to May 2011.

Aquaculture	Risk analysis in aquaculture (training)	TBD*	Oman	3–4 days	Approved
Aquaculture	Environmental monitoring in aquaculture (training)	TBD	TBD	10–14 days	Approved
Aquaculture / Fisheries (joint activity)	Red tides: Impacts on capture fisheries and aquaculture and counter measures (technical workshop)	2010	Kuwait	3–4 days	Approved
Aquaculture / Fisheries (joint activity)	Geographical Information System (GIS) and spatial tools applications for capture fishery and aquaculture	2010	Qatar	3–4 days	Approved
Aquaculture	Regional Aquaculture Information System (development and consolidation)	--	--	5 days	Ongoing

*TBD to be determined