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COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

SUB-COMMITTEE ON AQUACULTURE

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EXCERPTS FROM THE PROSPECTUS OF (A) THE EXPERT CONSULTATION ON IMPROVING GLOBAL STATUS AND TRENDS REPORTING ON AQUACULTURE AND (B) THE WORKING GROUP OF EXPERTS ON THE FAO AQUACULTURE QUESTIONNAIRE, *FISHSTAT AQ*

Background and Rationale

1. FAO plays a unique role in global aquaculture statistics and the preparation of information on the global status and trends of the aquaculture sector. Such reports are important in alerting regional organizations, national policy makers and advisors, industry, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the public to the global aquaculture situation and global issues which can have effects at the regional and national levels.
2. In recent years the demand for reliable data and information, and for reporting on fisheries and aquaculture has greatly increased, driven by the need to formulate and monitor the impact of sound policies and development plans for sustainable aquaculture development, and management of resources and the environment; and the increasing public demand for transparency and accountability.
3. Changing perspectives in fisheries and aquaculture management are also changing requirements for information. It is now largely accepted that: (a) managers must take a wider range of issues into account in decision-making (e.g. socio-economics, resource use, management of the environment); (b) aquaculture needs to be considered within the full scope of the environment; (c) ecosystem-based management is likely to be increasingly adopted in the future; (d) the best approach to sustainability is through appropriate precaution and application of the Precautionary Approach; and (e) interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral information is required and there is urgent need for integration of data collection and presentation.

4. The rapid growth of the aquaculture sector will increase concern about implications of its expansion and the risk of unsustainable development, and underline the need for a reliable and adequate information base to ensure informed policy and development planning. These concerns have created an increased need, in many countries, for a better array of numerical data of reliable quality and for other information that measure and describe trends of the sector, and for better use of existing information.
5. The need for aquaculture data and information collection is embedded in the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF)¹, and some data needs are further elaborated in the associated FAO Technical Guidelines². The Code recognizes that reliable and timely data are required for the competent authorities of national governments to discharge effectively their general responsibility in the promotion of sustainable aquaculture practices that are well-integrated into rural, agricultural and coastal development.
6. Though aquaculture has a long history, the management of the sector is a fairly new concern and the collection of statistical data and other information on aquaculture is a recent endeavour in many countries. Equally, the FAO aquaculture statistics database system is a relatively recent activity, initiated only in 1984. The questionnaire, *FISHSTAT AQ*, designed in consultation with regional experts, was introduced in 1984 to collect aquaculture statistics reported at the national level. The questionnaire and its instruction sheet are intended to: (a) promote standardized usages of variables to facilitate international comparability of data; and (b) improve monitoring and analysis of trends in aquaculture development.
7. There have been no substantial changes in the structure and contents of the questionnaire since 1984, with the exception of the definition of aquaculture. The FAO questionnaire was last reviewed in 1999 (mainly in the Asia region) by a SEAFDEC³-FAO ad hoc expert consultation, but no modifications were made to the questionnaire. Guidelines for the collection of structural aquaculture statistics were prepared by the Fisheries Department as a supplement to the Programme for the World Census of Agriculture 2000 to encourage Member Governments to improve structural data on aquaculture for better frame surveys. This is a voluntary and long term process and the results will not be available for some time.
8. Published FAO statistics are currently limited to production quantities and values by species and environment, plus information on production facilities. There is considerable variation in the quality of the data submitted to FAO by Member Governments, and some of the submitted data is not yet published because of problems of quality and completeness. FAO recognizes that many of the problems with statistical and non-statistical information on aquaculture are a reflection of the recent development of the sector as a recorded activity, its diversity and the complexity of developing approaches. FAO has made considerable progress in improving its information bases on aquaculture, but these databases are still in the developmental stage, lagging behind statistical systems for fisheries and agriculture.
9. The growing importance of aquaculture requires closer attention to some aspects of data collection and their accurate reporting and analysis, as well as the purpose and scope of collected data. There is a need for a coherent long term strategy to improve the FAO global system of status and trends reporting and the underlying information base. There is also need to revisit the FAO aquaculture questionnaire in the light of emerging needs and existing problems in national reporting.

¹ FAO. 1995. Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. Rome, FAO, 41 p.
<http://www.fao.org/fi/agreem/codecond/ficonde.asp>

² FAO Fisheries Department. 1997. Aquaculture Development. *FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries* No. 5, Rome, FAO, 40 p.

³ SEAFDEC = Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center

10. The Conference on Aquaculture in the Third Millennium (2000)⁴ identified information needs for aquaculture as a priority area for attention at the national, regional and global levels. More recently, the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture (COFI/AQ), during its First Session in April 2002, designated information needs for aquaculture as a priority area for attention at the global level and recommended that FAO develop an approach for improving reporting on aquaculture status and trends similar to that developed for capture fisheries, with special attention to the quality of the information on which it is based.

11. In response to these needs and recommendations, the FAO Fisheries Department is convening an Expert Consultation on Improving Status and Trends Reporting on Aquaculture, and a Working Group of Experts on the FAO Aquaculture Questionnaire, *FISHSTAT AQ* in November 2003. These activities are a collaborative effort of three units of the FAO Fisheries Department, the Fisheries Information, Data and Statistics Unit (FIDI), the Fisheries Policy and Planning Service (FIPP) and the Inland Water Resources and Aquaculture Service (FIRI).

A. Expert Consultation on Improving Status and Trends Reporting on Aquaculture

Objective and scope

- (a) The Fisheries Department is organizing this Expert Consultation with the purpose of seeking advice and guidance for improving global status and trends reporting on aquaculture.
- (b) The overall objective of the Expert Consultation is to prepare a sustainable strategy and plan for the improvement of status and trends reporting on aquaculture at the international level.
- (c) To provide guidance, the Expert Consultation must consider a number of interlinked institutional and technical issues. It must evaluate the current information base and its adequacy for monitoring of trends in the light of changing management perspectives. It must also examine the procedures for data collection for national needs, and for regional and global reporting. It should also address the broader issues of quality assurance and participation in the collation and analysis of information in order to ensure transparency and consensus.

More specifically, the Expert Consultation will:

- (a) Review available information on completeness, scope and procedures for preparation of FAO status and trends reports on aquaculture (i.e. information collection and collation, quality control, analysis and dissemination), as well as the nature and quality of the information on which it is based, and the timeliness of reporting;
- (b) Review regional and global institutional arrangements and mechanisms for advising on information needs for policy and management, agreeing on standards and methodologies for collecting information, and coordinating statistical activities among regional bodies;
- (c) Consider changing information requirements for sector management and suggest minimum content and related data and information needs at the national level and for global reporting, within the practical limits of national resources and capacities, to enable a more holistic, multi-faceted approach to aquaculture analysis and management;
- (d) Identify areas for improvement and suggest practical measures and mechanisms for achieving improvements in targeted areas; and
- (e) Draft an international strategy and plan to serve as a framework for implementing these improvements.

⁴ NACA/FAO. 2000. Report of The Conference on Aquaculture in the Third Millennium. NACA, Bangkok and FAO, Rome. 120p.

In addressing this task, and to ensure a practical outcome, the Expert Consultation should take into consideration:

- Current content and constraints in the collection of aquaculture statistics and establishment of non-statistical information systems;
- National data collection capacities and resources, as well as the trade-off between the scope of coverage and data accuracy; and
- Recent recommendations from FAO meetings on these matters.

Expected Output

It is anticipated that the Expert Consultation will provide:

- (a) Specific advice and guidance on measures to improve various aspects of global status and trends reporting on aquaculture including, *inter alia*, matters related to institutional arrangement; scope; standards; quality; participation, transparency; and consensus
- (b) A draft strategy to serve as a framework for implementing the suggested improvements.

B. Working Group of Experts on the FAO Questionnaire, *FISHSTAT AQ*

Objective and scope

The FAO Fisheries Department is organizing this Working Group with the purpose of seeking expert advice and guidance concerning the FAO questionnaire (*FISHSTAT AQ*) and its instruction sheet, in order to identify and prioritize modifications that are deemed most necessary to improve the FAO data base on aquaculture.

The overall objective is to improve the information base for global reporting within the practical limits of national capacities and resources while responding to the extent possible to changing management perspectives and widespread concerns about sustainable development, and management of the environment and natural resources.

Specifically, the Working Group is invited to review the *FISHSTAT AQ* questionnaire to provide recommendations on what modifications are necessary and feasible (e.g. in terms of scope, harmonization of terms and classifications, definitions, periodicity of data collection, adequacy and clarity of the instruction sheet, user friendliness), to prioritize the suggested modifications and to identify specific approaches and actions to achieve them to meet global information requirements.

In doing so, the Working Group should take into consideration:

- (a) The discussions and recommendations of the preceding Consultation on Improving Status and Trends Reporting on Aquaculture regarding:
 - Minimum essential data needs
 - National issues and priorities for improving statistical data
 - Issues concerning the FAO global statistical data base on aquaculture
 - Modifications to *FISHSTAT AQ* suggested earlier (for the Asia region), and the response of concerned Member States

- (b) Possible need for modifying the scope of statistical data collected to meet new management perspectives and to respond to increasing public concerns about resources and the environment, including minimum needs for relevant indicators;
- (c) The revised definitions and additions to structural and non-structural statistics suggested in FAO's *Guidelines for the collection of structural aquaculture statistics*;
- (d) Differences in development stages and importance of the sector and institutional capacity among Member Governments and feasibility for Members to provide the statistics requested; and
- (e) The need to address effects of modifications of the FAO questionnaire on the integrity of historic data sets at the national, regional and international level.

Output

The expected outputs include:

- (a) Suggested changes and priorities, and the underlying rationale;
- (b) Practical means of achieving recommended changes (i.e. an action framework/road map), including suggestions on how to phase in changes to long standing data sets; and
- (c) Recommended level of aggregation and periodicity of data collection for each type of data category.

In arriving at recommendations, the Working Group should pay special attention that:

- Recommendations are specific and achievable
- Targets to be monitored are measurable
- Data collection can be cost-effective and sustainable by providers
- Collection of additional information may be attained at the expense of precision and reliability