

COFI 30 HIGHLIGHTS: WEDNESDAY, 11 JULY 2012

The third day of the 30th session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) convened on Wednesday. The Committee spent the morning discussing ocean governance and relevant outcomes from the Rio+20 conference. In the afternoon delegates reviewed recent major developments and future work of the FAO on combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing that have occurred since COFI 29.

OCEAN GOVERNANCE AND RELEVANT OUTCOMES FROM RIO+20

Gabriella Bianchi, FAO, presented a report on the outcomes from Rio+20 and ocean governance (COFI/2012/6/Rev.1), highlighting the increased prominence of oceans at Rio+20 and requesting that the Committee advise FAO on its role in advancing ocean governance.

Honduras, for ORGANIZATION FOR THE CENTRAL AMERICAN FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE SECTOR, called on COFI and FAO to help systematize their experience in implementing successful regional fisheries management agreements. Peru, for the LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GROUP (GRULAC), supported by VENEZUELA, stated that multilateral governance of oceans should evolve from existing national and regional agreements.

The EU called for: improved transparency of RFMOs; science-based ocean governance; and universal ratification of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the UN Fish Stocks Agreement. MAURITIUS stressed that members of RFMOs must implement their obligations or ocean governance will be back to square one. MEXICO noted RFMOs are the most effective mechanism for management, but effectiveness is not homogenous.

NORWAY, supported by NEW ZEALAND, INDIA, ANGOLA and the FAROE ISLANDS, outlined measures for FAO to focus on: implementing existing instruments; fish for food security; and leading fisheries and aquaculture matters in the UN system. NEW ZEALAND said this agenda item reflects increased maturity of COFI. JAPAN and NORWAY urged FAO to participate more actively in CBD meetings. INDIA encouraged more participation of fisheries experts at CBD and CITES.

INDONESIA emphasized the “blue economy” approach to ocean management, and PALAU called for capacity building for regional institutions. VENEZUELA called for FAO to include support for sustainable development models other than the “green economy.” SIERRA LEONE, supported by ANGOLA and TANZANIA, called for FAO to assist with governance of artisanal fisheries, with ANGOLA emphasizing governance by regional fisheries bodies. THAILAND stressed need for FAO to look into piracy on the high seas.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION supported outcomes of Rio+20 on the need for conservation and rational use of biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ). ARGENTINA, supported by ECUADOR, expressed reservations about the use of the term “governance” with regards to biodiversity in ABNJ. BRAZIL, supported by ECUADOR, expressed concerns about the Global Environment Facility’s (GEF) ABNJ Programme and the World Bank Global Partnership for Oceans initiatives, and favored increased FAO participation in regional and national governance coordination. The EU stressed that the outcomes of Rio+20 concerning biodiversity conservation in ABNJ was a compromise that cannot be renegotiated. ARGENTINA, with VENEZUELA and MEXICO, said they could not accept the interpretation of UNCLOS in the report.

The US, supported by CANADA, said ocean governance is a holistic concept that is key for COFI and should be addressed in coordination with other initiatives. CANADA commended FAO on leading joint initiatives including the Global Partnership for Oceans initiative. ICELAND said FAO has the necessary competencies to promote sustainable governance. FAROE ISLANDS recommended FAO increase active coordination of national governance measures

UN DIVISION FOR OCEAN AFFAIRS AND THE LAW OF THE SEA (DOALOS) invited FAO to undertake work on deep-sea fisheries. UNEP welcomed collaboration with FAO on ecosystem approaches, marine protected areas, and food security. The NORTH EAST ATLANTIC FISHERIES COMMISSION described cooperation with the COMMISSION FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT OF THE NORTH-EAST ATLANTIC.

PEW expressed hope for establishing a framework for biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction. GREENPEACE lamented that Rio+20 oceans outcomes were a repetition of

previous commitments. IUCN requested COFI and the UN General Assembly oversee performance reviews of RFMOs to advance transparency.

The FAO Secretariat said the GEF ABNJ Programme was within FAO's mandate, noting that they had referred to it at COFI 29. He explained that the term governance, as used in the report, is not meant to undermine state sovereignty.

RECENT MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS AND FUTURE WORK IN SELECTED FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE ACTIVITIES OF FAO

COMBATING IUU FISHING (COFI/2012/8): Michele Kuruc, FAO, stressed the wide interest in IUU fishing from the private sector, NGOs, and the UN Security Council. David Douman, FAO, described FAO activities encouraging the entry into force of the Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA) and its subsequent implementation.

NORWAY, CHILE, GHANA, and SEYCHELLES urged all states to ratify the PSMA to facilitate its entry into force, with SIERRA LEONE lamenting: "inaction is tantamount to tacit support." COSTA RICA announced its ratification of the PSMA. JAPAN called on states not ready to ratify the PSMA to implement practical and feasible measures against IUU fishing, and said catch-documentation schemes are demanding but important. NORWAY said the PSMA is the most effective way of addressing IUU fishing, and urged FAO to continue capacity-building workshops until the PSMA enters into force.

MALAYSIA highlighted implementation of port state measures through regional cooperation. THAILAND noted the workshop co-hosted by FAO and the Asia-Pacific Fisheries Commission on implementing the PSMA that was held in Thailand in April 2012. VENEZUELA said port state measures need to be applied in a gradual manner allowing countries to build up competencies and capacities. TURKEY said they have increased inspection boats and trained port inspectors to implement port state measures. SOUTH AFRICA cautioned that the effectiveness of port state measures depends on appropriate enforcement. OMAN, KENYA, GUINEA and LIBERIA requested capacity development to help with implementing port state measures.

CANADA stressed that tackling IUU fishing requires action by port, flag, and market states. Supported by NORWAY, he said work with INTERPOL and the International Maritime Organization is critical. BANGLADESH remarked that IUU fishing is driven by market demand, with the EU noting the need for market measures to combat IUU fishing. INDIA and MEXICO called for compilation of information on the extent of IUU fishing, noting that better data will aid efforts to combat the problem.

MAURITIUS said IUU fishing in small-scale fisheries should be considered. The US noted tuna RFMOs' commitment to harmonize vessel records but cautioned, only a global record will be truly global. IRAN proposed a regional plan of action preventing IUU Sturgeon fishing. SENEGAL stressed focusing on regional or sub-regional approaches. TONGA emphasized sharing and cooperation to combat IUU fishing and the need to strengthen existing measures.

NAMIBIA described being a victim of IUU fishing, stressing their engagement with FAO flag state controls. Peru, for GRULAC, recognized flag states' responsibility for guaranteeing vessels are not involved in IUU fishing. MOZAMBIQUE proposed sanctions for non-compliance with IUU fishing control measures, and CANADA called for flexible and innovative work on flag state performance criteria. RUSSIAN FEDERATION urged FAO to produce a binding document on flag state control, with URUGUAY and GHANA noting their support for the flag state performance criteria. COOK ISLANDS stressed needing flag state consent when involving them in performance evaluations. FAROE ISLANDS, with MEXICO and ICELAND, supported the convening of a third expert consultation on flag state performance criteria.

INDONESIA and BAHRAIN described policy measures, partnerships and capacity building implemented to combat IUU fishing. TANZANIA, supported by SEYCHELLES, asked for FAO support to curb piracy, which is a major challenge in the fight against IUU fishing. MALDIVES said piracy in the Indian Ocean impedes efficient surveillance. URUGUAY underscored national commitment to eliminate IUU fishing. ARGENTINA highlighted the legal framework within which FAO would need to implement measures to combat IUU fishing.

CANADA, JAPAN, NORWAY, INDONESIA, GHANA, and ARGENTINA supported the Global Record of fishing vessels, noting its importance. COLOMBIA cautioned that the Global Record requires proper circulation of information between flag states and national authorities. PALAU requested clarification on the mechanism of submitting information for the Global Record.

INTERNATIONAL MONITORING, CONTROL AND SURVEILLANCE NETWORK described technical and human resource capacity building for surveillance. DOALOS noted assistance funds available under UN Fish Stocks Agreement to defray costs for delegates to attend fisheries meetings or for capacity building. PEW called for COFI to act decisively on IUU fishing and underlined the importance of capacity development. GREENPEACE recognized members' support for the PSMA and called for action to follow quickly once it enters into force.

The FAO Secretariat summarized the discussions of the session, recognizing the IUU fishing concerns, comments and experiences of the members.

IN THE CORRIDORS

After a full previous day, delegates worked in earnest to move through the Committee's remaining agenda. With some members questioning the FAO's role in the GEF ABNJ Programme, and the way forward with regards to Rio+20 outcomes, it is clear the FAO has a complex array of issues to balance, given the diverse needs of its membership. At the same time, the day's side-events on such topics as the management of sharks, small-scale fisheries, and the International Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Network, generated interest in the concrete actions that are underway on many of the issues within COFI's remit. These diverse and, according to one delegation, sometimes "simple solutions to local problems," echo the sentiments expressed by certain delegates that ocean governance needs to embrace a bottom-up approach, and that FAO needs to increase its role as a linking and coordinating body.