RECENT FAO ACTIVITIES RELATED TO BY-CATCH AND DISCARD ISSUES

by

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1. INTRODUCTION

The requirement for data on the discarded component of the catch has been clearly stated in numerous fora, documents and international initiatives, most notably in the UN Agreement on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks[1] and the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

This paper provides brief reports on two recent FAO activities related to this subject, the Technical Consultation on Reduction of Wastage in Fisheries (28 October - 1 November 1996, Tokyo, Japan) and a study of shark catches (mainly by-catches) undertaken by FAO in response to a request from CITES.

2. TECHNICAL CONSULTATION ON REDUCTION OF WASTAGE IN FISHERIES

The Consultation in its Report[2] noted that Annex 1 of the UN Agreement details requirements for the collection of data, including the following:

> *Article 3.1 - "States shall collect data on "total catch in number, nominal weight, or both, by species (target and non-target)..." and "discard statistics, including estimates where necessary; reported as number or nominal weight by species..." [3.1 (b) (c)].*

> *Article 6 - "States... should establish mechanisms for verifying fisheries data "through "scientific observer programmes to monitor catch, effort, catch composition (target and non-target) and other details of fishing operations" [6 (b)].*

> *Annex I details additional requirements as to the type and accuracy of the data to be collected.*

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[1] Agreement for the implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 Relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks.

[2] Report of the Technical Consultation on Reduction of Wastage in Fisheries, Tokyo, Japan, 28 October - 1 November 1996. FAO Fisheries Report No. 547. Rome. FAO. 1996. 27p.

Annex I further requires States to share data at the regional level through regional organisations and calls upon the UN FAO to collect and disseminate data at the global level [Article 7].

With respect to the collection of data from fisheries on the high seas, the Agreement places strengthened obligations on flag States. Article 18 obligates flag States to establish "requirements for recording and timely reporting of... catch of target and non-target species..." [18.3 (e)]; "requirements for verifying the catch of target and non-target species through such means as observer programmes..." [18.3 (f)]; and the implementation of "inspection schemes", "monitoring systems" and "observer programmes" involving observers from both the flag State and other States [18.3 (g) (i-iii)]. The Agreement places considerable weight on the obligation to collect data in high seas fisheries in relation to the compliance and enforcement provisions contained in Articles 19-23 [Article 21.11].

In relation to data collection, the Consultation (Report paragraphs 32 and 33) stated that it felt strongly that improvement of regional and global estimation of discard levels could best be accomplished by more and better information from the national and regional fishery sector levels and it "recommended that data on discards be collected nationally and then collated by FAO, for the individual fisheries, and that it be published".

3. FAO SHARK CATCH/BY-CATCH STUDY

CITES Resolution Conf. 9.17 was addressed to several agencies at different levels. Although some actions have already been taken, sometimes these led to parallel endeavors and duplicating requests to countries. Specifically therefore, CITES asked the following responsible agencies to get to action:

a) FAO (a global body), to collect and assemble data on sharks;

b) Regional fisheries organisations, to do the same; and

c) Itself, for information on sharks from its Parties.

Thus, the US National Marine Fisheries Service collated and analyzed shark data from around the world. In a related development, the IUCN held a meeting of shark experts in July 1996.

FAO will respond to the request of CITES by undertaking some work on shark fisheries. This activity will be mainly funded from extra-budgetary sources. Meanwhile, the project "Sustainable Contribution of Fisheries to Food Security" to be funded by the Government of Japan and executed by FAO, contains a component for investigating the biological and trade status of sharks. Also, using Japanese Trust Fund and FAO resources, an inquiry was undertaken for the collection of species-specific catch data for sharks (including data on discards and recreational catches) for recent years, and any available information on the status of shark stocks from national sources. So far, national reports have been received from 28 countries.

In addition, experts on elasmobranchs have been approached for more information. The data and information received from these and other sources have been reviewed, and a report is being prepared which will hopefully provide a brief synopsis for each species.

The said report shall contain the following information:

a)   A brief summary of the biology and geographical range;

b)   A description of its reproductive potential, growth rates, size of young, size of litters, longevity and location of nursery areas, and information which can together indicate how a species will respond to exploitation;

c)   Documentation of the impact of shark fisheries; and

d)   A status category to indicate a species' vulnerability to fisheries.

The report is currently being reviewed by FAO. It may be utilized as a working document during an expert consultation on the biological and trade status of sharks to be held in 1998. This forum is expected to prepare the technical guidelines and a draft plan of action for an intergovernmental Consultation on Sharks. The Plan of Action adopted by this Consultation will be addressed to the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI). The expert consultation will also advise to some extent, the FAO response to CITES Resolution 9.17.