

Report of the

**SECOND SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR
FISHERIES**

Muscat, Oman, 18–21 May 2003



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PREPARATION OF THIS DOCUMENT

This is the final version of the report adopted in Muscat, by the second session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) on 21 May 2003.

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Distribution:

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FAO Fisheries Department
FAO Regional and Subregional Fisheries Officers

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ABSTRACT

The second session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) was attended by delegates from seven members of the Commission as well as by observers from the Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency (ERWDA), the United Nations Environment Programme/Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP/ROWA) and the WorldFish Center. The report provides information on the topics reviewed during the second session of RECOFI. The official opening of the session was made by Dr Younis Al-Akhzami, Director General, Fisheries Resources, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries of the Sultanate of Oman. A two-day technical meeting preceding the Commission session was organized for the purpose of reviewing the technical preparations in support of the Commission session. The session was organized to review the progress of the RECOFI relevant issues of concern in the Gulfs Region as well as the progress of the first session recommendations. The Commission endorsed the recommendation to establish a standing Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA) and its terms of reference and a Working Group on Statistics (WGS). The Commission also reviewed the next intersessional work in relation to budgetary issues.

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OPENING OF THE SESSION

1. Delegates to the second session of the Regional Commission For Fisheries (RECOFI) were welcomed by Dr Younis K. Al-Akhzami, Director General of Fisheries Resources, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Sultanate of Oman, on behalf of the Minister, H.E. Sheikh Salim Bin Hilal Al-Khalili. Dr Younis noted that the Commission Session should follow-up on the recommendations of preceding meetings. These included establishing a standardized database for shrimp fisheries, documentation of management procedures and discussion of statistics of other species thus ensuring more coordination and cooperation between all parties. The opening speech is attached as Appendix F.
2. Of particular interest in the opening presentation was notification of the intention of the Sultanate of Oman to propose establishing an office to address issues of fisheries data collection, their analyses and assisting member countries to formulate decisions regarding regulation of fishing operations and application of methods of responsible fisheries management.
3. Mr Mohammed Saif, Secretary of RECOFI, addressed the Commission on behalf of Dr Jacques Diouf, Director-General, FAO, and conveyed his best wishes for the success of the Session. The opening speech is attached as Appendix G. The list of participants is attached as Appendix B to this report.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE SESSION

4. The Agenda was adopted with some minor modifications. The Agenda is attached as Appendix A to this report. The documents before the Commission are listed in Appendix C.

REVIEW OF REPORTED LANDINGS FOR RECOFI AREA COUNTRIES

5. The Commission reviewed RECOFI/2003/3 (Review of Reported Landings for the RECOFI Area Countries until and including 2001). Note was made of the general trends in the landings described in the various national reports. The Secretariat described why data in the FAO reported landings database would always be at least 15 months out-of-date and thus could not be used to review the status of landings by member countries in the preceding year. Such review could only be done by the Commission if members were to bring their fisheries data for the preceding year for discussion and analysis.
6. Particular note was made of two issues: (a) the variable national practices in disaggregation of reported data by taxonomic level (i.e., to family, genus, species level, etc.) and (b), the need for improved geographical resolution, i.e., where fish were landed.
7. It was noted that many RECOFI countries only recorded their reported fish landings data to FAO with the different taxonomic groups in a highly aggregated form, i.e. many species are combined into one, or a few groups. One reason for this was that several member countries understood that this was an FAO requirement. As a consequence, the FAO fish landings database, which is the only existing regional fisheries capture database, could only provide landings information in a highly aggregated manner with respect to the species composition of the catches.
8. Concern was expressed that data in the FAO database are at first only available in a combined form on a geographical basis, e.g. RECOFI landings data are first aggregated for

the Western Indian Ocean FAO Statistical Area 51. This causes problems. In the case of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia data are aggregated for the Red Sea and RECOFI Area; for the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), fisheries data are aggregated for statistical Sub-areas 51.2 and 51.3, e.g. west and east of Straits of Hormuz; reported landings data for the Sultanate of Oman are combined in the FAO database in Sub-area 51.3 for catches from both inside and outside the RECOFI Area.

9. Discussion focused on the need to identify those species of particular importance to national and regional management. It was noted that difficulties existed in collecting more detailed data at landing sites and in many cases those collecting the data would require further training to accurately identify species. However, many countries had data collection procedures well designed to address these problems. These approaches may well be extended to all reporting areas of the Commission Area.

10. The need to be clear about the objectives of data collection programmes was noted. The major goal was collection of data for resource management. Emphasis ought to be on stocks that are exploited by more than one country. Species or species groups of particular attention are: Sciaenidae, shrimp, *Scomberomorus*, cuttlefish, Lethrinidae, Serranids (a complex of >30 species, of which seven were of particular importance).

11. Considerable discussion focussed on what regional arrangements for handling of fisheries statistics would be desirable and how they might be undertaken. Two countries had proposed the creation of a regional statistics office whose functions would include regional coordination and the examination and analysis of common problems. Issues to be resolved include: (a) what are the desirable levels of disaggregation of statistics in terms of taxonomic identification; (b) geographical disaggregation; (c) assistance in developing acceptable data collection (i.e. design of survey programmes); and (d) processing procedures that can be harmonized across the region. Should a regional centre be established, it would require appropriate terms of reference, staffing and budget. It was agreed that a working group to examine this issue may be the way to proceed in this manner.

12. The Commission agreed that in respect to the preceding discussions:

- (i) The FAO Fishery Information, Data and Statistics Department (FIDI) is requested to work with the Commission's member countries to increase the level of taxonomic disaggregation of reported landings that are reported in the FAO Nominal Catch Database and to report to the next RECOFI meeting on the progress made with these efforts.
- (ii) FIDI be asked to maintain data reported by RECOFI countries disaggregated into the Statistical Sub-regional Areas of 51.2 and 51.3. In the case of Sub-Area 51.3, a further division should be made to separate the area of the Gulf of Oman from the Northwestern Arabian Sea. This information should be made available in the FAO's main Nominal Catch Database. FIDI is requested to report on the progress that has been made with this request to the next RECOFI Session.

13. The Commission was also presented with the recommendations that had been prepared by the technical meeting during the two preceding days. These included:

- (i) Assign an expert to review catch sampling schemes that are used in the region's countries and to develop better and harmonized statistical systems for regional adoption.
- (ii) Identify the most important fish species to receive detailed attention in data collection because of management and/or conservation problems.
- (iii) Appoint a person to coordinate and harmonize the data collection system needs, organize the undertaking of a regional database, and identify what is needed from a regional statistical information system.
- (iv) Identify desirable levels of disaggregating data, i.e. species breakdown, treatment of shared stocks, and the recording of fleet effort, Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) rates, fish size and age distributions, and fleet capacity.
- (v) Collect more landings data disaggregated to the species level.
- (vi) Arrange a workshop to revise existing data.
- (vii) Advise on needs for improved statistics at national levels to meet regional requirements.

REVIEW OF THE AQUACULTURE SITUATION IN THE RECOFI AREA

14. The FAO Fishery Resources Officer, Mr Alessandro Lovatelli, Fisheries Department, Fishery Resources Division, presented a general overview on the status of aquaculture in the RECOFI countries based on the working document RECOFI/2003/4. The information and statistics available show that aquaculture development has progressed in most of the member countries, with some supplementing local supplies from capture fisheries and others exporting farmed products.

15. The growth of the sector was particularly evident for the period 1997 to 2001 when the production almost doubled from 38 600 tonnes to almost 75 000 tonnes. The expansion is attributed mainly to increased production in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. It was noted that although progress in aquaculture was evident in the Region, the sector still only represents 10 percent of the overall fish production compared to the average 30 percent for global aquaculture production.

16. It was noted that in addition to the progress made in aquaculture production there had also been significant improvements in various aspects of capacity building. More infrastructure facilities have been provided or upgraded, more technical staff trained abroad and on-the-job, more research work carried out and more accurate data collected. The progress made has encouraged private investment in projects with many more pending evaluation and approval from relevant authorities.

17. The presentation proceeded with a summary of the recent activities carried out in preparation of the Second Session of RECOFI. The Commission was informed that during the technical meeting held in Kuwait, 16–18 February 2003, the participants from the RECOFI member countries recommended that a working aquaculture body be formally established. The draft Terms of Reference for this aquaculture body were discussed and drafted.

18. In the technical aquaculture meeting immediately preceding the Second Session of RECOFI (18–19 May 2003, Muscat, Oman), which was attended by experts from five RECOFI countries, a working document with recommendations on the form and structure of

the aquaculture body along with a proposed work programme for 2003–2004 was prepared and submitted to the Commission for consideration and approval. The report is attached as Appendix D.

19. The Commission fully agreed with the importance of aquaculture in the Region and endorsed the recommendation to establish a standing Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA) and its Terms of Reference (Appendix E), rather than establishing a Committee on Aquaculture. It was agreed that this structure would enable the WGA to retain the flexibility required for it to carry out its mandate and work plan, following submission and approval by the Commission during its annual session.

20. The Commission also approved the proposed WGA structure, its focus on marine and brackish water aquaculture, and for it to convene on an annual basis prior to the regular Commission Session. It was agreed that the RECOFI Secretariat would contact, within two weeks from the end of the Session, all member countries requesting them to identify and communicate a WGA National Focal Point, i.e. the name of an institute and officer.

21. The election of a WGA chairperson was also raised and it was agreed that all RECOFI countries would, simultaneously, indicate their interest in chairing the first two-year term of the WGA. It was pointed out that the WGA Chairperson would represent the Commission. In the meantime it was agreed that the Focal Point for Bahrain would act as the WGA Interim-Chairperson, as Bahrain proposed to convene and host the First Annual Meeting of the WGA. The offer made by Bahrain was acknowledged by the Commission. Furthermore, it was agreed that the first WGA Chairperson would then be officially nominated during the First Annual Meeting of the WGA in Bahrain.

22. With regards to the timing of the First Annual Meeting of the WGA, it was agreed that the Interim-Chairperson of the WGA and the RECOFI Secretariat would liaise to identify the most convenient time to hold the meeting in relation to the other planned RECOFI activities and the Commission Session itself. The dates would then be communicated to all other WGA Focal Points for consideration and approval.

23. The agenda for the First Annual Meeting of the WGA would be drafted by the Interim-Chairperson in close collaboration with the RECOFI Secretariat and circulated to all the WGA Focal Points well in advance in order to allow suggestions, modifications, and sufficient time to collect data and reports that may be required at the meeting.

REVIEW OF INTERSESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

24. The Secretariat presented and elaborated on the contents of the working document RECOFI/2003/5, including the reporting on the results of two preparatory meetings of RECOFI working groups, held in Muscat (May 2002) and Kuwait (February 2003) (RECOFI/2003/Info/2 and RECOFI/2003/Info/3).

25. The background paper RECOFI/2003/5 highlighted the achievements and shortcomings of the scheduled activities of RECOFI, including the post-evaluation study of the Indian Ocean Fishery Commission (IOFC) Gulfs Committee.

26. The Secretariat raised the issue of the establishment of RECOFI sub-committees or working groups, including statistics and aquaculture working groups. It was asked how the RECOFI Secretariat can play a part in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) fisheries

activities, particularly demersal surveys. The Secretariat replied that ad hoc meetings were planned with both the GCC and the Regional Organization for the Protection of Marine Environment (ROPME), although no time has yet been fixed for these meetings.

27. FAO stated that demersal surveys were important and that the successful experience of the UAE in undertaking a similar survey could be used as a model for future programmes. However, budget constraints were identified as a major barrier to undertaking large-scale demersal surveys in the region, as well as the need to undertake such surveys on both the eastern and western side of the Gulf. It was pointed out that marine surveys should be considered as part of normal fisheries management programmes and therefore funded as part of annual fisheries programme activities. Despite this, there was general agreement as to the need for regular demersal surveys in the RECOFI area as part of normal fisheries management practices.

28. One member expressed agreement to the suggestion in the background paper of extending RECOFI activities to the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden areas as well as the issuing of a periodic RECOFI bulletin. The Secretariat advised that some Red Sea countries had requested their own regional fisheries commission. It was suggested that cooperative projects, (including demersal surveys) with other countries, rather than full membership of RECOFI by other countries may be a way of establishing initial contacts in areas of common interest. However, the many complications of highly extended programmes were noted in the different resources and areas with physical conditions which would need addressing. These realities mitigated against extensive programmes.

29. The interaction between the various RECOFI sea areas was highlighted, indicating that there is the possibility of surveys in one area being relevant to adjoining areas. However, this should not replace more comprehensive surveys in the RECOFI region.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEM IN THE RECOFI AREA

30. Mr Andrew Smith, Fishery Industry Officer, FAO Fisheries Department, Fishing Technology Service (FIIT), presented document RECOFI/2003/6 in response to an FAO directive that Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) issues be brought to the attention of all regional fisheries commissions.

31. As part of the presentation, member countries of RECOFI were advised to consider becoming members of the Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) Network so as to keep abreast of recent developments in MCS and VMS technologies. The details of MCS Network were explained and the Commission was also invited to review recent developments in MCS and VMS and to consider holding a VMS workshop to communicate these developments.

32. In response to a question about the applicability of VMS technology to the region, it was agreed that VMS use in the immediate future may be limited in the region because of the large number of small vessels. However, as costs declined (current capital costs on the on-vessel transmitter was approximately US\$ 600 to US\$ 2 000 depending on the system used), VMS would become feasible even for these small vessels.

TECHNICAL REPORTS

Marine resources survey in the United Arab Emirates waters

33. Mr Thabit Abdelsalam Al-Zahran, Director, Marine Resources Environmental Research Center, Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency (ERWDA), presented a description of the recent UAE marine resource survey. He described its objectives, methods and results of the recent 12-month marine resources and oceanography survey in the waters of the UAE. Fish samples were obtained by trawl and traps. Acoustic methods were used to supplement fish biomass estimates that were based on the trawl swept-area results.

34. Depending on the season, total demersal biomass estimates ranged from 6 000 to 16 000 tonnes for twenty key species. An annual cycle in abundance was evident with the lowest values present during the summer. Many of the species were migratory with most movement waters of northern Emirates.

35. As seen by measurements taken, many immature individuals of all specimens are caught in commercial fisheries. Little difference was observed in size composition between trawlable and non-trawlable areas, although demersal biomass was greater in non-trawlable areas. Fish migration was found to be related to spawning activity. Least mobile fish were summer spawners, such as resident harbour (grouper).

36. A key conclusion of the survey is that the demersal biomass is now only about 20 percent that of 1978; on the East coast this situation is worse, where the biomass is seven percent of that found in 1978. Major declines in demersal biomass could not be attributed to fishing alone – environmental degradation had to be considered.

37. The total biomass of small pelagics was similar to that observed during the 1978 surveys. Most small pelagic species caught were commonly <4 cm in length and occurred in small schools. Thus they were unlikely to be of commercial significance.

38. It was concluded that the UAE area was important for fish spawning in general. Fish stocks in the UAE appear to be shared with other countries.

39. It was considered that coastal habitat degradation might be the cause of the reduction in biomass found and that there is a need for effective cooperation at national and regional levels to address the issue of environmental and habitat degradation.

40. It was noted that increased nutrient and sediment runoff may contribute to phytoplankton and jellyfish blooms; increased organic productivity may be smothering benthos and causing fish kills. Further there are implications for human health. Coral reefs and sea grass areas are also being affected, thus affecting dependent species.

41. It was concluded that an improved management regime was required throughout the region that must include ecosystem considerations and protections. Precautionary approaches should be included. Regulations should extend to land-use regulations where the activities affect marine resources.

42. Increased fishing effort was noted as a contributing cause in the decline in abundance as the numbers of fishermen and boats had increased by a factor of four over the last 25 years and no doubt had contributed to the problem.

43. The topic of subsidies was raised by the UAE delegates and they believed that the use of subsidies could encourage over-fishing and that once introduced they were difficult to remove.

44. Many interventions noted the adverse impacts of trawling on the benthos and related fish fauna. Other issues that arose in the context of the discussion were the adverse impacts of subsidies in stimulating fishing effort beyond levels where sustainable harvests are possible.

45. The Commission commended the Emirate of Abu Dhabi and the ERWDA for their efforts, noting the immense value of the results obtained and their regional significance. The Commission expressed the strong hope that the Emirate of Abu Dhabi would publicize the results of the survey.

Impacts of intertidal stake nets on commercial fish species in Kuwait

46. A presentation on the impacts of intertidal stake nets on commercial fish species was made by Mr Ali Al Baz of the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR). This is one of the oldest fishing techniques used in the Gulf and the use of this gear has increased from 137 installations in 1986 to 355 by 2003. The purpose of the study was to describe the status of the fishery (both biological catches and commercial information) and assess their environmental impacts.

47. Catch rates and species composition have been described and the economic returns of the fishery were determined. Catch rates appear to have significantly declined since 1989.

48. Major problems have arisen with this fishery, which includes by-catch of birds, benthic damage caused when accessing the weirs and discard of unwanted species.

49. It is intended to close many of the *Hadrah* (stakenets) because of environmental concerns. A closed season has since been introduced.

Report on the Gulf Cooperation Council Regional Shrimp Survey

50. This programme was coordinated by the GGC fisheries group. The programme objectives included identifying regional shrimp stocks, undertaking monthly trawl surveys, developing common methods of stock assessment, developing regional management plans, identification of medium- and long-term sustainable harvest rates and provision of training in shrimp stock assessment and survey methodology.

51. The shrimp species encountered was mainly *Penaeus semisulcatus* (69 to 95 percent of the shrimp catch). Samples were sexed and measured. CPUE was measured, with the highest recorded in Kuwait and the lowest in Qatar. The bycatch ratio was highest in Kuwait (125:1), most of which was discarded. The lowest by-catch rate was encountered in Bahrain. Gravid females were mainly present from January to March. Length frequencies were also recorded. Salinity and temperature information was also recorded.

52. Yield isopleths were calculated for *P. semisulcatus* and optimal opening date was calculated to be in September in Kuwait, August in Saudi Arabia and June in Bahrain. Estimates of natural mortality rates varied from 2.17 to 3.84 based on Pauly's Method.

53. It was concluded that shrimp size decreases from north to south; that spawning shows greater seasonality in the north. Three stocks of *P. semisulcatus* were found to occur in the study area. Maximum biomass was found to occur around mid-August in Kuwait and occurs progressively earlier further to the south.

54. The Islamic Republic of Iran expressed the view that a Gulf-wide project for *P. semisulcatus* be undertaken.

55. A number of recommendations were identified for future work:

- (i) Assess shrimp resource abundance in UAE and Oman waters.
- (ii) Develop a long-term sampling programme.
- (iii) Determine what drives recruitment for the respective stocks, given that little is known about this.
- (iv) Identify shrimp nursery grounds.
- (v) Develop procedures for determining optimum yields for the respective stocks.
- (vi) Undertake mark-recapture experiments as required.
- (vii) Identify the best by-catch reduction devices for each shrimp fishing ground.

WorldFish Center

56. A presentation was given by the WorldFish Center observer on the overall programme of the Center and, in particular, on the one for the Regional Center in Egypt.

PROGRAMME OF WORK AND BUDGET

57. The working document on the Programme of Work and Budget for the Intersessional Period (2003–2004) was introduced by the RECOFI Secretariat.

58. The very slow progress of RECOFI was noted and it was agreed that there should be a two-year interval between the Commission Sessions.

59. The issue of budget implications was raised arising from the need to create working groups. In this context, it was noted that these working groups must receive their instructions from the Commission, who must also define, or at least agree, on what their terms of reference should be.

60. After extended discussion it was agreed that two working groups for Aquaculture and for Statistics should be established.

61. In the case of Working Group on Statistics (WGS), nominations for Focal Points will be received by the Secretariat from each member. An inaugural meeting will be held in early October in the Islamic Republic of Iran to develop a draft Terms of Reference. It was agreed

that the Focal Point for the Islamic Republic of Iran would act as the WGS Interim Chairperson. The offer made by the Islamic Republic of Iran was acknowledged by the Commission. Furthermore, it was agreed that the first WGS Chairperson would be officially nominated during the next meeting.

62. The proposed work programme for 2003–2004 of the Working Group on Aquaculture was presented to the Commission. The discussions revolved on two major points: (a) the prioritization of aquaculture activities in the Region, and (b) funding of all future activities.

63. Regarding the first point, Mr Lovatelli reported that two priority activities were identified by the RECOFI member country experts along with numerous other technical activities that needed attention, but this would require a clear mandate from the Commission for their implementation as well as appropriate funding. Furthermore, the two activities on aquaculture legislation and information system identified for the 2003–2004 work programme of the WGA were recommended as a result of the early stage of development of the WGA.

64. In reviewing the working document RECOFI/2003/7 (Programme of Work and Budget for the Intersessional Period 2003–2004) it was agreed that the Expert Consultation on the Introduction of Exotic Species should be cancelled as the issues concerning the introduction of exotic species would be covered in the proposed activity on legislation.

65. It was generally felt that confidence by the Commission in the work of the WGA could only be achieved with concrete results. The two proposed activities would enable the WGA to start working on some important issues and generate results of value at the regional level and at a relative low cost. It was agreed that it is now time for the WGA to start.

66. It was noted that a system for regularly funding activities under the WGA was not in place and that the Commission would require guidance from the RECOFI Secretariat on how best to proceed. Several delegations expressed concern that a delay in deciding on how the WGA could operate in the future would prolong the period of inactivity already experienced during the past couple of years.

67. It was recognized that the Commission was not in a position to endorse the work plan presented due to budget implications. Mr Lovatelli proposed that a fixed annual amount be considered by the Commission and eventually approved as dedicated funds for activities under the WGA. It appeared rather impractical for the WGA to propose annual budgets for approval at the single government level. If any additional funds to those made available by the Commission were required, the WGA would seek ways of attracting donor support in collaboration with the RECOFI Secretariat.

68. Commissioners stressed the need to ensure that all necessary documents are circulated well in advance.

Ad Hoc Meeting on Technological Innovation in Shrimp Fisheries

69. Two countries (Islamic Republic of Iran and Kuwait) supported the proposal to hold such a meeting, and the Commission requested that the Secretariat proceed with convening such a meeting. It was proposed by the Secretariat that the meeting be held early in 2004. The Islamic Republic of Iran had offered to host the meeting.

GCC/ROPME/RECOFI Joint Working Group

70. It was concluded that there was no purpose for this meeting at the present time and that the Secretariat should undertake the necessary coordination.

Setup of a Regional Database

71. It was agreed to setup a regional database for consideration by the Working Group on Statistics.

Periodical bulletin

72. Concern was expressed about who would do the work to support the production of such a bulletin. There was general agreement that consideration of this issue should be deferred until a later (unspecified) time. However, it was emphasized the importance to publicize the activities of the Commission through all possible media channels from both countries as well as from the Secretariat.

Secretariat costs

73. Questions were raised about the amount of time and expenditure on RECOFI issues by the Secretariat.

Technical group recommendations

74. The Commission noted the Recommendations of the Technical Group, as follows:

Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) Management

- The Commission should consider the need to address the issue of EAF on a regional basis.
- Note should be taken of the proposed Abu Dhabi Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management Symposium. RECOFI might consider participating and in what manner.
- The need for the Commission to establish a Working Group to advise on this issue was identified.
- The Commission should consider how to implement existing voluntary codes on fisheries management practices.

Reporting on the Stock Status of Important Fish Species

- The technical meeting re-emphasized the need to address this issue.
- It was agreed to address shrimp, *Scomberomorus* and harbour, and the Commission should provide guidelines as required.
- It was agreed that the Secretariat produce a list of all researches involved in fisheries in the region and put it on the RECOFI Web Site.

VMS-MCS

- The Commission is invited to review recent developments in MCS and VMS and, in particular, the emerging issues related to these important tools for fisheries

management. These developments could be used more extensively to promote human resources development and institutional strengthening in the Region.

- The Commission may also consider recommending member countries to consider participating in the International Network for the Co-operation and Co-ordination of Fisheries Related Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS Network).
- The Commission is invited to consider holding a VMS workshop similar to the one recently held in Senegal, with the objective of emphasizing the need and potential for cooperation on VMS to countries in the Region.

Gillnets

- The Commission should consider requesting the secretariat to organize a review of gill net fishing practices in the RECOFI region, the implications for gillnet fishing for conservation and management of resources and desirable regulations for the control of gill net fishing.

Shatt al Arab

- The Commission should take note of developments in the Shatt al Arab as an area requiring protection as a fishery nursery area, specifically, prohibition of trawling.

Mesopelagics

- The Secretariat is requested to organize an ad hoc working group to (a) plan a review and evaluation of past activities relating to mesopelagic fisheries in the Gulf of Oman, (b) identify a future programme to address planning requirements within a strategic planning framework, and (c) report to appropriate national stakeholders as required on the planning and implementation of future activities.

75. In regard to the issue of the Shatt al Arab and regime change in Iraq, it was noted that RECOFI welcomes the participation of Iraq in the activities of RECOFI and that the Secretariat should ensure that Iraq become active in RECOFI in the future as soon as is practical.

DATE AND PLACE OF THE THIRD SESSION

76. The Commission agreed that the next Session would be held in Doha, Qatar, during the second week of May 2005.

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

77. The report was adopted on Wednesday, 21 May 2003.

AGENDA

1. Opening of the Session
2. Adoption of the Agenda and arrangements for the Session
3. Review of reported landings for RECOFI Area countries until and including 2001
4. Review of the aquaculture situation in the RECOFI Area
5. Review of the intersessional activities recommended by the First Session of RECOFI
6. Strategies for implementation of MCS in the RECOFI Area
7. Programme of work and budget for the next intersessional period (2003–2004)
8. Any other matters
9. Date and place of the third Session
10. Adoption of the Report

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LIST OF DOCUMENTS

RECOFI/2003/1	Annotated Agenda
RECOFI/2003/2	List of Documents
RECOFI/2003/3	Review of Reported Landings for RECOFI Area Countries until and including 2001
RECOFI/2003/4	Review of the Aquaculture Situation in the RECOFI Area
RECOFI/2003/5	Review of the Intersessional Activities
RECOFI/2003/6	Strategies for Implementation of VMS in the RECOFI Area
RECOFI/2003/7	Programme of Work and Budget for 2003–2004
RECOFI/2003/Inf.1	List of Participants
RECOFI/2003/Inf.2	Report of the First Session of RECOFI
RECOFI/2003/Inf.3	Report of the Technical Meeting on the Management of Shrimp Fisheries and Aquaculture (Salmiya, Kuwait, 18–21 February 2003)
RECOFI/2003/Inf.4	Minutes of the First Meeting of RECOFI Work Group (Muscat, Oman, 13–15 May 2002)
RECOFI/2003/Inf.5	Post Evaluation Study of the Indian Ocean Fishery Commission (IOFC): Committee for the Development and Management of the Fishery Resources of the Gulfs (in print)

TECHNICAL AQUACULTURE MEETING

**Recommendations to the RECOFI Commission
on the
Formation of a Working Group on Aquaculture**

**18-19 May 2003
Muscat, Oman**

BACKGROUND

Regional cooperation on Aquaculture Development

1. During the first RECOFI Session in Oman (6–8 October 2001) and the last ‘Ad Hoc Technical Meeting on the Management of Shrimp Fisheries and Aquaculture’ held in Kuwait (18–21 February 2003) it was agreed that regional cooperation was needed aimed at further developing and strengthening the aquaculture sector in the RECOFI Region.

2. Although the RECOFI Commission formally established an Ad Hoc Working Group on Aquaculture during its First Session to evaluate and advise on the formation of an aquaculture body, little progress had been made in terms of formally discussing at the regional level the modalities in which the aquaculture body would operate, plan and implement activities, as well as report to the Commission.

3. The main purpose of convening the last technical meeting in Kuwait was to start technical preparations in support of the Second RECOFI Session. The objectives are clearly reported on section 18 of the *Note Formale* prepared and circulated following the above mentioned meeting. For convenience and reference these are listed below:

- a) To review the status of aquaculture in the Gulf Region and identify key issues affecting the development of a sustainable aquaculture industry.
- a) To identify areas of regional interest and cooperation among the RECOFI member countries.
- b) To study the practical implications of establishing a regional aquaculture subsidiary body under RECOFI including benefits to the member countries and financial implications.
- c) To elaborate and draft the Terms of Reference (TORs) of a formal Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA).

4. In summary, the technical meeting recommended that a working aquaculture body be established to discuss technical issues, areas of regional interest, and possible activities to be implemented, if approved and funded, during the annual work plan period of the Commission. A draft Terms of Reference for an aquaculture body have been discussed and drafted (see Annex III of RECOFI/2003/Info/3). Furthermore, a preliminary list of technical assistance areas needed in the Region was discussed (See Annex II of RECOFI/2003/Info/3). Four RECOFI countries, i.e. Iran (Islamic Republic of), Bahrain, Oman and the United Arab Emirates, listed technical areas where assistance and acquired knowledge could be offered to the other RECOFI member countries. Similarly, areas where assistance was required at the national level were duly reported.

5. Based on the discussions held in Kuwait, the Second RECOFI Session working document on the ‘Review of the Aquaculture Situation in the RECOFI Area’ (RECOFI/2003/4) summarizes the major priority areas as follows:

Facilitating commercialization

- Applied research on aquaculture has achieved reasonable success in certain fields.
- Efforts need to be focused on facilitating commercial applications.
- Preparation of feasible aquaculture investment projects.
- Meet product quality standards for both local and export markets.

Addressing development constraints and regional cooperation

- Various natural and technical constraints to the development of aquaculture have been identified.
- Research at the national level should be identified.
- Common concern to several countries should be identified for collective action and approaches to such cooperation discussed, agreed to and implemented.

Meeting information requirements

- In countries where the growth of aquaculture is accelerating, there is an increasing need for sound information (statistical and non-statistical) to guide research and development planning, monitoring and assessment.
- RECOFI member countries may wish to re-examine the need for and implication of the regional aquaculture information.

Ensuring proper governance of the sector

- There is a need to put in place legislation and regulations to ensure sustainable development and the protection of public interest, the environment and natural resources.

Application of advanced methods and technologies

- There is a need to apply more up-to-date/cutting-edge technologies in aquaculture research, development and management. Biotechnology research in fish diseases, genetics, fish health and quarantine, food quality standards, feed technologies, stock restoration are all areas where work should be extended.

Addressing manpower needs

- New technical personnel should be developed using institutions within and outside the Region. Specialised training facilities at high-school levels should also be established, and training courses encouraged at the regional level.

6. The same document suggests the following main recommendations in order to begin addressing the above priority areas for the development of aquaculture:

- a) RECOFI should consider establishing an "aquaculture subsidiary body or a recognized working group" that meets regularly to discuss relevant issues, activities and propose annual work plans. This body or working group would report directly to the main RECOFI Sessions. Member countries should appoint permanent focal aquaculture points.
- b) RECOFI should discuss and prioritize the preceding priority areas and request the "aquaculture subsidiary body or working group" to address one or more of those considered to be most urgent at its first meeting and to report to the RECOFI at an appropriate time.

RECOMMENDATIONS and FIRST WORK PLAN (2003–2004)

7. The participants attending the Aquaculture Session from 18 to 19 May 2003 (Bahrain, Islamic Republic of Iran, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) reviewed the recommendations made in Kuwait and discussed and concluded that the following issues should be taken-up by the Commission for consideration and approval:

Endorsement of the WGA

8. As mentioned above, the formation of an aquaculture body was considered during the First RECOFI Session, and an Ad Hoc Working Group was formed to evaluate and advise on this matter during the Second Commission Session. However, subsequent formal and informal discussions have somewhat created confusion on the status of the RECOFI body dealing with aquaculture. The result of such confusion has slowed down the actual structuring and work organization of the said body. It is therefore *recommended* to the Commission that a Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA) be endorsed rather than the establishment of a Committee on Aquaculture. The main argument for such a proposal is to ensure that the WGA retains the flexibility required for carrying out its mandate and work plans which will be regularly submitted and discussed for approval at the annual sessions of the Commission.

WGA Structure and Annual Meeting

9. It is *recommended* that each RECOFI member country identifies and officially communicates to the RECOFI Secretary a focal institute dealing with aquaculture and appoints a permanent and an alternate aquaculture specialist to the WGA. A WGA chairperson would then be nominated among the appointed specialists. He/she would act as chairperson for a period of two years. The main task of the chairperson would be to ensure that the approved work plan activities are initiated in a timely manner with the full support of the Focal Points in the other RECOFI member countries and support and technical supervision from the RECOFI Secretariat. The other main task would be the organization of the annual WGA meeting, ensuring the preparation and timely distribution of an agenda that would allow the Focal Points to prepare all background material, if any.

10. It is *recommended* that the WGA meets on an annual basis to discuss (a) the progress of activities, and (b) the new annual work plan and budget requirements. The WGA would then report directly to the Commission. The first annual WGA meeting date and venue will be identified by the nominated WGA chairperson through correspondence with all other Focal Point members. The date and venue for the subsequent WGA annual meeting will be proposed and agreed upon as an agenda item during the preceding meeting. The Annual Meeting of the WGA would be hosted in different RECOFI countries and held at least one month prior to the Commission Session.

11. If the above recommendation is endorsed by the Commission it is understood that each RECOFI member country will enable its WGA Focal Point, and possibly a second person, to attend the Annual Meeting. Each RECOFI member country will cover expenses for its Focal Point to attend the WGA Annual Meeting.

WGA Area of Coverage

12. It is *recommended* that the WGA focuses its mandate on marine and brackish water aquaculture since the Gulf is the water resource shared by all the RECOFI member countries. Nevertheless, coverage of inland water aquaculture issues would not be excluded as issues of regional concern and importance will be raised and acted upon on a case-to-case basis following presentation and discussion at the annual WGA meetings.

WGA Proposed Work Programme 2003–2004

13. Due to the infancy of the WGA it is recommended that initially only the two activities described below are included in the next 1-year Work Programme and approved by the Commission.

Activity No. 1	
Title:	Consultation on Regional Aquaculture Legislation – A review of existing laws and recommendations for a regional legislative structure.
Scope:	The main purpose of this activity is to collect existing specific and related aquaculture legislation from all RECOFI member countries and to compare the degree of development among the countries. The aim is for an external evaluation of the existing legislation, highlight improvement areas, where needed, and make recommendations on common regulations that could be adopted at a regional level.
Main Activities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection of all relevant and existing aquaculture legislation at the national levels. <i>ACTION: WGA Focal Points.</i> • Evaluation, comparison and regional legislative framework proposal prepared by an external consultant. <i>TO BE IDENTIFIED.</i> • Distribution of the proposal to the WGA Focal Points for review and comments prior to approval by the WGA in its next meeting. <i>ACTION: WGA Focal Points.</i> • Submit final proposal to the Commission for review and comments in its next meeting and follow-up actions. <i>ACTION: WGA Chairperson.</i>
Budget:	US\$ 15 000

Activity No. 2	
Title:	Establishment of a Regional Aquaculture Information System.
Scope:	The purpose of this activity is to gather information on the aquaculture sector in RECOFI member countries (e.g. national aquaculture sector overview, statistics, bibliographies and reports, names and addresses of private and government institutions involved in aquaculture activities, names of specialists working in aquaculture, training opportunities, ongoing research activities, etc.). This information will be collected and made available on a dedicated web site. This activity will also enable RECOFI member countries to regularly update the information. It will also facilitate contacts from international bodies to RECOFI aquaculture bodies and will also secure a position in the international information scene.
Main Activities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compile and approve a list of information to be collected at the national level. <i>ACTION: WGA Chairperson and Focal Points.</i> • Collect information according to approved list. <i>ACTION: WGA Focal Points.</i> • Recruit an aquaculture information specialist and a web designer to design and develop a regional aquaculture web site. <i>ACTION: RECOFI Secretariat and WGA Chairperson.</i> • Distribution of the proposed web site to the WGA Focal Points for review and comments prior to approval by the WGA in its next meeting. <i>ACTION: WGA Focal Points.</i> • Input of first set of data into the web site. <i>ACTION: Web designer.</i> • Training on web site data-input and up-dating for identified persons from each RECOFI member country. <i>ACTION: WGA Chairperson and web site designer.</i>
Budget:	US\$ 8 000

**TERMS OF REFERENCE
Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA)
RECOFI Commission**

The Terms of Reference for the RECOFI Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA) shall be to:

- Advise the RECOFI Commission on technical and policy matters related to aquaculture.
- Identify and discuss major issues and trends in regional aquaculture development.
- Identify and establish national focal points.
- Encourage technical cooperation and coordination among the member countries.
- Monitor development and trends of aquaculture practices in the Region.
- Establish a system for regular collection, up-dating and dissemination of aquaculture information.
- Review existing legislations in member countries and encourage regional coordination with a view to promote harmonization, as appropriate.
- Form ad hoc aquaculture working groups, as and when required.
- Carry out other duties related to aquaculture promotion and development that may be referred to it by the RECOFI Commission.

The regular activities of the RECOFI Secretariat related to the function of the Working Group on Aquaculture will be:

- The organization of the annual meeting of the Working Group on Aquaculture.
- The participation of a member of the Secretariat in the annual meeting of the Working Group on Aquaculture.
- The overall coordination and supervision of ad hoc working groups through nominated chairpersons.
- The preparation, publication and dissemination of the Working Group on Aquaculture meeting reports.

In addition to the regular activities of the Working Group on Aquaculture, indicated above, there could be additional activities which would require extra-budgetary resources which could take the form of specific projects, or a direct financial coverage of the activities by the countries hosting or participating in them, and which would be discussed by the Working Group on Aquaculture and the RECOFI Commission on a case-to-case basis. Example of these extra activities could be:

- Special reports on aspects of aquaculture development.
- Surveys linked to the development of aquaculture and to the generation of information.
- Training courses, seminars and workshops.
- Technical consultations on an ad hoc basis.
- Organization of study tours.

OPENING SPEECH
of
Dr Younis K. Al-Akhzami
Director General
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Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

(In the name of God most gracious most merciful)

Praise be to God and blessings and peace upon our prophet Mohammed, the guiding and the faithful and upon his relatives and followers.

H.E. Khalfan bin Saleh Al-Naabey
The Undersecretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

Directors General and officials of the Ministry
Representatives of FAO
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries I would like to welcome all the participants in this meeting and I would also like to convey to you the greetings and wishes of H.E Sheikh Salim Bin Hilal Al-Khalili, the Minister of Agriculture who wishes you fruitful discussions and good recommendations which provide a floor for more achievements in benefiting all our nations.

This is the second meeting of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI), following the first meeting hosted by Oman in Muscat in the period 6–8 October 2001 and the technical meeting which was also held in Muscat in the period 13–15 May 2000. This meeting aims at following up the implementation of the recommendations of the previous meetings which have called for establishing a standardized database for shrimp fishery and other species, documentation of managerial procedures, discussing statistics on different stock species and ensuring more coordination and cooperation between all the parties.

Fisheries resource comes in an advanced position as one of the economical pillars in the Sultanate economy; it is widely seen as the cornerstone of enhancing the policy of diversification adopted by the country to diversify its income resources. The government has saved no efforts in development and conservation of fisheries resources, by using every possible scientific means and methods. This includes the establishment of scientific specialized centres and the implementation of research programmes and projects that address different issues related to the fishing industry and also training centres that train the new fishermen generations on the best and the most sophisticated fishing gear and methods that consider quality and reduce cost. The hosting of scientific conferences is part of the government initiatives to develop and protect this resource. These efforts has lead the Sultanate to become one of the main countries exporting fisheries products to the European Union, as its abidance by the strict international quality control standards has become widely known. Many fisheries projects were implemented here in the Sultanate, among them successful aquaculture projects. These have been accompanied by concentrated efforts to preserve and protect the sustainability of these fisheries and conserve the marine environment, as the Sultanate is famous by having one of the most clean and health marine environments.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has contributed and continue to contribute in fulfilling many objectives related to establishing the scientific bases needed for protecting marine resources in a way that benefited all the human life. The code of conduct for

responsible fisheries, established by FAO includes the necessary principles for protecting fisheries. We hope such efforts be continued and that we work together for similar efforts by member countries.

In hosting this workshop, the Sultanate aims at establishing more regional cooperation in the technical level between the member countries specially in the stock assessment studies of demersal fish resources and the development of aquaculture. The Sultanate would submit a proposal of establishing an office to address the issues of fisheries data collection, their analysis and assisting member countries to formulate decisions regulating fishing operations and application of the principles of responsible fisheries in addition to the coordination between member countries on joint projects on natural fisheries or these related to aquaculture.

Finally, I would like to thank the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the regional office of Food and Agriculture for the Near East in particular, for organizing this meeting and the previous meetings. I also wish to thank participants from the Organizations and wish them successful deliberations and good stay in the Sultanate of Oman.

My thanks are also extended to his Excellency the patron of this ceremony the undersecretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Engineer Khalfan Al Naabiand and all of you.

OPENING SPEECH

of

Mohammad Saif Abdullah

RECOFI Secretary

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Regional Office for the Near East

In the name of God the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful
Praise be to God, blessings and peace to our Prophet Mohammad, and to his relatives and followers.

H.E. Khalfan bin Saleh Al-Naabey

The Undersecretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries – Oman

Directors General and Officials of the Ministry

Ladies and Gentlemen Representatives of RECOFI Countries, my colleagues from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

On behalf of my FAO colleagues and on behalf of the Director General of the Organization Dr Jacques Diouf and all employees in the FAO Regional Office for the Near East, I have the pleasure to welcome you and convey the greetings of the Assistant Director General and Regional Representative of the Near East Office and his wishes for the success of this second session of the RECOFI in the Sultanate of Oman and in the beautiful city of Muscat.

Since many years, the RECOFI is persistent on following up the catch activity all over the world, on collecting statistical data as well as on studying the problems facing the Fisheries and Aquaculture sectors and trying to find the suitable solutions. The Organization's data base is considered one of the best all over the world in spite of the presence of some deficiencies.

Ladies and gentlemen, in the Fisheries Committee meeting which was held in February/March this year, some of the Fisheries problems came out, on top of these problems were the decrease in fish quantities and some of the aquaculture problems, these problems were discussed and solutions have been observed by the participants, many other problems have been suspended pending to future studies and to meetings which will be supervised by the Organization and related reports will be issued for the next Fish Committee's meeting in year 2005.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will relay to you some important topics which I consider on top priority for sorting out.

First: Fisheries Statistics

The Commission has a unique role in the field of Fisheries Sustainable Management, this role is burst out from the shared nature of Fisheries Stock and Aquaculture between all of the Region's countries which is not limited to Geographic and Political borders, which makes any individual measure taken in one Country affects the stock of the whole area.

The shared responsibility of any sustainable Management requires in the first degree the consistent collection of accurate statistics on stock nature which facilitates the suggestions of perfect Management measures, it is quite clear that in the absence of such statistics, any current scientific researches will be of no value. The individual member Countries studies undertaken on the illegal fishing, risks many species to be diminished (decreased), it is worth mentioning that the illegal fishing is not the only cause that leads to this diminish but there are also other factors such as contaminations, inhabitedness expansion, destroying of small fish and shrimp growth areas anyhow, the fish statistics is a very important topic and there should be Regional Mutual efforts to study the fish diminishment

cause as well as establishing an office that is capable of collecting data on fisheries regularly - the RECOFI will propose recommendations for consideration in this session.

Second: Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing

This problem has been raised Internationally for many years. The increasing and exceeding number of National and International vessels placed the Fish wealth under great pressure that led to the Illegal fishing; as the applying of police surveillance over fish national & international vessels is a difficult and expensive matter, new methods has been adopted thru radio communications and satellites to track position and fish methods used by vessels, this system is called Vessel Monitoring System (VMS), in spite that this system was mainly used in the fishing monitoring known as MCS, yet it could be used also in fisheries and new technologies of this System will be presented at the session to study the possibility of its application in the Region.

Third: Aquaculture

The aquaculture sector has imposed itself on the Fish Committee meetings during the past few years, a result of which an aquaculture sub committee meeting is convened annually and a report is raised to the Fish Committee. Environmental problems have accompanied the rapid development in this field and although the RECOFI countries are considered to be recently acquainted with Aquaculture, yet the ambitious scientific researches in most of these countries as well as the trade implication of shrimp and fish aquaculture in other countries, makes the RECOFI responsible on following up the various activities, studying and verifying FAO and outside Experts' recommendations trying to make use of its application for the welfare of establishing sustainable Industry of marine fishing and local aquaculture through a sustainable scientific policy in collaboration with Organizations, Research Institutions, National and Regional Universities.

I am honoured to extend my thanks to the delegates from KISR, UNEP, ICLARM and King Abdul Aziz Scientific City for attending this session, and for sharing and enriching the success of its discussions. I would also like to extend my thanks to the efforts done by ROPME and GCC in supporting the RECOFI's activities and I hope that we all can succeed in increasing this cooperation for the welfare of the Region.

Finally, I have the honour to extend my gratitude and thanks to the Sultanate of Oman, Leadership, Government and Citizens for patronizing and hosting this session, namely his Excellency the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, his Excellency Undersecretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, the Director General of Fisheries Wealth and all employees in his department and wish you all a successful session and enjoyable stay.

The second session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) was attended by delegates from seven members of the Commission as well as by observers from the Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency (ERWDA), the United Nations Environment Programme/Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP/ROWA) and the WorldFish Center. The report provides information on the topics reviewed during the second session of RECOFI. The official opening of the session was made by Dr Younis Al-Akhzami, Director General, Fisheries Resources, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries of the Sultanate of Oman. A two-day technical meeting preceding the Commission session was organized for the purpose of reviewing the technical preparations in support of the Commission session. The session was organized to review the progress of the RECOFI relevant issues of concern in the Gulfs Region as well as the progress of the first session recommendations. The Commission endorsed the recommendation to establish a standing Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA) and its terms of reference and a Working Group on Statistics (WGS). The Commission also reviewed the next intersessional work in relation to budgetary issues.

