

Debating Aquaculture

The FAO's Committee on Fisheries' Sub-committee on Aquaculture recently discussed issues related to aquaculture development

The Seventh Session of the Committee on Fisheries' Sub-Committee on Aquaculture (COFI SCA) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) was held at St Petersburg, Russian Federation, during 7 – 11 October 2013.

The issues debated were the work priorities of the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture (SCA) and the roadmap for the future, the Global Aquaculture Advancement Partnership (GAAP) Programme (Agenda Item 6) and the draft Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Advisory Working Group on Genetic Resources and Technology (Agenda Item 4).

On Agenda Item 6—the draft strategic framework strengthening

In addition, GAAP, conceptualized by the FAO as a means to generate extra budgetary resources through strategic partnerships with private players, came in for a lot of discussion. The connection between the sub-committee and GAAP was unclear to several countries (notably, Chile, Russia and Argentina) and it was felt that the information provided did not clarify matters. Chile also suggested that GAAP could be developed through regional organizations. The Bay of Bengal Programme, an inter-governmental organization, requested GAAP to promote regional partnerships, especially South-South co-operation, looking at livelihood options that are an alternative to capture fisheries.

Noting that regional networks, such as the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA), are important, India called for further strengthening of such networks. India also suggested that South Asia, as a leading producer of aquaculture, could take the initiative in this matter.

Agenda Item 6 came up for discussion in the afternoon of the first day of the session. During lunch on the second day, Brazil, Chile and Argentina were seen talking to delegates about the item.

One agenda item

During the post-lunch session, Chile suggested that since the sub-committee had only one agenda item left (the SCA had managed to deal with several items on the second day, leaving it ahead of schedule), the discussion on Agenda Item 6 should be re-opened on the morning of the third day. This was supported

the role of the COFI SCA in advancing aquaculture development—Germany, on behalf of the European Union (EU), and Norway stressed the need to strategically prioritize the sub-committee's work, based on the Plan of Action agreed upon at the previous session of the sub-committee in South Africa. It was felt that the documents in front of the Seventh Session did not help prioritize work. This issue was raised by European countries several times, and supported by Chile, which said that the SCA's work needs to include small-scale aquaculture, which is linked to poverty alleviation.

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by Norway, Canada, the United States and Germany. Thailand, however, expressed surprise at the request to re-open the discussion but added that perhaps member(s) could suggest a roadmap for the future.

The next day, Canada, Germany (on behalf of the EU) and Norway stressed that some sort of roadmap for the next two years be developed before the end of the session. Canada pointed out that there were many issues but not enough money, so there was a need to deliberate on how to secure funds and use them wisely.

Canada suggested that the SCA commit to a draft plan to be given to members six months before the Eighth Session in Brazil. This plan should have rationale-oriented strategic priorities that are linked to FAO priorities. It should provide a timeframe for implementation.

However, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Indonesia, Korea and India said they needed to consult their governments and wondered why, when workshops and meetings have been scheduled to push forward regional plans, a separate roadmap was needed.

In the end, it was agreed that strategic priorities could be developed for each region and, therefore, regional workshops could be the way forward for this.

While, in general, there was praise for FAO's efforts at implementing the recommendations of the past sessions, there were requests from Kenya and Namibia for continued support for certain programmes such as setting up of biosecurity protocols.

The draft ToR for the Advisory Working Group on Genetic Resources and Technologies was put up for discussion and approval. This group had been set up last year at the Sixth Session in South Africa, to advise the SCA on matters concerning aquatic genetic resources and technologies and enhance international co-operation on them.

Several countries, like India, Norway, Thailand and Japan, supported the formation of the advisory working group and its ToR. However, Honduras noted that while the advisory working group was important, a paradigm shift in approach is needed in terms of an ecosystem approach to aquaculture which it has been attempting to implement. Of the eight countries that spoke about the advisory group, only three wanted changes and clarifications on the ToR. Germany, on behalf of the EU, pointed out that though the advisory group's name mentions genetic technology, the ToR does not. Germany also noted that the EU feels it is premature to include genetic modification within

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the scope of this working group. The EU was concerned that consumers are not ready for genetically modified fish.

Argentina, supported by Venezuela, pointed out that at the last session of the SCA, there had been talk of developing countries gaining access to genetic engineering technology; this ought to be added to the ToR, Argentina said. The Secretariat noted that access to technology is part of the scope of the working group. However, considering the requirements of space and latitude, there was no need to limit or

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the reporting system. The World Animal Health Organization, an NGO, offered to conduct reviews on animal health and sanitary standards, if members desired.

On Agenda Item 7: Evaluation framework for assessing conformity of public and private certification schemes with the FAO technical guidelines on aquaculture certification, Germany, on behalf of the EU, said that the evaluation framework for certification was of importance to the EU.

In a study, consumers had indicated that they were concerned about environmental impacts of the food they eat but the high price, low availability and lack of information of such “ecofriendly” food was an issue. The EU noted that 25 per cent of consumers were aware of the idea of certification; consumer perceptions had to be included in the certification process, it added.

The EU also expressed concern about the negative consumer image of the nutrition level of farmed fish compared to wild-caught fish.

Canada hoped that the evaluation framework for certification would be accepted by member countries. Country reports were due by the end of 2014, and Canada was concerned that the scope of the country reports was limited. Russia also raised the issue of consumer awareness of nutritional aspects of farmed fish, saying that work needs to be done to stress that farmed fish does not lack nutritional value.

Trade barrier

Morocco highlighted its concerns in meeting EU requirements on management and health standards. Brazil, Argentina, Bangladesh and India noted that the evaluation framework could become a trade barrier. Norway said that while it understood these concerns, the evaluation framework was meant to reduce the risk of the guidelines becoming a trade barrier and, therefore, the framework should be endorsed. Russia, while approving the framework, said it reserved the right to propose changes once

specify particular issues though they can be added to the ToR if needed.

Eight countries and a non-governmental organization (NGO) spoke on Agenda Item 5: Progress reporting on the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) provisions relevant for aquaculture and culture-based fisheries using the new reporting system.

Countries have been reporting the implementation of the CCRF through a standard questionnaire. In 2009, a new questionnaire specific to aquaculture, to supplement the aquaculture section in the earlier tool, was developed. The Secretariat informed the sub-committee that only 37 per cent of member countries responded to the new questionnaire, but these countries account for 90 per cent of aquaculture production globally. The conclusion was that the questionnaire is a good tool for self-assessment in spite of some over-scoring in policies and planning. Norway and Canada felt a little more experience in using the questionnaire is needed before any changes are made to the reporting system. Germany argued for Web-based systems and training modules on

countries have had some experience in using it. China and Thailand said that the framework could be used not just to evaluate private certification systems but also for producer countries to develop their own certification schemes. Brazil expressed concerns about the impact of the framework and the guidelines on low-input aquaculture.

Agenda Item 8 on applying spatial planning for promoting future aquaculture growth was welcomed by several countries. Norway noted that it should be done at the lowest level of government, to reduce conflicts.

Norway also introduced a note of caution on using Web- and computer-based tools, pointing out that these should not replace actual assessments.

Russia said the document was timely and useful but it would like to see a compilation of best practices. India noted that spatial data was hard to acquire, and climate-change impacts should be considered during spatial planning.

Norway and the US said they would have liked to see how spatial planning enables the SCA to meet the strategic goals of FAO.

Agenda Item 9 on the role of aquaculture in improving nutrition and the opportunities and challenges offered, again raised the issue of the nutritional value of farmed fish vis-a-vis wild fish. There was general agreement that there is no nutritional difference (as proven by studies) but consumers continue to be biased against farmed fish.

India mentioned how it is reducing the use of fish oil in shrimp feed. India also highlighted the importance of small-scale fisheries and small-scale aquaculture in poverty alleviation, food security and nutrition. India pointed out the importance of small-scale aquaculture for rural development in providing livelihood opportunities, and in improving social equity and food security. The needs of small-scale aquaculture producers need to be identified, documented and supported. India also noted that there are currently no specific social standards for aquaculture. Guidelines on

aquaculture certification should include standards and guidelines for working conditions and social protection. India urged the SCA to request the International Labour Organization (ILO) to undertake a study on these aspects, both in large- and small-scale aquaculture, and to develop standards and guidelines in consultation with FAO.

Agenda Item 10 on the role of the SCA in promoting culture-based fisheries saw discussion on definitions. Germany felt that culture-based fisheries must fall under fisheries since it does not fit the EU definition of aquaculture. India agreed that some universal definition of culture-based fisheries is required. India also drew attention, in paragraph 10 of the agenda document (which lists management issues), to the need to support/draw attention to the rights of traditional fisheries and also the need to look at the International Guidelines on Small-scale Fisheries (IGSSF) being developed by FAO.

Norway wondered whether the carrying capacity or normal stocking intensity should be considered in management and said that a serious risk assessment is needed if any species are to be introduced. Germany, speaking on behalf of the EU as well, and Norway said that restocking in natural waters is a growing concern and expert consultation on the matter would be useful.

There was also discussion on the issue of standardized and improved reporting of production from culture-based fisheries. The agenda document noted that reporting is inconsistent; some members report activities as falling under aquaculture while others report them under culture-based fisheries. China noted that it is difficult to separate aquaculture and culture-based fisheries and asked what the data collected was going to be used for.

The next session of the SCA—held every two years—will be held in Brazil, which took over as Chair. 3

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Co-ordinated Efforts in Aquaculture Needed to meet Global Demand

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Sub-committee on Aquaculture