

CHAPTER 3 – THE CURRENT PROGRESS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF NPOAS-SHARKS IN THE REGION

Along a series of regional meetings in the last three years, particularly during the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Preparatory Meeting on Issues Related to Fish Trade and Environment held in March 2004 in Hat Yai, Thailand, the Member Countries progressively adopted a common position on how to manage shark resources. This resulted in the commitment by all members to establish their respective National Plan of Action on Sharks (NPOA-Sharks) in line with the FAO International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks (IOPA-Sharks). The ASEAN member countries stressed out that fisheries catching sharks, like all other fisheries, are appropriate fisheries to utilize marine resources and can be managed by the ASEAN governments in a sustainable manner, through the establishment of the NPOA-Sharks within their management framework.

During this Preparatory Meeting, it was agreed that these NPOA should be supported with the best scientific evidence available under the framework of a comprehensive sectoral fisheries management. In other words, management measures for sharks would be integrated into the existing management framework for national fisheries, which will be strengthened, not taken separately. Each NPOA-Sharks, outlining data collection & analysis, supporting research, awareness & capacity building, and monitoring, could help clarifying the actions required for such integration.

It was recognized that great efforts would be required in order to continuously monitor shark resources, but this indeed would form the basis for appropriate fisheries management programs. FAO goes beyond monitoring in its advices for developing NPOAs. It prescribes that states should cover the following aspects: shark fisheries descriptions, species identification, stock identification and stock structure, and fishery monitoring. Yet, in conducting their national study with the support of SEAFDEC, the Member Countries faced several serious constraints, as highlighted above, which will need to be overtaken in the future. This can probably only be done with external assistance.

During the 2nd Regional Technical Consultation on Sharks, the Member Countries requested SEAFDEC to provide a basic frame and additional guidelines to the FAO IOPA to support the formulation of NPOA-Sharks that would take place in 2005. This frame is presented in the box below.

Suggested Content of a NPOA-Sharks in the Southeast Asian context

1. Preamble

- 1.1. The Preamble would state the main national policy and position for the sustainable exploitation of shark species.
- 1.2. It would also emphasize on linkages with the existing overall fisheries management framework, as follow:
 - The existing overall fisheries management framework
 - The Resolution and Plan of Action adopted at the ASEAN/ SEAFDEC Millennium Conference
 - The regional guidelines of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries
 - Pursue international cooperation through FAO and regional fisheries management organizations.
- 1.3. The Preamble would eventually also include a brief review of national shark fisheries, possibly based on the initiatives undertaken under ASEAN-SEAFDEC mechanisms.

2. Objective

“The objective of NPOA-Shark in ASEAN region is to take appropriate actions for the improvement of data collection on shark fisheries that will ultimately support the conservation and management of sharks and their long term sustainable use under the comprehensive national fisheries management policy, plan, and program.”

3. National Plan of Action for Shark

As the first priority is to improve data and information collection on shark fisheries, this key section would cover all the four components described below, clearly stating the strategies for achieving the above mentioned objective.

3.1. Monitoring (core component)

- Improve fisheries statistics (keywords: routine and non-routine mechanisms, indicators)
- Ultimately, assess status and trends of shark stocks and ensure continuous monitoring

3.2. Data collection and analysis

- Review shark fisheries
- Cooperate with industry
- Gather ecological information on shark species
- Understand shark utilization and trade
- Understand socio-economic importance of shark fisheries

3.3. Research

- Develop taxonomy
- Facilitate and encourage research on little known shark species;
- Promote research activities to maximize utilization of sharks
- Assess threat to shark populations, determine and protect critical habitats

3.4. Building of human capacity

- Train those concerned with identification of shark species;
- Promote effective utilization of shark catches;
- Build awareness on shark resource management among stakeholders and public;

4. Priorities

The actions to be undertaken are presented in order with priorities and possibly schedule, clearly stating how the country's first focus is on the improvement of data collection to understand national shark fisheries. Later on, focus could be shifted to more management and conservation type of actions, as judged necessary by the Member Country.

5. Cooperation with International and Regional Fisheries Management Organizations

The role and support that regional and international organizations such as SEAFDEC and FAO, as well as donors, could provide would be specified.

It is certain that there is a vast difference of capacity between ASEAN member countries in developing their NPOA, in terms of technical skills, manpower and financial resources. This has resulted in some countries going much faster than the others in the development of their Shark Plan. The approaches adopted from country to country have also widely differed and one will find great differences among the draft NPOA developed in Southeast Asia.

As of October 2005, when the member countries met at the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Preparatory Meeting on Environmental Related Tasks in Southeast Asia: Sharks and Sea cucumbers, in Bangkok, Thailand, only Malaysia and Thailand had already completed their NPOA-Sharks. Meanwhile, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Vietnam were in a drafting stage, pending for critical input, and in some cases external support, as well as consultation with national stakeholders. In case of Myanmar, it was reported that some existing

national fisheries management schemes actually already existed to conserve sharks such as closed season and fisheries conservation area. Myanmar however reported that there was still a lot of work needed in order for them to complete the process of drafting their NPOA.

The complete progress of development NPOA by country as informed during the Preparatory Meeting on Environmental Related Tasks in Southeast Asia: Sharks and Sea cucumbers, can be summarized as follows:

3.1 The current progress of NPOA-Sharks development in Brunei Darussalam

No information has been provided by Brunei Darussalam, beside the fact they are currently drafting their NPOA-Sharks.

3.2 The current progress of NPOA-Sharks development in Cambodia

The fisheries law, recently reformed, is under the process of adoption, requiring the mobilization of a large part of the capacity of the Department of Fisheries. The limited manpower issue, coupled with a lack of national scientific information of sharks and habitats and of funding for activities, had greatly hindered Cambodia in developing their NPOA-Sharks. Nevertheless, compilation of relevant data and information related to sharks has been done, under SEAFDEC support, and serious efforts have been put to initiate a drafting process of a NPOA for the country.

The current drafting process is however further hindered pending because of the difficulty found by its undertaker to find partners and experienced people who can collaborate in the formulation of the NPOA. Also, sharks are definitively not a priority issue for Cambodia, where urgent and direly required efforts and funding are rather put into the process of development and poverty alleviation. These combined problems have resulted in serious difficulty to get a supporting budget, as SEAFDEC study has been terminated, to develop and formulate an effective NPOA, as this is unfortunately a costly process.

3.3 The current progress of NPOA-Sharks development in Indonesia

The Indonesian NPOA-Sharks is still being developed. Efforts were initiated in January 2005 when the Directorate of Fish Resources conducted a National Workshop for its formulation in collaboration with the Research Centre for Capture Fisheries. The workshop resulted in the drafting of a detailed outline of the Indonesian NPOA-Sharks to be.

The formulation of the plan then started with the reviewing of the shark status in Indonesia notably through using the results obtained from the SEAFDEC supported activities. Review exercises included reorganizing data collection methods, data processing, and the inclusion of biological, economical and social aspects.

Along this formulation process, many problems were observed. Among others, there were serious weaknesses in the shark data collection system and a lack attention paid on shark resources as sharks are not considered as primary food source neither as having a relatively good economical value. Another problem was that fishery statistics recorder in the past did not have any break down into species due to poor taxonomical knowledge of local enumerators. This changed in 2002 but this made understanding shark status and trends difficult.

3.4 The current progress of NPOA-Sharks development in Malaysia

Malaysia is one of the ASEAN-SEAFDEC member countries that have already completely the drafting of their NPOA-Sharks. The complete draft NPOA can be downloaded (<http://www.mfrdmd.org.my>). Currently, they are getting input from the stakeholders through

national consultative workshops involving representatives from fishers, fisheries association, NGOs, entrepreneurs, and fishery managers from most states in Malaysia.

Briefing and explaining to public, fishers and other stakeholders on the importance to manage shark resources was done through national consultative workshops, exhibitions, talks, seminar, and media messages (radio and television). However, this is a source of problems as it requires important funding and manpower, and a lot of time, in order to build public awareness at the national level.

Practically, much has to be learned from the Malaysian experience, which stand as a beacon for other Southeast Asian countries in promptly and seriously developing their shark plan. The process was started by gathering information on status of sharks and rays from various sources such as a special research program initiated in 1999-2004, nation wide surveys, partly with SEAFDEC support, literature review, analysis of fisheries statistic, and use of others available sources of information. Once this information review was completed, Malaysia appointed a group of appropriate people as members of a committee to draft the NPOA.

This committee proceeded with the determination of a format for the NPOA and on deciding which key element will be used. For this purpose, they analyzed the suggested formats prepared by FAO, SEAFDEC Secretariat as well as existing NPOAs from other countries. Based on this, the drafting proper was initiated. This draft was then presented to a special committee, namely the Planning and Implementation Committee chaired by the Director -General of Fisheries Malaysia. The Committee made several suggestions and comments and the NPOA was subsequently amended before being openly distributed for comments through internet. The last step is to organize the “road-shows” or workshops to gather feedbacks from stakeholders in the different Malay states. Based on recommendations and suggestions from the stakeholders, the NPOA will be finalized and adopted in 2006.

3.5 The current progress of NPOA-Sharks development in Myanmar

The most important objective under consideration by the Department of Fisheries at present relates to the development and management of marine fishery resources to increase production. In order to achieve the balance between fishing efforts, sustainability of resources exploitation, and environmental conservation, various programmes were implemented. Yet, none of them explicitly address the need for the monitoring and management of shark resources. This is understandable given the nature of tropical multi-species fisheries, as in Myanmar, where management is best achieved for fish population as a whole. It would be impossible to focus on individual resource, or specific mono-species stocks of fish. Furthermore, sharks and rays have never been featured conspicuously in the landings of marine capture fisheries, either in terms of volume or value.

There is still a need for a comprehensive understanding of the biology and ecology of sharks and rays especially in areas pertaining to their population dynamics, critical habitat requirements during their life cycle and conservation needs. These are crucial factors for the successful management of sharks and rays resources. The absence of such comprehensive studies hinders the formulation of a management plan.

The Department of Fisheries is now in the process of drafting their NPOA, although this will be an expensive and time consuming activity. The objectives of their Shark Plan will be as follow:

- To ensure sustainable use of sharks and rays;
- To assess threats to shark and rays population and to provide special attention to the threatened stocks;
- To minimize unutilized incidental catches, waste and discards from sharks and rays catches;

- To encourage full use of dead sharks;
- To facilitate the identification and reporting of species-specific biological and trade data;
- To facilitate improved species-specific catch and landings data and monitoring of sharks and rays catches; and
- To improve and develop a framework for establishing research, management and educational initiatives of sharks and rays.

3.6 The current progress of NPOA-Sharks development in the Philippines

The Philippines has not started drafting their NPOA-Shark as they want first to comprehensively review all existing information and data available on sharks. However, some practical steps that will be used for the development of a NPOA have been identified as follows:

- Determine available sources of data and information on shark;
- Gather and review all available information from above sources;
- Draft the outline of the NPOA-Sharks including detailed content;
- Conduct a stakeholder dialogue/consultation where the detailed outline and process are presented, amended and eventually agreed;
- Raise the level of awareness to all sector of the community through the preparation of awareness building materials and the implementation of an information campaign. Practically, this will involve additional public consultations, seminars and other means of public communication like using TV and radio advertisements, flyers, billboards, and if deemed possible, through comics to reach children as well;
- Involve all stakeholders in the preparation of the NPOA-Sharks proper so that a sense of ownership is built;
- Prepare policy and regulations on the conservation and management of sharks
- Monitor the implementation of the NPOA-Sharks with the involvement of all stakeholders. In general, stakeholders would take an active part in the implementation of the provisions of the NPOA-Sharks.

3.7 The current progress of NPOA-Sharks development in Thailand

Thailand is another country in the region that already drafted their NPOA-Sharks. The process of development for the plan lied on try to answer the fundamental question: “What are the problems related to sharks in Thailand?”

Answers offered a clear linkage with the issue of the status of shark resources, in turn highlighting problems in shark management, which then lead to a second question – “How to solve these problems?”

Answering this resulted in identifying objectives and determined a scope by the development of the NPOA. On this basis, Thailand then set up an Action Plan to prepare her Shark Plan and later on went through a consultative process before completing the draft NPOA.

3.8 The current progress of NPOA-Sharks development in Vietnam

Vietnam is in the drafting process of their NPOA-Sharks. During this development, several problems arise such as the lack of data and information as few shark studies and surveys were carried out in the past beside the SEAFDEC supported study. As it is, statistical data on the catch of shark on a species basis by gear type is insufficient to understand the status of the resources. The drafting process was also pending the organization of conferences on the management and utilization of sharks. Both the drafting and these conferences are requiring funds which are currently insufficient.

This has resulted that, so far, the NPOA-Sharks development process has not been completed and couldn't be approved by the government. Nevertheless, Vietnam is confident that the drafting process of their NPOA-Sharks could be finalized in 2006 with the organization of the national conference on the management and utilization of sharks, if proper sources of funding are identified.

The development and implementation of the NPOA is carried-out according to the following practical themes:

- The fishery statistical data system will be strengthened;
- Shark species will be considered on a species basis within the system in order to give a robust basis for the management and conservation of shark resources;
- Awareness building for all stakeholders on how to sustainably utilize shark resources using various methods such as pamphlets, posters, and training;
- Surveys and studies to assess shark resources in Vietnam will be conducted to provide the necessary baseline information on shark resources to ensure proper management and conservation measures can be undertaken;
- Proper management measures applied such as: fishing licenses, investigation at sea, strict control of the fishing fleet that target sharks (long line for shark);
- Fishery extension promoted to support fishers to store, process and utilize properly shark catches in order to achieve a higher economic efficiency;
- Collaboration with FAO must be strengthened, while collaboration must be maintained with SEAFDEC for information exchange in the region.