

ASEAN-SEAFDEC Directives Related to Species of International Concern

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Background

Over the years, policy makers and managers have been concerned about the manner and extent of current utilization of aquatic and fisheries resources. In Southeast Asia, overfishing coupled with conflicts among various users over the limited and degraded fisheries resources call for urgent action to rectify fisheries practices particularly through better management of aquatic resource utilization toward the goal of sustainable development. Stock enhancement as a management tool has become a regional challenge that requires greater attention.

In 1995, the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) was adopted to provide norms and principles to guide the responsible utilization of fisheries resources. In support of the CCRF implementation by member states, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has developed supplemental International Plans of Action (IPOAs) and Strategies with the view of better addressing some priority issues such as fishing capacity, incidental catch of seabirds in longline fishing, sharks and illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing (FAO 2005).

After a decade of implementation of the CCRF in 2005, some environmental groups increasingly claim that such implementation has achieved little progress and in many cases proved to be ineffective. They also claim that a substantial gap exists between commitment by the States and their actions. Alternatively, other initiatives/mechanisms (Convention on International Trade in Enda-

ngered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora or CITES, United Nations General Assembly, eco-labelling and trade barriers rather than FAO) have been promoted with the view of managing utilization of aquatic resources. These movements have brought grave concern to fisheries authorities at various levels as the initiatives/mechanisms are developed without considering the ongoing efforts of fisheries competence authorities that are working towards sustainable development and management of fisheries. In addition, concern has also been expressed regarding the competence and scientific bases of various fora and mechanisms that deal with the management of commercially important aquatic species. The recent outcome of the Thirteenth Conference of Parties (CoP13) of CITES (Vichitlekarn and Gamucci 2005) could be a good example of the above concern, which requires a closer investigation of lessons learned in order to set future directions for sustainable/responsible development of fisheries.

To support implementation of this global CCRF, the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) initiated a Southeast Asian regionalization process of the CCRF in 1998. The objective of the regionalization was to address principles and issues of the CCRF taking into consideration regional specificity and requirements which had been overlooked during the preparation of the CCRF. After a series of consultations at national and regional levels, the regionalization process developed a set of regional guidelines for responsible fisheries in Southeast Asia including important thematic

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issues of fisheries namely, fishing operations, aquaculture, fisheries management, post-harvest practices and trade.

To follow up these efforts, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and SEAFDEC organized a Conference on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security in the New Millennium: “Fish for the People” in 2001. With over 800 participants from Southeast Asia and around the world, the Conference discussed important fisheries and aquaculture issues and identified actions needed to achieve sustainable fisheries in Southeast Asia. As major outcomes of the Conference, the Resolution (RES) and Plan of Action (POA) on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security for the ASEAN Region were developed under the framework and principles of the CCRF, and adopted by the ministers and their senior officials responsible for fisheries in region, respectively. The RES and POA are considered a regional policy framework and priority actions required to a) achieve sustainable development of fisheries and food security in countries of the region, and b) provide a regional framework for collaboration and partnership in fisheries.

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To achieve sustainable fisheries for food security in the ASEAN region, the RES and POA urge the Member Countries to rectify their fisheries practices through improvement of existing fisheries management policy, framework and practices as well as implementation of the CCRF, RES and POA. Improvement of fisheries management includes the gradual introduction of decentralized rights-based fisheries and co-management systems, regulation/control of fishing activities, protection/rehabilitation of important aquatic resource habitats, resource/stock

enhancement, and so on. In addition, the RES and POA also highlight the need to enhance partnership among Member Countries in the region through formulation of common positions as well as to increase their participation and involvement in international fora (FAO, CITES, etc.) to safeguard and promote ASEAN interests particularly on issues of international concern.

In line with the above general directives, especially in relation to stock enhancement of species under international concern, senior fisheries officials of ASEAN and SEAFDEC have urged proactive approaches in tackling the issues and gave the following directives:

- 1) To increase support to national initiatives and to facilitate regional cooperation on stock enhancement including identification of concerned species and their status, interaction between concerned species and fishing, and integrated approach and community involvement in management and conservation of aquatic resources;
- 2) To identify issues/species of international concern and conduct review on status of the issues/species as basis for formulation of fisheries policy as well as common positions among the Member Countries in international fora;
- 3) To compile information on status and initiatives related to management and conservation of aquatic resources and to disseminate them in appropriate international fora to enhance awareness of the regional situation and seriousness of the issues;
- 4) To promote appropriate inter-agency coordination on the issues at national and regional levels; and
- 5) To promote involvement of national fisheries agencies in national/regional/international fora/mechanisms related to utilization and management of aquatic resources.

Current regional programs supporting species of international concern

In response to the above directives, ASEAN and SEAFDEC jointly promoted a number of regional fisheries programs under the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Fisheries Consultative Group (FCG) mechanism established in 1999. The existing programs include:

Fish trade and environment

The program addresses close linkages between responsible trade in fish and fishery products and sustainable development of fisheries. Through its activities, the program conducts regular identification of trade-related issues, which have potential negative impacts on the fisheries sector in the region. Comprehensive reviews of the identified issues and their status will form the basis for the formulation of fisheries policy and common positions and the identification of strategies to address concerns among the Member Countries.

Management of fisheries and utilization of sharks in Southeast Asia

The program was initiated to support Member Countries in the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Management and Conservation of Sharks (IPOA-Shark). The program includes a one-year regional comprehensive study of shark resources, utilization and trade. Results of the study have provided a basis for dissemination of information on the current situation of sharks in the region, and future formulation and implementation of the National Plan of Action on Sharks (NPOA-Shark) by Member Countries in line with the IPOA.

It should be noted that utilization and management of sea cucumbers has been recently identified by the SEAFDEC Secretariat and will be soon formulated into

a regional activity. Moreover, years of experience and expertise in stock enhancement of the Aquaculture Department (AQD) (for mollusks, seahorses, and other threatened aquatic species) and the Marine Fishery Resources Development and Management Department (MFRDMD) of SEAFDEC (for sea turtles) can provide a solid foundation for the implementation of the newly developed regional program on Research and Development of Stock Enhancement for Species of International Concern. The program is in fact a framework for this Regional Technical Consultation (RTC) on Stock Enhancement for Species of International Concern.

Issues to be Addressed on Stock Enhancement

Despite the fact that stock enhancement has been in practice in both inland and marine waters in the ASEAN region over the past number of years and the considerable progress and achievements made in this field, there are concerns on the goals and effectiveness of stock enhancement under the broad framework of sustainable management of fisheries resources. The following are issues that need due consideration when identifying future development directions of stock enhancement in the region:

- What are the goals of stock enhancement (religious/ceremonial, commercial, management)?
- Do stock enhancement programs contribute to higher fishery production in the region? In what context?
- Do the costs of stock enhancement outweigh the gains? Are gains sustainable?
- Can the same level of “enhancement” gained from hatchery releases be achieved through stronger fishing regulations and enforcement and/or habitat restoration?
- What are the explicit indicators of success? How they are measured?

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- What other fishery management strategies need to be coupled with stock enhancement?
- What are the preconditions and responsible approaches and protocols of successful stock enhancement programs?
- What improvements need to be made in existing approaches?

Conclusion: The Way Forward!

With the view to support the Member Countries in achieving sustainable development of fisheries in the ASEAN region, it is timely for SEAFDEC/AQD to organize this RTC to address issues of stock enhancement particularly for species of international concern. The program on Research and Development of Stock Enhancement for Species of International Concern through this initial regional technical consultation could help monitor the status and progress of stock enhancement in the ASEAN region as well as clarify issues, context and future directions for stock enhancement of species of international concern. The program should be viewed as an opportunity to address this important topic in two general directions.

Support to national initiatives on stock enhancement

- Strengthening existing stock enhancement initiatives as effective management tools by mobilizing existing work and expertise among the Member Countries and SEAFDEC AQD;
- Developing a low-cost tool to illustrate positive impacts of stock enhancement on overall management of resource utilization;
- Identifying key factors and considerations based on stock enhancement experience to improve overall management of resource utilization; and
- Raising issues among policy-makers in appropriate fora to ensure support.

Support to the Member Countries on species of international concern in international fora

- Compiling and disseminating information on status of concerned species and seriousness of the Member Countries particularly on stock enhancement;
- Identifying potential international fora (including CoP14 in 2006) and assisting Member Countries in preparing their policy and common positions; and
- Coordinating with existing regional programs/initiatives including the ASEAN Expert Group on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (AEG-CITES) with regard to these issues.

Moreover, in promoting the above two directions, networking of regional experts on stock enhancement may be considered. Such networking not only facilitates improvement of national stock enhancement initiatives but also helps to identify species of international concern including their potential impacts on the fisheries sector in the region.

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