

# Developing Guidelines for Safety at Sea: Expert Consultation in Rome Provides Guidance

**S**afety at sea is a critical issue in fisheries. Governments need help in providing guidelines to improve safety.

An expert consultation in Rome held from 10 to 13 November, 2008, did just that – it came up with an outline for the development of guidelines for best practices to improve safety at sea.

The Consultation was funded by NIOSH (National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health) through the BOBP-IGO, and the Government of Norway through the FAO FishCode Programme. Sixteen persons took part in the Consultation.

Welcoming participants, Mr Grimur Valdimarsson, Director of the Fish Products and Industry Division, FAO Rome, said that more than 24 000 fishing-related deaths occurred every year. He said that in merchant vessels, a majority of the hazardous operations were carried out in the safety of a port; but in small fishing vessels, crews worked at sea in all types of weather.

He said that human error rather than faulty design, construction or equipment of vessels, was responsible for about 80 percent of the accidents.

Mr Jeremy Turner, chief of the FAO's Fishing Technology Service, ascribed fatalities in fisheries to poor-quality vessels and equipment as well as to human failure. Regulation could address the former issue, a broader range of interventions was needed to eliminate the latter. Economic pressures made owners and skippers resort to cost-cutting on vessel maintenance, safety equipment, labour and working conditions. These contributed greatly to human error and accidents. Holistic solutions were needed that addressed social, economic and technical dimensions.

The resource person from the IMO, Mr Hiroyuki Yamada, said that the long-standing cooperation between FAO, ILO and IMO had yielded a range of instruments related to the safety of fishers and fishing vessels. Collaboration focused currently on

safety recommendations for decked fishing vessels less than 12 m long, and undecked fishing vessels, as well as on guidelines to assist the implementation of the FAO/ILO/IMO Code of Safety.

Dr Jennifer Lincoln (an injury epidemiologist with NIOSH) summarized a paper based on a FAO/NIOSH study on the relationship between fisheries management and safety at sea. Sixteen case studies from around the world were part of the study. The Consultation stressed the need for a shared understanding between fisheries managers and safety professionals, and urged them to work together.

The Consultation recognized the special needs of developing countries in implementing guidelines for safety at sea. To remove constraints to a safety policy, technical and legal assistance might be needed; also assistance in the areas of data collection and analysis, capacity-building, scientific cooperation, and



*A view of the city of Rome from FAO Headquarters.*

the training of trainers and extension workers. The Consultation noted that special attention might have to be paid to available and affordable safety equipment and servicing facilities.

### **Outline for guidelines on best practices for safety at sea**

The outline for the development of guidelines was based on four interlinked 'pillars'. Under the first pillar, a baseline assessment of safety issues is proposed through data collection and analysis of accidents in fisheries.

The second pillar is devoted to creating an inventory or baseline survey that provides a comprehensive overview of all aspects of national fisheries.

In the third pillar, information provided under pillars 1 and 2 is to be analysed to identify safety problems and their causes. This analysis would be used to develop solutions and measures for mitigation. The fourth pillar would concentrate on implementation and promotion of the strategy. It includes recommendations on how to advocate, manage and influence change and evaluate progress.

Here are important points from the four pillars. For complete details, please see FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Report No 888 (Report of the Expert Consultation on best practices for safety at sea in the fisheries sector)

#### **Pillar 1 – Data collection and analysis to improve safety**

Guidance will be provided on:

- The need for accident/incident data collection, interpretation and analysis,
- Design of data collection systems (Data sources may include records held by the Coast Guard, the Navy, insurance companies, traditional power structures, police, death registers and coroners' inquests, as well as anecdotal evidence from crew members, communities and families),



*Participants at the Expert Consultation.*

- Preparation of a standard form for accident data collection,
- Systems for centralized collection of data from decentralized sources,
- Collection of accident and injury data in remote areas,
- Collection of accident and injury data from confidential sources, and
- Comparing costs of accident prevention versus search and rescue operations.
- Legal requirements for consultation/cooperation between ministries and administrations,
- Status of existing national legislation directly or indirectly related to fishing vessel safety,
- Identification of procedures and conditions for licensing and registration,
- Identification of construction standards for fishing vessels and certification requirements,
- Identification of manufacturers and suppliers within the country providing safety equipment, machinery and services,
- Lists of insurance brokers, and
- Historic data on fatalities and injuries.

#### **Pillar 2 – National fisheries sector inventory**

- Comprehensive reports reviewing all national fisheries,
- Numbers of people involved in fisheries, numbers and types of fishing vessels as well as non-fishing vessels dedicated to supporting activities in fisheries,
- Socio-economic analysis of fisher communities and fleet segments,
- A summary of national fisheries management objectives and regulations,
- Definition of links between all concerned administrations,
- Identification of vessel owners, and organizations concerned with fish processing and marketing and fisher representatives,
- Training facilities in fisheries, numbers of qualified trainers and extension specialists,
- Availability of qualified examiners in areas of certification of fishing vessel personnel,

#### **Pillar 3 – Problems, solutions and safety strategy development**

##### *Analytical tools*

A strategy for improved safety and guidance, including the use of analytical tools, should determine direct contributing factors to fatalities, injuries and vessel casualties before, after and during the event, such as:

- Human factors (fatigue, stress, lack of training, risk-taking behaviour, drug abuse, safety culture),
- Fisheries management regimes (overcapacity, excessive competition),
- Regulatory measures (unclear, inappropriate or out-of-date regulations, gaps or contradictions)

among applicable regulations, particularly regarding registration and fishing authorization procedures),

- Vessel and equipment (poor design and construction, inadequate crew facilities and medical supplies, poor maintenance, lack of quality boatbuilders),
- Physical environment (weather, wind, waves, poor visibility, etc), and
- Operational factors, including vessel management, aids to navigation, navigational error.

### Strategy development

For mitigation or solution of identified problems, guidance should be provided on the development of strategies, participatory mechanisms and implementation programmes, including elements such as:

- A mechanism to ensure broad stakeholder consultation and participation (which may include fish processing and marketing companies, safety equipment and engine suppliers, boatyards, scientific research and training institutes,
- Analysis of the value of existing legislation, preparation of amendments to existing legislation or new legislation,

- Implementation of training needs assessment and voluntary and mandatory training for fishers and inspectors as well as fisheries and maritime administration personnel,
- Analysis of direct and indirect relationship between fisheries management measures and safety at sea,
- Evaluation of factors arising from increased investment, effort and risk,
- The significance of fiscal policies and their effect on safety,
- Development of an effective framework for cooperation between fisheries and maritime and other concerned administrations at the national level,
- Importance of awareness-raising campaigns on safety among fisher communities, and empowerment of fishers in the decision-making process through the participatory approach, and
- Early warning systems, disaster preparedness, risk reduction planning and implementation and other mitigation arrangements.

### Pillar 4 – Managing Change

Drawing upon the data collection and analysis, inventories and problems, and the solutions identified, Pillar 4 will seek to

promote an overall strategy on how to manage or influence change. Plans of action with measurable goals and objectives to monitor progress and evaluate impact will be developed. Guidance will be provided on the need -

- To raise political will and commitment for improving safety,
- To identify pressure groups to bring about change,
- To empower all stakeholders to take identified action, and where applicable, the formation of a safety committee (fisheries and maritime administrations, training institutions, fishing boat owners and operators, fisher unions, cooperatives, families, insurance entities),
- To consider the value of formal classroom and informal training,
- For consultation among all stakeholders, the objective being that people in fisheries take on the onus for best practices to improve health and safety,
- To provide the resources to bring about change, including skills, expertise, time and financing to ensure change through action, performance and accountability,
- For quality project design and formulation, including progress indicators, and addressing implementation, ongoing monitoring and evaluation, and correction and adjustment,
- For the development of a communication strategy, for distribution of all pertinent information and awareness-raising, and
- To use mentors to enhance communication with fishers.

The Consultation has asked the FAO Secretariat to proceed with the development of guidelines on the basis of the outlines summarized above. Experts present at the Consultation will be involved in the effort. Expertise in the ILO and IMO secretariats will be tapped.



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