

Establishment of Advisory Body for Fisheries Management in Southeast Asia



Background

In response to the current declining state of world fishery resources due to unsustainable utilization, there has been concern expressed by international society for the need to improve current fisheries management framework and practices. Echoing the international concern, countries in Southeast Asia have over the years discussed ways to strengthen the fisheries management in the region through both individual country's effort and regional cooperation.

Over the last few years, concern and need for improving fisheries management in the region particularly addressing issues related to fishing capacity and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing have been discussed. Several fisheries management bodies have been established to regulate the utilization of resources in many regions of the world. The necessity in establishing a regional management mechanism in the Southeast Asian region and sub-regions has also been raised for discussion at several regional technical consultations organized by SEAFDEC, i.e. the ASEAN-SEAFDEC "Regional Technical Consultation on Management of Fishing Capacity

and Human Resource Development in Support of Fisheries Management in Southeast Asia (19-22 September 2006), and the ASEAN-SEAFDEC "Expert Meeting on Fisheries Statistics, Information and Indicators (27-29 November 2006). It was recommended that the Regional Scientific Advisory Committee for Fisheries Management, should be established to enhance information collection for fisheries management. Based on the recommendation, SEAFDEC Secretariat has consulted with Member Countries and formulated a proposal with the scopes and terms of reference. The draft proposal has been scrutinized by the SEAFDEC Program Committee; and at the 40th Meeting of SEAFDEC Council in 2008, the proposal for the establishment of a "Regional Advisory Committee for Fisheries Management in Southeast Asia (RAC) as a subsidiary body of the SEAFDEC Council was endorsed.

Scopes

RAC is established to assist the SEAFDEC Member Countries in achieving sustainable utilization of fisheries resources through improved fisheries management for food security, sustainable livelihoods of the people, as well as

economic development and integration in Southeast Asia through the provision of technical advice on fisheries management issues or as requested by the SEAFDEC Council. The advice provided by RAC covers management of fisheries generally conducted in marine waters within the EEZs and inland waters in Southeast Asia including fisheries with particular attention to trans-boundary fish stocks.

Guiding Principles

The establishment and implementation of RAC are in line with several international and regional fisheries-related frameworks. These include the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and its provisions, the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, as well as the Resolution and Plan of Action on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security in the ASEAN Region as adopted by the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Member Countries in 2001. The following considerations also form the important guiding principles for RAC.

- The right to fish and the obligation to do so in a responsible manner so as to ensure effective conservation and management of the living aquatic resources;
- Rationale and responsible utilization, and maintenance of resources in sufficient quantities for present and future generations in the context of food security, poverty alleviation and sustainable development;
- Management decisions for fisheries should be transparent and based on the best scientific evidence available, also taking into account traditional knowledge of the resources and their habitat, as well as relevant environmental, economic and social factors;
- Protection and rehabilitation of critical fisheries habitats and integration of fisheries into multiple aquatic resources use planning, development and management;
- Cooperation among the Member Countries within their respective competences and in accordance with international law, at sub-regional, regional and global levels through fisheries management organizations, other international agreements or other arrangements to promote conservation and management, ensure responsible fishing and ensure effective conservation and protection of living aquatic resources, taking into account the need for compatible measures in areas within and beyond national jurisdiction; and
- Involvement of and consultation with stakeholders, through awareness and capacity building, in the policy formulation and implementation process, and the conservation and management of the fishery resources on which they depend.

Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference of RAC include:

- To review and assess the current status of the fishery resources in particular transboundary fish stocks, the status of fishing industries, and fisheries management measures and administrations in the region;
- To provide advice on priority fisheries management issues including policy considerations, coordinated fisheries management actions, and human and institutional capacity building, in order to formulate recommendations for improved fisheries management;
- To facilitate addressing the identified issues, including assessment and in-depth studies, possibly through ad-hoc technical working group(s); and
- To collaborate with international/regional organizations, programs or projects concerned with fisheries management and sustainable use of fisheries resources in formulating advice.

Towards the action

Based on RAC's advice, the SEAFDEC Council would further decide on how such advice should be considered and followed-up. The advice may also be conveyed to the ASEAN through ASEAN Sectoral Working Group on Fisheries (ASWGF), as well as other agencies/institutions with dealing with fisheries management in the region, e.g. the Coordination Committee of RPOA on Responsible Fishing Operations including Combating IUU Fishing, as well as the countries outside the region operating fisheries in the region.

It is envisaged that through the establishment of RAC, management of fisheries in the region would be based on the best scientific evidence available in order to ensure the sustainable and responsible exploitation of fishery resources in the Southeast Asian region. 

