

## The Regional Fishery Body Secretariats Network addresses priority areas for fisheries governance, issues Statement at its Third Meeting

The Third Meeting of **Regional Fishery Body Secretariats Network** (RSN 3) was held in Rome, Italy 7-8 February 2011. It addressed many pressing issues relating to global and regional fisheries governance, including illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, overcapacity, the ecosystem approach to fisheries management, small-scale and inland fisheries and the outcomes of the 29th Session of FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) held in Rome during the previous week. Twenty-eight RFB Secretariats were represented at the meeting with varying responsibilities over inland, coastal and marine fisheries and aquaculture, as well as four intergovernmental organizations. It was chaired by Mr Kjartan Hoydal, Secretary of the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission.

The RSN, which has evolved over twelve years, was established to promote consultation and dialogue among Regional Fishery Bodies (RFBs), address priority issues of common concern and foster ongoing cooperation and exchange of information. In executing its functions, the RSN serves to underpin the important role played by RFBs in the conservation, management and sustainable use of fish stocks.

The RSN issued a Statement expressing its concern about the allegations of anti-fishing lobbies in the press and some scientific journals that most RFBs are failing internationally in their efforts to effectively conserve and manage fisheries resources. Recognizing that challenges exist and there is room for further improvement of regional fisheries governance, the RSN elaborated why many of these condemnations are unjustified and welcomed evaluations of their practices and encouraged communications and constructive comments.

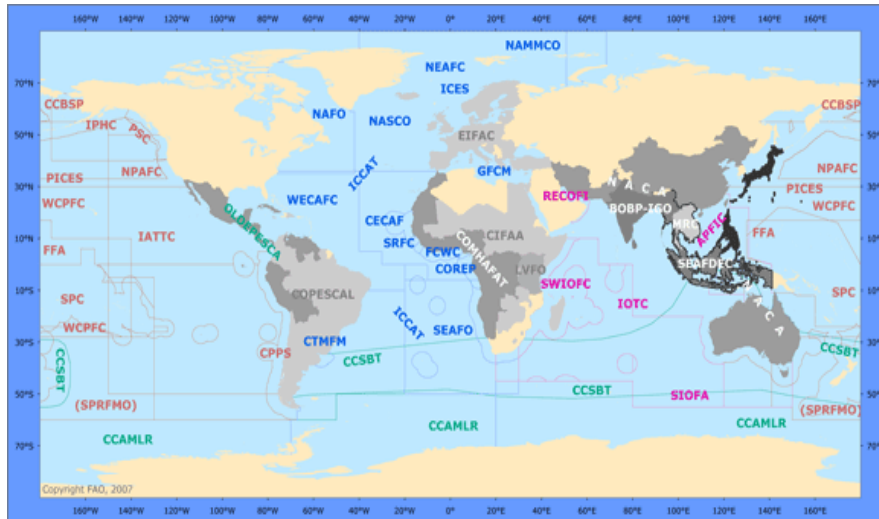
RSN 3 participants included:

- Twenty-two RFB Secretariats with a primary mandate over marine and coastal fisheries and aquaculture, based in the following regions: Atlantic Ocean (9), Indian Ocean (3), Mediterranean (1) Pacific Ocean (5) and Global/Trans-ocean (4).
- Six RFB Secretariats with a mandate over inland fisheries and aquaculture based in: Africa (3), Asia (1), Europe (1) and Latin America (1).
- Four inter-governmental organizations, including two with a mandate over large marine ecosystems, based in the following regions: Africa (2), Indian Ocean (1), Pacific Ocean (1).



**STATEMENT OF THE THIRD MEETING OF THE  
REGIONAL FISHERY BODY SECRETARIATS NETWORK<sup>1</sup>**

**8 February 2011  
Rome, Italy**



**THE REGIONAL FISHERY BODY SECRETARIATS NETWORK (RSN),<sup>2</sup>**

*Recalling* the continuing need for strong and effective fisheries governance at regional level and the important role played by Regional Fishery Bodies (RFBs) in this regard;

Recognizing that The Regional Fishery Body Secretariats Network is an informal consortium of secretariats representing the regional fisheries body Secretariats worldwide, which have varying responsibilities over inland, coastal and marine fisheries and aquaculture;

*Noting* the wide range of mandates and functions of RFBs, including advisory and management mandates, and the various challenges they face in discharging their duties and improving fisheries conservation, management and sustainable use;

*Mindful* of the measures taken by the international community and RFBs to strengthen fisheries governance, including the establishment of new RFBs and the conduct of comprehensive RFB Performance Reviews, as well as the implementation of the Recommendations of such Reviews;

---

<sup>1</sup> The term RFB is used in this document to encompass regional fishery bodies, regional fisheries management organizations and regional fisheries arrangements

<sup>2</sup> FAO serves as the secretariat to the RSN. It was established twelve years ago meets biennially in tandem with the meeting of the FAO Committee on Fisheries. The RSN provides a valuable international resource for disseminating information. More information can be found at <http://www.fao.org/fishery/rsn>.

*Referring* to the growing collaboration and cooperation among RFBs to apply modern principles of fisheries management and to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and the significant progress made in these regards;

*Mindful* of the increasing reliance by RFB Members on these bodies as leaders in regional fisheries governance;

*Concerned* that too many of the global fish stocks remain overexploited or depleted and that RFBs must proactively continue to seek ways to improve and promote enforcement of conservation and management and sustainable use;

*Further concerned* that unsubstantiated and/or erroneous information has been used by anti-fishing lobbies whose advocacy activities have the objective of denigrating the work of RFBs;

*Affirming* its commitment to achieving strengthened and effective governance for fisheries conservation, management and sustainable use,

**MAKES THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT:**

1. The RSN Network provides a forum for promoting consultation and dialogue, addressing priority issues of common concern and fostering ongoing cooperation and exchange of information. In executing its functions, the RSN serves to underpin the important role played by RFBs in the conservation, management and sustainable use of fish stocks.
2. The significance of the role of RFBs in fisheries governance has been increasingly and profoundly emphasized in international law, international fisheries instruments and international organizations including through the United Nations (UN) System. A wide range of UN fisheries instruments, both binding and non-binding, continue to develop and deepen areas for cooperation through RFBs, such as the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the 2009 FAO Agreement on Port State Measures as well as UN General Assembly Resolutions.
3. The establishment of seven new RFBs in the past decade demonstrates the determination of the international community to improve fisheries governance at regional level. In turn, the commitment by the RFBs to the RSN process reflects their resolve to further enhance the manner in which they perform their role in fisheries governance.
4. RFB mandates and functions vary significantly and include the following key elements:
  - Mandates may range from taking binding decisions on fisheries management, to providing non-binding advice to supporting cooperative arrangements for information sharing;
  - Establishment may be by Convention, Agreement or as an FAO RFB;
  - Fish stocks may be highly migratory stocks, straddling stocks, shared inland and riverine stocks, anadromous stocks, catadromous stocks and/or aquaculture species;
  - Species responsibility may be single species or multispecies, and may involve ecosystems and multiple industry sectors;
  - Fisheries sub-sectors may range from artisanal to small scale to industrial;
  - Aspects of the relevant fishing industry may be highly technological, labour intensive and/or capital intensive.

5. The RFBs face similar challenges in their efforts to support the collaborative processes that assist their members to achieve fisheries conservation and management and sustainable resource use. There are also clear challenges in identifying and, as appropriate, implementing measures to achieve sustainable use of fishery resources. In this regard, the RFBs rely on support by their members in providing information and implementing decisions, but this may be uneven from time to time. In addition, some RFBs established in the distant past have recognized the need for restructuring and revision of their Basic Texts, and have initiated or completed the relevant processes.

6. To address these challenges, a total of eleven RFBs have, since 2006, either completed Performance Reviews or have agreed to undertake them. For each Performance Review, some element of independent evaluation has been included, similar transparent and comprehensive criteria have been used and the results have been made publicly available. RFMOs have begun to implement the recommendations of the Performance Review Panels in an effort to meet the challenges and strengthen fisheries governance.

7. RFBs generally take into account modern principles of fisheries management, including the precautionary and ecosystem approaches to fisheries, mindful that fishing is totally dependent on healthy ecosystems. It is the RFBs that are best placed, in a holistic, integrated process, based on these approaches and other emerging concerns such as climate change, to achieve sustainable, responsible fisheries in their respective areas of competence.

8. RFB Secretariats continue to work closely with relevant experts, including fisheries scientists, managers and stakeholders, in their efforts to effectively fulfil their mandates and objectives. The Secretariats work closely internationally within the UN system and together with other RFBs and civil society which share common interests, have mandates over the same species and/or provide scientific advice. In this way, significant progress has been made in increasing cooperation and addressing global problems such as IUU fishing, destructive fisheries practices, bycatch and discards, scientific data and information collection, exchange and analysis and capacity building.

9. RFB Secretariats recognize the existence of anti-fishing lobbies whose advocacy activities have the objective of denigrating the work of RFBs. They do not use neutral scientific information, and may serve as a source of publicity for those involved. RSN expresses its concern about the allegations in the press and some scientific journals that most RFBs are failing internationally in their efforts to effectively conserve and manage fisheries resources.

10. It is acknowledged that challenges exist and that there is room for improvement of regional fisheries governance. However, the RSN believes that many of the condemnations are unjustified, particularly those made in a disproportionate and unfocused manner and with inaccurate conclusions. Scientific papers condemning fisheries or fishing practices are a special problem, especially where wrong data are used. This could be rectified if relevant RFBs were consulted to ensure the accuracy of the information or the paper is subject to peer review.

11. RSN welcomes evaluations of their practices and encourage communications and constructive comments. RSN is also always open to cooperation with regional and sub-regional organisations and initiatives that seek to find the balance between utilisation and conservation and to promote sustainable aquaculture. In this way, continuous and sustainable fish production can be enhanced in the best interest of the communities and countries which depend upon these activities for employment and food security.