

# Reforming fisheries and aquaculture: APFIC Forum provides food for thought

Many significant ideas and suggestions on “Reforming fisheries and aquaculture” emerged from the regional consultative forum of APFIC (Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission), which met in Kuala Lumpur from 16 to 19 August 2006.

The Forum preceded the 29th session of APFIC, held from 21 to 23 August 2006 at the same venue. (an article on the main APFIC meeting appears on pages 25 - 28). It was attended by 88 participants from 16 APFIC member-countries and 15 international, inter-governmental, and non-governmental organizations active in the fishery sector.

The goal of the APFIC Forum meeting (referred to as RCFM) was

to analyse and agree on actions needed to reshape fisheries and aquaculture in the Asia-Pacific region. Specifically, RCFM was to provide background material on the status and trends of fisheries and aquaculture in the Asia-Pacific; develop action plans to address two major issues (trash fish fisheries and fisheries co-management); and discuss two other issues – fish trade and standards; and illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing. The RCFM also addressed broader policy challenges facing all members, such as incorporation of fisheries and aquaculture concerns into national poverty reduction strategies; and integration of fisheries management into large marine ecosystem management.

The Director-General, Department of Fisheries, Malaysia, Y Bhg Dato’ Junaidi bin Che Ayub, welcomed participants. He said the forum would strengthen the role of APFIC through better knowledge of fisheries issues, sounder policy formulation and assistance to member-countries in reshaping their fisheries.

In a thoughtful keynote address, Mr Ichiro Nomura, Assistant Director-General, FAO Fisheries Department, described the evolution of APFIC as a regional consultative forum. He said the forum would act as a neutral platform to assist its members in discussing emerging issues in fisheries and aquaculture.

*Participants at the APFIC Forum.*





Mr Nomura said that successive waves of “boom and bust” had characterised the development of fisheries and aquaculture in Asia and the Pacific. In fisheries, stocks and habitats were being exploited one after another by newer and more effective fishing techniques to meet widening demand and expanding markets for fish. This phenomenon had led to the decline of pearling in the 1800s, trawling in the 1960s, and purse seining for small pelagics in the 1970s. About a decade ago, a point was reached where under-exploited stocks were very few, so were areas for fleets to develop.

As regards aquaculture, Mr Nomura said that remarkable growth had occurred in some parts of the region; but there were also rapid shifts in technology and in species farmed. There are today many constraints to further development of aquaculture – including the supply of aquaculture feed and the areas of expansion.

He said that in view of the unprecedented changes in fisheries and aquaculture in the Asia-Pacific region in recent times, reforming fisheries and aquaculture was urgent – to ensure sustainability and to strengthen livelihoods and economies in the region.

The RCFM was officially opened by Dato’ Seri Hj. Mohammed Shariff Hj. Omar, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Agro-based

Industry, Malaysia. He said that regional fisheries bodies should assist members in addressing the issues that now confronted fisheries and aquaculture. In this context, Malaysia welcomed the new role of APFIC as a consultative forum.

Dr Derek Staples, secretary of APFIC, explained the arrangements for RCFM, its objectives and expected outcomes. RCFM was designed as a platform for discussion, he emphasised. Forum participants debated four main themes, which are among the hottest issues in global fora today.

- The future of fisheries and aquaculture in Asia and the Pacific region and the low value/trash fish problem.
- Co-management, governance and institutions.
- Policy challenges.
- Emerging issues.

The Forum’s final session heard a summary and a presentation of the recommendations to be forwarded to APFIC. Posters prepared by members concerning national experiences with policy development, co-management and other issues, enriched the information exchange.

**Theme 1: The future of fisheries and aquaculture in Asia and the Pacific, and the low-value/ trash-fish problem**

Discussing the status and potential of fisheries and aquaculture in the

region, Dr Staples said that the world produced about 95 million tonnes from capture fisheries; the Asia-Pacific region contributed nearly half of this amount. In aquaculture, the region’s contribution is about 90 percent (40.4 million tonnes out of 45.5 million tonnes). Production in the region has grown by 3 percent since 2002 for capture fisheries, and by 12.5 percent for aquaculture (excluding aquatic plants). China and Thailand are among the world’s top five exporters of fish. As regards employment, Asia accounts for 87 percent of the world’s fishers and fish farmers, with 33 million people engaged in fishing and 9.5 million in fish farming. Many of these activities are pursued on a part-time basis as part of a complex livelihood.

In capture fisheries, production of pelagic species peaked in the late 1980s and then declined and levelled off. Demersals peaked in the mid-1970s, declined and then levelled off and never returned to the mid-1970s level. Unlike capture fisheries, aquaculture production is continuing to grow. There has been a steady increase in the APFIC region’s production with a dramatic increase reported for China (about 70 % of the total production from the region). Eight APFIC member-countries (including USA) are among the top 10 producing countries.

Scientific surveys have been conducted in many areas of Asia, including India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam. All of them show dramatic declines in stocks, with current biomasses between 6 percent and 30 percent of the biomass recorded 20 to 30 years ago. There are 65 large marine ecosystems (LMEs) worldwide, of which 20 are in the APFIC region.

Dr Staples summarized the challenges to fisheries and aquaculture in five sub-sectors:

- marine coastal fisheries — integrated coastal management, increasing catches through better management;



- pelagic offshore fisheries – access to resources;
- demersal offshore fisheries – sustainable expansion;
- inland fisheries – competing water use and environmental impacts from external factors; and
- aquaculture – site and feed constraints and increasing trade related issues.

Addressing these issues requires action both regionally and by countries. The Forum agreed that all countries should:

- apply a number of fishery management interventions (reducing the capacity of trawlers and pushnetters; improving gear selectivity; introducing more effective rights-based management; protecting nursery areas; and seeking alternative employment options for fishers);
- improve post-harvest interventions that could be used to improve the utilization of low value/ trash fish (improve onboard handling, diversify product forms); and
- address the demand for low value/ trash fish by aquaculture by improving feeds for aquaculture

**Theme 2: Co-management, Governance and Institutions**

The Forum debated co-management, one of the buzzwords

in fisheries today (management can't succeed without active co-operation on the part of all stakeholders). Presentations were made by Mr Robert Pomeroy of the University of Connecticut, USA (on lessons learned in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean on mainstreaming fisheries co-management); by Mr Pedro Bueno of NACA (on co-management in aquaculture); by Mr Simon Funge-Smith of FAO-RAPA (on strategies and action to mainstream fisheries co-management in the APFIC region); and by Mr Suriyan Vichitlekarn of SEAFDEC (on fishery rights). It also heard country experiences in co-management from Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.

The Forum defined fisheries co-management as “a partnership approach where government and the fishery resource users share the responsibility and authority for the management of a fishery or fisheries in an area, based on collaboration between themselves and other stakeholders.” The Forum recommended that fisheries co-management be mainstreamed into national systems of management in the countries of the Asia-Pacific region, building on previous activities. It suggested that APFIC members should invest enough

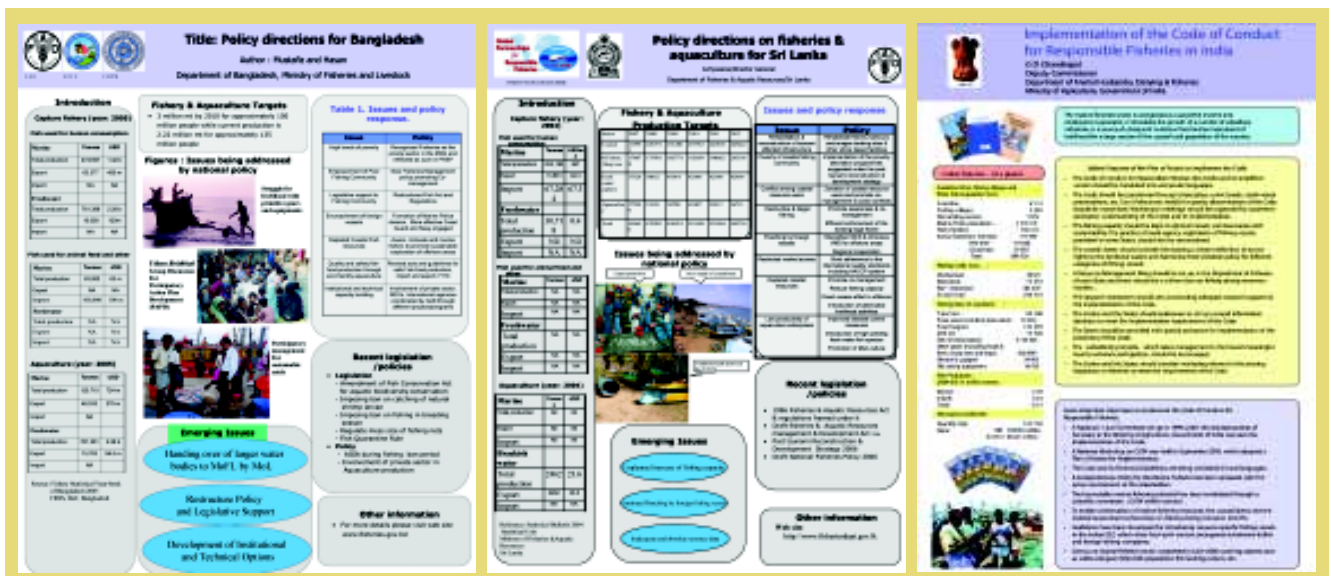
money to develop co-management and allocate budgets for fisheries co-management practices at all levels. Co-management should address key national policy objectives such as reducing overexploitation of fish stocks, overcapacity and poverty reduction.

The Forum urged members to assist in the empowerment of communities, facilitate capacity-building at all levels across communities and scales, and particularly ensure that government staff at all levels are adequately skilled and experienced to facilitate the implementation of fisheries co-management. The Forum urged all parties to share information and experiences on co-management and asked research agencies to undertake applied research on co-management, and particularly utilize traditional knowledge, management practices and experiences.

**Theme 3: Policy challenges**

The Forum undertook a policy review of member-countries to provide a regional synthesis of topical policy issues and to consider key policy drivers. Describing some of the findings of the review, Mr Graeme Macfadyen of the Poseidon Aquatic Resources Management Ltd said that many national policies referred to poverty alleviation and increases in exports as key objectives but did not address distribution aspects or the impact of trade.

*Posters presented by Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India at the Forum.*



Mr Andy Thorpe of the University of Portsmouth presented a paper highlighting the fact that though Asia is the foremost producer in capture fishery and aquaculture, the two subjects were hardly mentioned in poverty reduction strategies. He suggested that “flagship” projects should be established in fisheries and aquaculture to highlight their importance at the regional level. Links should be established with the UNDP to develop fish trade strategies.

The Forum referred to “policy gaps” and suggested “harmonization” on some matters between the national policies of countries, particularly neighbouring countries. There was no reference in many national policies to international and bilateral arrangements. Likewise, there were few references to gender-related issues. There was little investment in fisheries management. On poverty reduction practices, the Forum suggested that countries of the region should do more to link with and influence the policies and activities of international agencies, such as UNDP and UNESCAP, which had a sub-committee on Poverty Reduction Practices.

The Forum expressed concern that the Asian Development Bank has “de-prioritized” support to fisheries. It suggested measures to improve understanding among fishing communities, managers, and policy-makers of the linkages between

fisheries and the ecosystem. This could lead to integrated fisheries and habitat/ ecosystem management. It was also necessary to build the capacity of the authorities concerned to ensure that fisheries issues were integrated into the overall marine management framework.

#### **Theme 4: Food quality & safety in the context of trade**

Mr S Subasinghe of INFOFISH described major trends in the global seafood trade and how these related to the Asia-Pacific region. He said that cultured shrimp was rising in importance globally, while shrimp seems to have replaced canned tuna as a consumer favourite in the US. In the European Union, there has been a sustained increase in consumption and demand for all products, both fresh and frozen, from the Asia-Pacific. He said that increased purchasing power is also driving the import of more expensive products. Developed countries seem to have lowered tariff barriers but increased non-tariff barriers. Supermarket purchasing power is a strong influence on global trade and is emerging in both developed and developing countries. The power of supermarkets strongly affects markets and trade, so does environmental lobbying.

The Forum noted that with increased trade in fish products,

food quality and safety issues had become increasingly important for countries in the APFIC region. There is some concern that small-scale fishers and unorganized farmers are at a disadvantage in trade if very strict measures are put in place on food standards issues. Public support for small-scale farmers and fishers should be sustained to enable them to confront the impact of the new standards. A harmonized approach to HACCP standards for aquaculture must be worked out across countries in the Asian region.

About illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing – another “emerging issue” – the Forum said that many countries do not have the capacity to adequately address IUU fishing. There is no mechanism in place for regional co-ordination of management measures, including management of foreign vessels’ access to EEZs and international waters. Monitoring, control and surveillance are poorly developed across the region and compliance is low.

Excess capacity is one of the main drivers of IUU fishing. Countries should urgently begin to manage the issue of overcapacity of their national fishing fleets, review national legislation on IUU fishing and support international initiatives on the management of shared stocks and IUU fishing. A more coordinated regional and sub-regional approach must be adopted to IUU fishing. The Forum recommended that countries should sign on to and implement international instruments such as the UN Straddling Stocks Convention and the FAO Compliance Agreement.

As the end of three days of substantive discussion and debate, participants agreed with Mr Ichiro Nomura: “The need to reform fisheries and aquaculture is urgent – there is simply no other choice.”

