

Fourth Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture

Aquaculture now produces nearly 50 percent of the world's food fish¹. The sector is growing and poised to contribute in increasing quantities, in the coming decades, to bridge the supply and demand gap created by the stagnant capture fishery production.

On the request of FAO membership, last year, the name of the FAO Fisheries Department was changed to the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department. This demonstrates the importance attached to aquaculture by the world. Such an important food producing sector needs good governance to avoid the risk of unregulated development which could diminish world expectations. Regular and continuing global dialogue is therefore important at both the highest technical and political levels.

Established during the twenty-fourth session of 2 Session COFI, held in March 2001 in Rome, the COFI/SCA is the only such mechanism in place at the moment.

The fourth session of the COFI/SCA is planned to discuss several important issues.

1. As a standing agenda item, the Secretariat will present a document outlining the efforts of the Department in implementing the recommendations of the past sessions of the COFI/SCA.
2. The Department monitors the progress made in implementing the provisions of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF), on a regular basis, through analysis of responses to a standard questionnaire sent to its membership. As a standing agenda item, the Secretariat will report this to COFI/SCA. This time the Secretariat has taken the opportunity to present both (a) the status of progress in implementing the aquaculture and culture-based fisheries provisions of CCRF and (b) a proposal to improve global monitoring and reporting by countries and their compliance. Owing to the low responses and the overall poor quality of information obtained from the past questionnaire surveys, the Department finds it difficult to comprehend the assistance required by the members in better implementing the CCRF provisions. Thus, a new proposal for further improvements to the reporting mechanism is proposed. The Sub-Committee will be invited to comment on the analysis and proposal, to recommend specific follow-up actions to develop and implement the recommended reporting mechanism and to recommend a time frame for the completion of the task.
3. As mentioned earlier, responsible governance is the key to long-term success and sustainable development of the aquaculture sector. Under the agenda item, "Towards better governance in aquaculture", the Secretariat

attempts to review and share the experiences of FAO member countries in ensuring the development of responsible aquaculture, be it through developing, establishing, maintaining and enforcing appropriate legal, regulatory and administrative frameworks or through diverse policies. The aim of this agenda item is also to explore the constraints that impede or could impede better governance of the sector and to suggest mitigating strategies.

Good governance has been ensured through predictable, transparent, equitable and easily enforceable legislative frameworks and simple regulations covering all aspects of aquaculture and its value chain, economic incentives that encourage best practices, prompting and assisting farmers to elaborate, support and enforce self-regulating management codes and the promotion of sustainability-conducive production systems. Although significant efforts have been made to develop suitable regulatory frameworks to comply with law and order in aquaculture development, there is still public concern that some forms of aquaculture are environmentally perturbing at the expense of society, and that local communities are neither sufficiently empowered nor aware of the safety and quality of aquaculture products. The lack of financial and skilled human capacities to establish, monitor and enforce regulations in developing countries, which lead aquaculture production, could particularly threaten efforts to properly govern aquaculture. The Secretariat invites COFI/SCA to review the ideas conveyed in the working paper and share national experiences in aquaculture governance, identify actions which could help the members improve aquaculture governance and provide guidance on the way forward on this issue in general.

4. "Technical guidelines on aquaculture certification" is an agenda item which the Secretariat believes will receive significant attention by the participating members at this fourth session.

There is a concern that at least some forms of aquaculture are environmentally unsustainable, socially inequitable and that products are unsafe for consumers. Over the years, there have been attempts to respond to the consequent public perception and market requirements, with varying degrees of success. One such attempt is the certification of aquaculture. FAO members expressed their concern that the emergence of a wide range of certification schemes and accreditation bodies created confusion amongst producers and consumers alike and recognized the need for more globally accepted norms for aquaculture production.

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¹Unless stated otherwise in this text the term fish includes also crustaceans and molluscs.