Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

COMMISSION ON GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/Report

Fifth Session of the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

Rome, Italy, 18–20 September 2024

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COMMISSION ON GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

REPORT OF THE FIFTH SESSION

OF THE

INTERGOVERNMENTAL TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP ON

AQUATIC GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

Rome, Italy, 18–20 September 2024

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
Rome, 2024

The documents prepared for the Fifth Session of the Working Group on Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture are available on the Internet at the following address:

www.fao.org/aquatic-genetic-resources/activities/itwg/fifth-session-documents

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Fifth Session of the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (Working Group) was held in Rome, Italy, from 18 to 20 September 2024. The Members and Alternates of the Working Group, as elected by the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (Commission) at its Nineteenth Regular Session, are given in *Appendix C.* The list of delegates and observers is available on the meeting website.[1]

II. OPENING OF THE SESSION AND ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON, VICE-CHAIRPERSONS AND *RAPPORTEUR*

2. Ms Shauna Baillie (Canada), Chair of the Fourth Session of the Working Group, opened the session and welcomed the delegates and observers.

3. Ms Vera Agostini, Deputy Director, FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Division, welcomed delegates and observers. She highlighted the high number of delegates and countries registered, confirming the continuing and growing importance of the sustainable use, development and conservation of aquatic genetic resources for food and agriculture (AqGR). She acknowledged the important achievements of FAO's work on AqGR, under the guidance of this Working Group. She concluded by thanking Members, that have contributed, for their feedback to the development of FAO resources, through their National Focal Points, providing valuable input in the development of the *Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture* (Global Plan of Action)[2] and AquaGRIS.

4. Mr Graham Mair, Senior Aquaculture Officer, FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Division, and Secretary to the Working Group, welcomed the participants and provided some background on FAO's work on AqGR under the programme of work of the Commission. He noted the progress made since the publication of the report on *The State of the World's Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*[3] and the adoption of the Global Plan of Action and highlighted the launch of AquaGRIS on 17 September 2024, noting the important role it plays in enhancing the management of AqGR. He pointed out that FAO was moving into a new phase focused on supporting Members in the implementation of the Global Plan of Action.

5. In line with Article III of its Statutes, the Working Group replaced absent Members of the Working Group with other Members of the Commission present at the meeting. Chile, China , Côte d'Ivoire, Germany and Libya therefore attended the meeting as Members of the Working Group.

6. The Working Group elected Mr Belemane Semoli (South Africa) as Chair. The Working Group elected Ms Shauna Baillie (Canada), Mr Alejandro Barrientos Puga (Chile), Mr Wendy Tri Prabowo (Indonesia), Mr Jauda R. Jauda Hamad (Libya) and Ms Ingrid Olesen (Norway) as Vice-Chairs for the Regions they represent. Ms Baillie was elected *Rapporteur*.

7. The Working Group adopted the Agenda, as given in *Appendix A*.

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[1] www.fao.org/aquatic-genetic-resources/activities/itwg/fifth-session-documents

[2] FAO. 2022. *Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*. FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. Rome. https://doi.org/10.4060/cb9905en

[3] FAO. 2019. *The State of the World's Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*. FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture assessments. Rome. https://doi.org/10.4060/CA5256EN

III. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE *GLOBAL PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE CONSERVATION, SUSTAINABLE USE AND DEVELOPMENT OF AQUATIC GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE*

8. The Working Group considered the document *Status of the implementation of the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*.[4] It took note of the *Draft Guidelines for Genetic Management of Stocking Programmes for Aquatic Species*,[5] the *Draft Practical Guide on* Ex situ In vitro *Gene Banking of Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*,[6] and the Glossary for aquatic genetic resources for food and agriculture.[7] It also noted the *Report of the Twelfth Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) Sub-committee on Aquaculture*[8] and the *Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture* (GSA), recently adopted by COFI.[9]

9. The Working Group welcomed the publication of the GSA and noted with appreciation the key role of the Global Plan of Action in defining GSA guidance on the conservation of aquatic biodiversity, genetic resources management and sustainable seed supply in aquaculture.

10. The Working Group welcomed the Glossary for aquatic genetic resources for food and agriculture and recommended its publication in all FAO official languages, and its broad communication to key stakeholders.

11. The Working Group welcomed the creation of the e-learning course on *Aquaculture Breeding and Genetics* and recommended its rapid finalization, including addition of subtitles for translation in all FAO official languages, and its use in building capacity for genetic management and improvement in aquaculture.

12. The Working Group recommended that the Commission invite FAO to prepare guidelines for policymakers to promote the development of breeding programmes for lower-value species in developing countries, applicable to key species in all regions and incorporating guidance on governance of and business models for breeding programmes.

13. The Working Group recommended that FAO develop a policy brief to support the development of capacity to design and implement selective breeding programmes in aquaculture.

14. The Working Group considered the *Draft Guidelines on Genetic Management in Stocking Programmes*[10] and the *Draft Practical Guide on* Ex situ In vitro *Gene Banking of Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*[11] and recommended their finalization for consideration by the Commission at its forthcoming session. The Working Group noted that its Members may submit comments on and inputs to the Draft Guidelines and the Draft Practical Guide by 15 November 2024.

15. The Working Group requested FAO's support to build capacity for *ex situ in vitro* gene banking among Members.

16. The Working Group recommended that the Commission encourage countries to implement the Global Plan of Action, including by using AquaGRIS for the development of national registries of AqGR.

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[4] CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/3.
[5] CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/3/Inf.1.
[6] CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/3/Inf.2.
[7] CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/3/Inf.3.
[8] CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/3/Inf.5.
[9] CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/3/Inf.6.
[10] CGRFA/WE-AqGR-5/24/3/Inf.1.
[11] CGRFA/WE-AqGR-5/24/3/Inf.2.

17. The Working Group recommended that the Commission invite FAO to continue to support Members in the implementation of the Global Plan of Action, including through the development and distribution of case studies of successful initiatives, and facilitate the sharing of knowledge among countries.

18. The Working Group recommended that the Commission invite donors to provide extra-budgetary funds to support the implementation of the Global Plan of Action by developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

IV. DEVELOPMENT OF A GLOBAL INFORMATION SYSTEM FOR FARMED TYPES OF AQUATIC GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

19. The Working Group considered the document *Status of development of a global information system for farmed types of aquatic genetic resources for food and agriculture*,[12] welcomed the official launch of the fully operational version of AquaGRIS and acknowledged the on-going support by the Government of Germany.

20. The Working Group noted that AquaGRIS provides a critical source of information on the status of conservation, sustainable use and development of AqGR, and recommended that Members use AquaGRIS and create national AqGR registries. It further recommended that the Commission, at its next session, invite donors to support countries in the creation of national registries.

21. The Working Group emphasized the importance of strengthening the capacity of National Focal Points to make use of AquaGRIS and recommended that FAO continue supporting countries in the use of AquaGRIS, through training, technical support and guidance.

22. The Working Group emphasized the importance of interoperability of AquaGRIS with other AqGR information systems and recommended to continue exploring opportunities for ensuring the interoperability with a view to facilitate information exchange between different information systems and avoid duplication of efforts.

23. The Working Group recommended that the Commission consider requesting the Working Group to explore, at its next session, the feasibility of using AquaGRIS for the collection of data related to Sustainable Development Goal indicator 2.5.1.b.

24. The Working Group recommended that FAO continue to host, maintain and oversee the further development of AquaGRIS and stressed the need for stable, reliable and regular funding of AquaGRIS.

V. INDICATORS FOR MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GLOBAL PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE CONSERVATION, SUSTAINABLE USE AND DEVELOPMENT OF AQUATIC GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

25. The Working Group considered the document *Monitoring the implementation of the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.*[13] It took note of the documents *Proposed indicators for monitoring the implementation of the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*,[14] and *Draft process indicator questionnaire for monitoring the implementation of*

[12] CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/4.
[13] CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/5/Rev.1.
[14] CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/5/Inf.1.

the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.[15]

26. The Working Group recommended the addition or adaptation of questions in AquaGRIS to: (i) enable creation of indicators to quantify germplasm stored in *ex situ* gene banks for species, farmed types and genetic stocks; and (ii) develop a resource indicator to quantify the extent of characterization of genetic resources.

27. The Working Group welcomed the indicator framework and recommended its finalization. The process indicator questionnaire should be distributed for completion to National Focal Points every five years.

28. The Working Group recommended deferring the decision on the frequency of the updating of AquaGRIS, and thus the generation of resource indicator reports, until 2027 when Members will have more experience with the workload involved with entering and updating data in AquaGRIS.

29. The Working Group recommended that National Focal Points use the indicators, as endorsed by the Working Group, for monitoring and reporting on the status of AqGR and the implementation of the Global Plan of Action, and promote and support the completion of the AquaGRIS and process indicator questionnaires in accordance with agreed timelines.

VI. PREPARATION OF THE SECOND REPORT ON THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S AQUATIC GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

30. The Working Group considered the document *Preparation of the Second Report on the State of the World's Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*[16] and reviewed the proposed approach to the preparation of *The Second Report on the State of the World's Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture* (SoW AqGR-2).

31. The Working Group endorsed the proposed process and timeline for the preparation of the SoW AqGR-2, based on national data on resource indicators in AquaGRIS and national data on process indicators generated through a separate questionnaire. The Working Group recommended that the SoW AqGR-2 be a concise document on the global state of conservation, sustainable use and development of AqGR.

32. The Working Group recommended that the Commission, at its next session, encourage countries to create national registries of AqGR using AquaGRIS, and to complete the process indicator questionnaire when requested by FAO.

33. The Working Group took note of the extra-budgetary resources required for the preparation of the SoW AqGR-2 and recommended that the Commission, at its next session, encourage donors to support the preparation of the second global assessment.

[15] CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/5/Inf.2.
[16] CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/6.

VII. CLIMATE CHANGE AND AQUATIC GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

34. The Working Group considered the document *Climate change and genetic resources for food and agriculture* [17] and took note of the documents *Draft baseline report on genetic resources for food and agriculture and climate change*[18] and *FAO's work on climate change*.[19]

35. The Working Group recommended that the Commission invite Members to make use of FAO tools and guidance documents on climate change adaptation and mitigation when developing or updating their National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), specifically the *FAO Strategy on Climate Change 2022–2031*[20] and its Action Plan.[21]

36. Furthermore, it took note of the draft baseline report and urged National Focal Points to the Commission, that have not yet done so, to complete the questionnaire. The Working Group noted that many Members of the Working Group were not aware of and had not received the questionnaire and, therefore, recommended that the Commission reconsider its decision to circulate the questionnaire to only National Focal Points to the Commission. It also recommended that the draft baseline report be revised in the light of further submissions by National Focal Points to the Commission, for information of the Commission.

37. The Working Group recommended that the global multistakeholder workshop on climate change and genetic resources for food and agriculture be convened before the Twenty-first session of the Commission to exchange information and experiences, share views and priorities, and discuss possible changes to the *Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Integration of Genetic Diversity into National Climate Change Adaptation Planning* (Voluntary Guidelines),[22] taking into account the findings of the baseline report. Furthermore, it noted that the workshop should devote a special session to AqGR and climate change to address the specificity of the impact of climate change on aquatic species, especially on harmful algal blooms problems related to vibrio bacteria, fish life cycles and the One Health approach to enhance management and governance of these issues.

38. It further recommended that the Voluntary Guidelines be revised in light of the outcome of the workshop, taking into account the responses to the questionnaire, for consideration in regional consultations and subsequently by the Working Groups and the Commission.

VIII. OPTIONS FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF NEW AND EMERGING ISSUES

39. The Working Group considered the document *Options for the identification of new and emerging issues*.[23]

40. The Working Group recommended that the Commission consider the adoption of a new procedure for the ad hoc identification of new and emerging issues for consideration by the Commission at its forthcoming session. It highlighted the need for the process to be inclusive and transparent.

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[17] CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/7.
[18] CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/7/Inf.1.
[19] CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/7/Inf.2.
[20] FAO. 2022. *FAO Strategy on Climate Change 2022–2031*. Rome. https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/cc2274en
[21] C 2025/8 Annex 5: Progress on implementation of the Action Plan of the FAO Strategy on Climate Action 2022–31 in the 2022–23 biennium.
[22] FAO. 2015. *Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Integration of Genetic Diversity into National Climate Change Adaptation Planning*. Rome. https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/i4940e
[23] CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/8.

41. The Working Group reviewed the draft amendment to the Commission's Rules of Procedure, as given in the *Appendix* to document CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/8. It noted that paragraph 3 of the *Appendix* is very detailed, and recommended that it be more general. Furthermore, it requested the addition of "for food and agriculture" at the end of paragraph 3.iii.

IX. ANY OTHER MATTERS

42. The Working Group recommended that FAO take initiatives to raise awareness of the Global Plan of Action among policymakers, through donor countries. The Working Group further recommended to promote implementation of the Global Plan of Action by Members through assigning a task force at national level and for FAO to consider assigning task forces at regional levels.

43. The Working Group thanked FAO for organizing an informal session for delegates prior to the Fifth Session of the Working Group and recommended that FAO make this a regular event for future Sessions of the Working Group. Furthermore, it proposed that the Bureau take a more active role in the planning of the Working Group Sessions, including through virtual meetings with the Secretariat during the intersessional period.

X. CLOSING STATEMENTS

44. Mr Manuel Barange, Assistant Director-General and Director of FAO's Fisheries and Aquaculture Division, thanked delegates and observers for their valuable input to the Fifth Session. He stressed the ever-growing importance of sustainable aquaculture to food security and in sustaining and growing the supply of aquatic foods. He referenced the recent G20 Agriculture Working Group Ministerial Declaration, which recognized both FAO's Blue Transformation Roadmap (2022–2030) and the Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture (GSA). He specifically noted the relevance of the work on AqGR, guided by the Commission and the Working Group, to key elements of Blue Transformation Roadmap and to the GSA. Mr Barange commended the Working Group in guiding the fundamental development of AquaGRIS, the full version of which was launched earlier in the week. He recognized the achievements highlighted during the Fifth Session of the ITWG and appreciated the guidance provided on the next steps of the work programme. He particularly noted the importance of not leaving anyone behind in the process of implementation of the Global Plan of Action. FAO, partners and donors must particularly focus on supporting countries develop national registries of AqGR, cautioning that it was necessary to proceed with care and with realistic expectations.

45. Ms Suzanne Redfern, Technical Officer, Secretariat of the Commission, thanked the Working Group for the fruitful discussions and the detailed comments received, which will be considered at the Commission's Twentieth Regular Session scheduled to be held from 24 to 28 March 2025. She stressed the importance of the release of the fully operational version of AquaGRIS as a tool for monitoring the implementation of the Global Plan of Action and for preparing an update report on the state of the world's AqGR. In concluding, she thanked the Governments of Canada, Germany, the Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Norway and Switzerland for supporting the work of the Commission and its Working Groups and expressed her gratitude to all Members and observers, the Chairperson and *Rapporteur* for having made the meeting a success.

46. Mr Mair thanked all delegates for their input and engagement, including their participation in the launch of AquaGRIS and the informal session. He welcomed the proposal for greater engagement with the Bureau of the Working Group during the intersessional period including in the planning of future informal sessions, which the Secretariat will endeavour to make a standard feature linked to the formal Sessions. He highlighted some of the activities proposed for the coming intersessional period and concluded by thanking the past and present Members of the Bureau of the Working Group, and all colleagues who have contributed to the success of the Session.

47. The Chairperson thanked all delegates and the *Rapporteur* for their contributions to the success of the Session and noted that the Working Group had accomplished a great deal in reviewing the progress FAO and Members have made with the implementation of the newly adopted Global Plan of Action including the utilization of AquaGRIS. He concluded by expressing his thanks to the Secretariat for the organization of this Fifth Session.

APPENDIX A

AGENDA OF THE FIFTH SESSION OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP ON AQUATIC GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

1. Election of Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson(s) and *Rapporteur*
2. Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable
3. Implementation of the *Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*
4. Development of a global information system for farmed types of aquatic genetic resources for food and agriculture
5. Indicators for monitoring the implementation of the *Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*
6. Preparation of *The Second Report on the State of the World's Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*
7. Climate change and aquatic genetic resources for food and agriculture
8. Options for the identification of new and emerging issues
9. Any other matters
10. Adoption of the Report

APPENDIX B

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Document symbol	Title
CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/1	**Election of Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson(s) and *Rapporteur***
CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/4/1/Inf.1	Statutes of the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, and Members and Alternates Elected by the Commission at its Nineteenth Regular Session
CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/4/1/Inf.2	Information note for participants
CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/2	**Provisional agenda**
CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/2 Add.1	**Provisional annotated agenda and timetable**
CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/2/Inf.1	List of documents
CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/2/Inf.2	Lists of delegates and observers
CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/3	**Status of the implementation of the *Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Aquatic Genetic Resources***
CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/3/Inf.1	Draft guidelines on genetic management in stocking programmes
CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/3/Inf.2	*Ex situ in vitro* gene banking of aquatic genetic resources for food and agriculture – Draft Practical Guide
CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/3/Inf.3	Glossary for aquatic genetic resources for food and agriculture
CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/3/Inf.4	Report of the Thirty-sixth Session of the Committee on Fisheries
CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/3/Inf.5	Report of the Twelfth Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture
CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/3/Inf.6	Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture
CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/4	**Status of development of a global information system for farmed types of aquatic genetic resources for food and agriculture**
CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/5	**Monitoring the implementation of the *Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture***

CGRFA/WG-AqGR-4/24/5/Inf.1	Proposed indicators for monitoring the implementation of the *Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*
CGRFA/WG-AqGR-4/24/5/Inf.2	Draft process indicator questionnaire for monitoring the implementation of the *Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*
CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/6	**Preparation of *The Second Report on the State of the World's Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture***
CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/7	**Climate change and genetic resources for food and agriculture**
CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/7/Inf.1	Draft baseline report on genetic resources for food and agriculture and climate change
CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/7/Inf.2	FAO's work on climate change
CGRFA/WG-AqGR-5/24/8	**Options for the identification of new and emerging issues**

APPENDIX C

MEMBERS AND ALTERNATES OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP ON AQUATIC GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE, ELECTED BY THE COMMISSION AT ITS NINETEENTH REGULAR SESSION

Composition (no. of countries per region)	***Country***
Africa (5)	Cameroon Morocco Nigeria South Africa South Sudan *First Alternat*e: Mozambique *Second Alternate*: Côte d'Ivoire
Asia (5)	India Indonesia Malaysia Philippines Republic of Korea *First Alternat*e: Sri Lanka *Second Alternate*: Bangladesh
Europe (5)	Czechia Finland Italy Norway Spain *First Alternat*e: Germany *Second Alternate*: Russian Federation
Latin America and the Caribbean (5)	Argentina Brazil Costa Rica Cuba Ecuador *First Alternat*e: Jamaica *Second Alternate*: Colombia
Near East (4)	Kuwait Oman Saudi Arabia United Arab Emirates *First Alternat*e: Iraq *Second Alternate*: Libya
North America (2)	United States of America Canada
Southwest Pacific (2)	Fiji Palau *First Alternate*: Tonga *Second Alternate*: Marshall Islands