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The Regional Fishery Body Secretariats' Network

Relates to agenda item: 14. Cooperation with other RFMOs, international bodies and other relevant matters

Proposal ☐ Working Document ☐ Information Paper ☒ Other Document ☐

Delegation of FAO

Abstract

The Regional Fishery Body Secretariats' Network (RSN) is a unique coordination mechanism consisting of Regional Fishery Advisory Bodies (RFABs) and Regional Fishery Management Organizations (RFMOs) from around the world. The paper provides a brief overview of RSN, its scope and activities that have the ultimate goal of promoting and highlighting the essential role of regional cooperation for fishery and aquaculture development and sustainability. SIOFA Members are invited to note the scope and work of RSN and consider the benefit of SIOFA participation in RSN

Introduction

The Regional Fishery Body Secretariats' Network (RSN)¹ is a unique coordination mechanism consisting of Regional Fishery Advisory Bodies (RFABs) and Regional Fishery Management Organizations (RFMOs) from around the world.

¹ <http://www.fao.org/fishery/rfb/en>

There are some fifty Regional Fishery Bodies (RFBs)² worldwide, half of them provide only scientific and technical advice to their members, they are regional fishery advisory bodies (RFABs); while others, called regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) have mandates to adopt legally binding conservation and management measures based on best scientific evidence.

The first RFBs were created between the 1920s and 1960s. Since then, the number of RFBs has steadily increased over time. The first RFB created under the FAO Constitution, in 1948, was the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission (APFIC). Previously, the FAO Conference, in its sessions held in 1946 and 1947, referred to the relevance of these bodies and recommended actions to their creation, indicating sea areas of preference. Also the 1998 High-level Panel of External Experts in Fisheries expressed the view that such bodies or arrangements are essential in reinforcing regional cooperation.

Laying the foundation of the Regional Fishery Body Secretariats' Network (RSN)

The First meeting of FAO and Non-FAO Regional Fishery Bodies and Arrangements was held in Rome in February 1999; participants discussed how to promote the implementation of recent international instruments and initiatives, the precautionary approach to fisheries management; the mechanisms for the exchange of information among RFBs and between RFBs and FAO; potential closer collaboration between RFBs on a geographic or species basis; and mechanisms to promote the global coordination of the activities of RFBs. Also, participants considered the forum provided by the Meetings an opportunity to share experiences and views upon often common problems, recommending that such meetings should be held regularly with FAO as focal point.

In 2005, at the Fourth meeting of the FAO and Non-FAO Regional Fishery Bodies and Arrangements, considering the significant consultations in preparing meetings and noting that “this constituted a virtual group during intersessional periods rather than a single event every two years”, the participants agreed that the title of ‘Regional Fishery Body Secretariats' Network’ would be more applicable than the Meeting's title. The RSN met again in 2007 and consecutively each two years, in coincidence with sessions of the Committee on Fisheries.

The network is celebrating in 2019 twenty years of working together with its members for a sustainable management of fisheries and aquaculture development. SIOFA Members are invited to note the scope and work of RSN and consider the benefit of SIOFA participation in RSN.

RSN structure and objective

The RSN includes more than fifty RFBs and partners. The RSN decisions are non-binding to its members and the organizations represented by them.

The main objective of the RSN is to enhance cooperation and coordination among RFABs/RFMOs to achieve fisheries and aquaculture sustainable development through effective regional mechanisms also in consideration of SDG 14 and the 2030 Agenda, and includes promoting information sharing and discussion among secretariats on emerging issues or subjects covered by the mandate of their respective organizations. The RSN aims to support the central role played by RFBs in the conservation,

² The term Regional Fishery Bodies (RFBs) is used throughout the paper to mean both Regional Fishery Advisory Bodies (RFABs) and Regional Fishery Management Organizations (RFMOs)

management and sustainable use of fish stocks, and, promote cooperation and coordination among RFBs as one of the most effective ways to strengthen regional fisheries governance.

FAO and RSN

The Network is supported by FAO, which hosts and provides secretariat services and the venue for meetings; maintains a dedicated website³, as a space for providing RFBs data collection, details on RFBs' work and conventions, information on Secretariat' Network, meeting and technical reports, as well as creating a framework for fishery and aquaculture governance and management, comprising principles, agreements, processes, mechanisms and organizations related to fisheries and aquaculture. In this context, the RSN publishes a newsletter that includes the updated information provided by member organizations⁴, and technical publications. FAO in cooperation with RSN have recently produced a corporate video on the work of RFBs⁵.

RSN's work

The Network is increasingly recognised as well suited to support the work done by its member organizations on the regional dimension of fisheries (and aquaculture when appropriate) governance and sustainable development. In particular through: providing a neutral forum for discussion through more frequent and/or longer meetings; supporting sharing of experiences and practices and access to information; making information readily available to members and institutions engaged on fisheries and aquaculture matters, as well as to civil society organizations and the general public; facilitating RFBs presence in relevant international fora including those in where global policy for fishery and aquaculture governance are discussed; stimulating cooperation between RFBs and with other key stakeholders and actors; and enhancing communication among RFBs

Strengthening regional cooperation

The international community has increasingly recognized that strengthening governance of shared fisheries is best achieved by enhancing the role of regional fishery bodies (RFBs).

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasizes the importance of regional and subregional dimensions, regional economic integration and interconnectivity in sustainable development. The regional level is the most appropriate level for establishing a collaborative framework to preserve and protect whole ecosystems efficiently while also providing opportunities for participating States to benefit sustainably from the services they render.

Global instruments and normative processes have to be implemented and translated into actions at the country and regional levels, as appropriate. In this regard, regionalization of fisheries and aquaculture governance can provide opportunities not only to address common concerns, create synergies and mainstream the global objectives of relevant UN bodies, but also to broaden outreach on the global fisheries agenda to regional partners that may not be directly concerned with fisheries, as well as to the general public.

³ <http://www.fao.org/fishery/rsn/en>

⁴ <http://www.fao.org/fishery/rsn/newsletter/en>

⁵ <https://youtu.be/XR8uBMsvVcQ>

The regional dimension is key to international fisheries management policy, as demonstrated by the rapid expansion of the family of RFBs. RFMOs and RFABs continue to evolve in response to calls for sustainability, improved management and governance, and as a result of lessons learned and stronger commitment by their members.

For many years, FAO has promoted and supported RFMOs and RFABs. It has participated directly in the establishment of many of them, formalizing existing opportunities for sharing experiences within a given region, or implementing the processes needed for sustainable management of shared resources. These RFBs have benefited from FAO's advice on technical matters as well as its secretariat, legal, financial and process support.

The present paper reports on the FAO commitment to bolstering regional cooperation through the Regional Fishery Body Secretariats' Network (RSN), which provides a forum for promoting consultation and regional dialogue, addressing priority issues of common concern and fostering ongoing cooperation and exchange of information.