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REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR FISHERIES (RECOFI)

Sixth Session

Rome, Italy, 10 – 12 May 2011

PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INITIATIVE ON FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COOPERATION IN THE NORTHERN AREA OF RECOFI

INTRODUCTION

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide information to the Commission on the progress of the FAO/RECOFI initiative to promote fisheries management cooperation in the northern area of RECOFI.

BACKGROUND

2. The twenty-eighth Regional Conference for the Near East (March 2006) had called upon FAO to encourage Member countries to promote measures for rebuilding and rehabilitating the fisheries infrastructure and institutions in Iraq. At the fourth RECOFI Session, the Commission expressed the hope that Iraq will resume its role by participating in future RECOFI sessions and stressed that it would welcome further information from Iraq on priority requirements for rebuilding and rehabilitating its fisheries institutions. At the fifth Session of RECOFI (12-14 May 2009, Dubai, UAE) the delegate from Iraq, with the support of the delegates from Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Kuwait, requested that the FAO Secretariat facilitate sub-regional cooperation among the three countries on fisheries issues of common concern, including IUU fishing. The Commission agreed that the Secretariat should support this sub-regional initiative including an *ad hoc* meeting among the three Members, with the view of promoting enhanced cooperation.

ACTIVITIES AND RESULTS

3. The RECOFI Secretariat convened the preliminary meeting on the *Fisheries Management Cooperation in the Northern Area of the RECOFI* in occasion of the FAO/RECOFI Regional Workshop on “Stock Indicators and Stock Status Reporting” that was held in Tehran (Islamic Republic of Iran) from 26 to 29 July 2009. The meeting was attended by participants from Iran, Iraq and Kuwait.

4. It was explained and agreed upon that current and future discussions should pertain exclusively to fisheries issues appropriate and coherent with the RECOFI and FAO mandate, with no reference to legal status of territories and boundaries. The participants agreed to name the current

undertaking as the FAO/RECOFI “Initiative to Promote Fisheries Management Cooperation in the Northern Area of the RECOFI” (henceforth “the Initiative”). The discussion focused on the identification of the priority topics, as listed below, to be included in the agenda of this initiative aimed at fostering sub-regional cooperation to support sustainable fisheries:

- 1) fisheries management in the northern area of RECOFI including the review of effectiveness of current conservation and management measures to preserve the resources and aquaculture;
- 2) sub-regional trade (dynamics, constraints, opportunities);
- 3) promotion of sustainable inland, brackish and marine waters aquaculture, including stock enhancement;
- 4) establishment of scientific cooperation and implementation of joint activities.

5. With reference to topic three above, it should be noted that the mandate of RECOFI does not include inland waters. In the sub-region concerned, however, inland waters are an essential component of the northern RECOFI’s ecosystem much affecting marine fisheries production. The meeting participants concurred on the need to pursue an integrated and holistic approach in accordance with the FAO mandate concerning freshwater fisheries and aquaculture. Moreover, it was deemed necessary to substantiate the selected topics with quantitative information to be collected through a survey questionnaire. This would create a solid base for discussion and analysis.

6. The second meeting of the Initiative was held on 22 October 2009 at the time of the third meeting of the RECOFI Working Group on Fisheries Management (Doha, Qatar, 20-22 October 2009). The status of implementation of the survey questionnaire was reviewed. It was agreed that the questionnaire exercise should be completed by December 1st 2009.

7. A further meeting was held on 13 May 2010 in concomitance with the Special Meeting on RECOFI Consolidation and Development (Rome, Italy, 11-12 May 2010). All meeting participants confirmed their respective countries’ commitment and availability to support the Initiative and agreed on the convenience to progress toward a higher-level meeting to have this initiative formalized and substantiated.

8. The higher-level meeting was preceded by and prepared for through a technical meeting. The technical meeting on Fisheries Management Cooperation in the Northern Area of the RECOFI was held in Kuwait City on 1 and 2 November 2010. Based on data gathered through a questionnaire prior to the meeting as well as on discussions at the meeting, it was agreed in the meeting that the following issues were priorities for the sub-region:

- the improvement and development of institutional and technical capacities;
- the establishment of cooperative appraisal of shared stocks including biological research on life history of priority species supporting fisheries of common interest;
- a concerted formulation and implementation of measures to prevention IUU fishing including illegal transboundary landing of catch;
- the effective enforcement of fishery regulations;
- the identification of priority species essential habitats such as spawning and nursery grounds in the area concerned, including the identification of breeding and spawning seasons for the joint adoption of appropriate conservation measures;
- the creation of a cooperative research programme to assess and monitor the environmental pollution and its impact on marine biodiversity in general and on the shared fish stocks in particular in the Northern Gulf sub-region; and
- the elaboration of a joint management plan under the guidance of FAO/RECOFI for the management and conservation of the shared stocks including the prevention of fishing activities during spawning and breeding seasons.

9. There was agreement that the work plan to support fisheries management cooperation in the northern area of RECOFI should be structured around three main components encompassing the activities identified as priority and of common interest to the countries. These components were:

- I) capacity development in fisheries and aquaculture research and management;
- II) joint appraisal of shared stocks and fisheries of common interest including standard data collection and compilation; and
- III) improvement of sub-regional fisheries management including combating IUU fishing.

10. The meeting concurred on the following immediate actions:

- a) The FAO Secretariat will prepare the Summary Report of the meeting;
- b) Kuwait will update the survey information;
- c) Iran (Islamic Republic of) will prepare a logical framework of activities; and
- d) Iran (Islamic Republic of) will convene and host a higher-level meeting on the tripartite initiative tentatively to be held in 2011.

11. In consideration of the current and possible future FAO role in supporting the tripartite initiative, FAO/FI and FAO/RNE will be invited to attend the higher-level meeting.

SUGGESTED ACTION BY THE COMMISSION

12. The Commission is invited to consider the progress and outcome of the initiative to promote fisheries management cooperation in the northern area of RECOFI meetings reviewed in this paper and to provide guidance on the future activities including any follow-up actions.