

The birth of the Network of Aquaculture in the Americas (Red de Acuicultura de las Americas, RAA)

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Aquaculture networks have been promoted and fostered by FAO in response to member countries requests to strengthen the sustainable development of the sector in all regions of the globe. Good examples are the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia and the Pacific (NACA) and other initiatives alike such as the Network of Aquaculture Centres of Eastern Europe (NACEE) and the recently-born Aquaculture Network for Africa (ANAF).

FAO has coordinated efforts towards the development of aquaculture in Latin America and the Caribbean since 1974, when the proposal to create a regional centre to support aquaculture in the region was made during a FAO/CARPAS symposium on aquaculture in Latin America held in Montevideo, Uruguay.

The activities carried out since then to foster regional cooperation in aquaculture have been recurrent with significant milestones at different times in the recent past. Good examples are the creation of the Commission for Inland Fisheries for Latin America (COPESCAL) in 1976; the establishment of the Latin American Regional Aquaculture Centre (CERLA) in Brazil in 1977; the AQUILA Project, implemented between 1986 and 1994. Moreover, during the past decade, joint and parallel actions between FAO and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Mechanism (APEC), including feasibility studies and workshops, were also important steps towards this objective. Within these, the FAO workshop on the Feasibility of Establishing a Regional Cooperation Network for Aquaculture in Latin America and the Caribbean held in Panama in 2004, already laid out an initial potential structure and aim of a network¹.

During the fourth session of the Sub-committee of Aquaculture of the COFI, held in Puerto Varas, Chile in October 2008, countries of the American continent requested FAO to take actions in order to reactivate this long-aspired aquaculture network. In response to such a demand, the FAO Sub-regional Office for South America (SLS), together with the Fisheries and Aquaculture Management Service (FIMA), organized a workshop to reactivate the initiative of the creation of an aquaculture cooperation network in the Americas. The meeting was held from the 10th to the 12th of June, 2009 in Guayaquil, Ecuador after a kind invitation of the government of this country. The workshop was partly funded by a trust fund with the government of Japan (GCP/INT/069/JPN).

Thirteen countries were represented in the meeting: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, United States of America and Uruguay.



Participants to the Meeting

C. VELOSO, FUNDACIÓN CHILE

Representatives from NACA and from the Organization of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector for the Central American Isthmus (OSPESCA) were also present.

As a main result of the meeting discussions, the participants decided to sign a letter of intent to ratify officially their interest to create the RAA, the Spanish acronym for the Network of Aquaculture of the Americas (NAA). They agreed that the network should be an inter-governmental organization (IGO) and also agreed on the mission and vision statements, priority areas (see Box) and the basic organic structure of the network. An ad interim directive council representing 5 sub-regions was also agreed and selected among adhering countries. The countries or organizations representing each subregion are the following: Mexico representing North America, OSPESCA representing Central America countries, a Caribbean country (to be identified) shall represent the Caribbean, Ecuador representing the Andean Sub-region and Chile representing the countries of the southern cone of South America.

The meeting also suggested that the network should have a Secretariat with an Executive Secretary in the host country for operating purposes. The Executive Secretary will be elected by the host country by a merit rating, with the approval of the Directive Council of the Network.

RAA MISSION

The network must contribute to the sustainable and equitable development of aquaculture, emphasizing social, economic, scientific, technological and environmental aspects through regional cooperation among the countries of the Americas.

RAA VISION

The network shall be an international benchmark in aquaculture cooperation and a catalyst for sustainable development of aquaculture in the countries of the Americas.

GOVERNING PRINCIPLES OF THE RAA

- The development of aquaculture shall be sustainable in the economic, social and environmental dimensions through adequate technology, research and development.
- The network shall operate with transparency, participation, commitment, cooperation, equity and social and environmental responsibility.
- The network shall be open to other relevant cooperation initiatives.
- The network shall promote gender equity.



Participants to the Meeting

The meeting delegates elected Brazil as the host country for two and a half years. During this period the network statutes are to be developed and agreed by the adhering countries and the initial actions shall begin.

Brazil has already committed to set up an office within the facilities of the newly formed Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture in Brasilia. The country also allocated relevant funding for 2009 and 2010 in order to support the initial activities of the network. Other countries also committed supporting funds.

The first meeting of the above-mentioned Directive Council took place on August 30th in Manaus, Brazil; FAO was invited as an observer. During this meeting, the Council reviewed and discussed the first draft of the statutes as well as the first actions of the interim secretariat.

The formalization of the creation of the RAA is expected to be signed by the Ministers responsible for the aquaculture sector from the adhering countries, by March 2010.

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¹<ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/008/y6009b/y6009b00.pdf>.