

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Committee on Fisheries (COFI)

FAO

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) was founded in October 1945 with a mandate to raise levels of nutrition and standards of living, to improve agricultural productivity, and to better the condition of rural populations. It was the first specialized agency of the United Nations to be established.

Today, FAO is the largest autonomous agency within the United Nations system with 192 member countries plus the European Community (Member Organization) and one Associate Member (Faroe Islands). The FAO employs 1600 professional staff and 2000 general services staff worldwide.

The Organization offers direct development assistance; collects, analyzes, and disseminates information; provides policy and planning advice to governments; and acts as an international forum for debate on food, agriculture, and forestry issues. FAO is active in land and water development, plant and animal production, forestry, fisheries, economic and social policy, investment, nutrition, food standards and commodities, and trade. It also plays a major role in dealing with food and agricultural emergencies. A specific priority of the Organization is encouraging sustainable agriculture and rural development, a long-term strategy for the conservation and management of natural resources. It aims to meet the needs of both present and future generations through programs that do not degrade the environment and are technically appropriate, economically viable, and socially acceptable.

FAO is governed by the Conference of Member Nations, which meets every two years to review the work carried out by the organization and approve a Program of Work and Budget for the next biennium. The Conference elects a Council of 49 Member Nations to act as an interim governing body. Members serve 3-year, rotating terms. The Conference also elects a Director-General to head the agency. The current Director-General, José Graziano da Silva was elected in June 2011. His term runs from January 2012 to July 2015.

The Organization's work falls into two categories. The Regular Program covers internal operations, including the maintenance of staff that provides support for field work, the provision of advice to governments on policy and planning, and support for a wide range of development needs. It is financed by Member Nations who contribute according to levels set by the Conference. The Field Program implements FAO's development strategies and provides assistance to governments and rural communities. Projects are usually undertaken in cooperation with national governments and other agencies. More than 60 percent of Field Program finances come from national trust funds and nearly a quarter is provided by the United Nations Development Program. FAO contributes through its Technical Cooperation Program (TCP).

\$53,867,000 was budgeted in 2010-2011 for FAO's Program of Work for the Fisheries and Aquaculture Department supplemented by \$35,219,000 in direct support of the Program of Work from Trust Funds and an additional \$52,466,000 from other voluntary contributions. About 57 percent of the Organization's budget depends on voluntary contributions.

COFI

COFI, a subsidiary body of the FAO Council, was established by the FAO Conference at its Thirteenth Session in 1965. The Committee presently constitutes the only global inter-governmental forum other than the United Nations General Assembly where major international fisheries and aquaculture problems and issues are examined and recommendations addressed to governments, regional fishery bodies, NGOs, fishworkers, and the international community on a world-wide basis. COFI has also been used as a forum in which global binding agreements as well as non-binding instruments were negotiated.

COFI membership is open to any FAO Member and non-Member eligible to be an observer of the Organization. Representatives of the UN, UN bodies and specialized agencies, regional fishery bodies, national and international non-governmental organizations participate in the debate, but without the right to vote.

The two main functions of COFI are to review the programs of work of FAO in the field of fisheries and aquaculture and their implementation and to conduct periodic general reviews of fishery and aquaculture problems of an international character and appraise such problems and their possible solutions with a view to concerted action by nations, by FAO, inter-governmental bodies and the civil society. The Committee also reviews specific matters relating to fisheries and aquaculture referred to it by the Council or the Director-General of FAO, or placed by the Committee on its agenda at the request of Members, or the United Nations General Assembly. In its work, the Committee supplements rather than supplants other organizations working in the field of fisheries and aquaculture.

COFI is empowered to establish subcommittees on specific issues. These subsidiary bodies meet in the intersessional period of the parent Committee. COFI has a Sub-Committee on Fish Trade and a Sub-Committee on Aquaculture and is advised by the FAO Advisory Committee on Fishery Research. The last meeting of the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture was held in St. Petersburg, Russia, in October 2013.

The 30th Session of COFI met in Rome on July 9-13, 2012. Its report can be downloaded from the FAO website. The meeting included delegations from over 200 states, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, and fishers' groups. Delegates received the rollout presentation of FAO's flagship publication *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2012* and proceeded to have a wide-ranging discussion of projected trends over the next fifty years and FAO's roles in this context.

The agenda dealt with major global fisheries and marine conservation issues, including implementation of the 1995 Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and related instruments; management of fishing capacity; fisheries bycatch issues such as the incidental take of seabirds and sea turtles; improvement and standardization of fisheries status and trends reporting; the effects of subsidies on fishery management; issues related to fish and seafood products trade, including subsidies and cooperation with CITES; aquaculture; reduction of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and strengthening monitoring, control, and surveillance; ecosystems approaches to fisheries management; deep-sea fisheries; and strengthening the performance and functioning of regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements.

The COFI meeting advanced several significant U.S. objectives, particularly in addressing the effects of fishing on the marine environment; cracking down further on IUU fishing; and making international organizations in this field more accountable. Other recent products of COFI initiatives include the International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-Sea Fisheries in the High Seas in 2008 and the Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing in 2009, and the Voluntary Guidelines for Flag State Performance in 2013, all funded in part by the NOAA Fisheries Office of International Affairs.

The United States chaired the meeting's Drafting Committee (Dean Swanson) and also served as a representative on that Committee (Cheri McCarty and Shannon Dionne).

Website: www.fao.org

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