

## **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Committee on Fisheries (COFI)**

### **FAO**

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) was founded in October 1945 with a mandate to raise levels of nutrition and standards of living, to improve agricultural productivity, and to better the condition of rural populations. It was the first specialized agency of the United Nations that was established.

Today, FAO is the largest autonomous agency within the United Nations system with 194 member countries plus the European Community (Member Organization) and two Associate Members (Faroe Islands and Tokelau). As of November 2013 FAO employed 1795 professional staff and 1654 support staff. Approximately 58 percent are based at headquarters in Rome, while the remainder work in offices worldwide.

The Organization offers direct development assistance; collects, analyzes, and disseminates information; provides policy and planning advice to governments; and acts as an international forum for debate on food, agriculture, and forestry issues. FAO is active in land and water development, plant and animal production, forestry, fisheries, economic and social policy, investment, nutrition, food standards and commodities, and trade. It also plays a major role in dealing with food and agricultural emergencies. A specific priority of the Organization is encouraging sustainable agriculture and rural development, a long-term strategy for the conservation and management of natural resources. It aims to meet the needs of both present and future generations through programs that do not degrade the environment and are technically appropriate, economically viable, and socially acceptable.

FAO is governed by the Conference of Member Nations, which meets every two years to review the work carried out by the organization and approve a Program of Work and Budget for the next biennium. The Conference elects a Council of 49 Member Nations to act as an interim governing body. Members serve 3-year, rotating terms. The Conference also elects a Director-General to head the agency. The current Director-General, José Graziano da Silva was elected in June 2011. His term runs from January 2012 to July 2015.

The Organization's work falls into two categories. The Regular Program covers internal operations, including the maintenance of staff that provides support for field work, the provision of advice to governments on policy and planning, and support for a wide range of development needs. It is financed by Member Nations who contribute according to levels set by the Conference. The Field Program implements FAO's development strategies and provides assistance to governments and rural communities. Projects are usually undertaken in cooperation with national governments and other agencies. More than 60 percent of Field Program finances come from national trust funds and nearly a quarter is provided by the United Nations Development Program. FAO contributes through its Technical Cooperation Program (TCP).

FAO's overall program of work is funded by assessed and voluntary contributions. The assessed contributions are member countries' contributions, set at the biennial FAO Conference. The total FAO Budget planned for 2014-15 is USD 2.4 billion. The voluntary contributions provided by Members and other partners support technical and emergency (including rehabilitation) assistance to governments for clearly defined purposes linked to the results framework, as well as direct support to FAO's core work. The voluntary contributions are expected to reach approximately USD 1,4 billion in 2014-15.

### **COFI**

COFI, a subsidiary body of the FAO Council, was established by the FAO Conference at its Thirteenth Session in 1965. The Committee presently constitutes the only global inter-governmental forum other than the United Nations General Assembly, where major international fisheries and aquaculture problems and issues are examined and recommendations addressed to governments, regional fishery bodies, NGOs, fishworkers, and the international community on a world-wide basis. COFI has also been used as a forum in which global binding agreements as well as non-binding instruments were negotiated.

COFI membership is open to any FAO Member and non-Member eligible to be an observer of the Organization. Representatives of the UN, UN bodies and specialized agencies, regional fishery bodies, national and international non-governmental organizations participate in the debate, but without the right to vote.

The two main functions of COFI are to review the programs of work of FAO in the field of fisheries and aquaculture and their implementation and to conduct periodic general reviews of fishery and aquaculture problems of an international character and appraise such problems and their possible solutions with a view to concerted action by nations, by FAO, inter-governmental bodies and the civil society. The Committee also reviews specific matters relating to fisheries and aquaculture referred to it by the Council or the Director-General of FAO, or placed by the Committee on its agenda at the request of Members, or the United Nations General Assembly. In its work, the Committee supplements rather than supplants other organizations working in the field of fisheries and aquaculture.

COFI is empowered to establish subcommittees on specific issues. These subsidiary bodies meet in the intersessional period of the parent Committee. COFI has a Sub-Committee on Fish Trade and a Sub-Committee on Aquaculture and is advised by the FAO Advisory Committee on Fishery Research.

The 31<sup>st</sup> Session of COFI met in Rome on June 6-13, 2014. Its report can be found at <http://www.fao.org/3/a-ML770e.pdf>.

The Committee reviewed issues of an international character, as well as the FAO program in fisheries and aquaculture and their implementation. The Committee expressed its praise and support for the State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA) 2014 publication, and emphasized the need for further measures to rebuild fish stocks. The Committee, while commending the new web-based questionnaire on the implementation of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (the Code), called upon FAO to further develop and review the questionnaire. While noting the progress made by the Members in implementing the Code and related instruments, the Committee underscored the need to continue supporting developing countries. The Committee acknowledged efforts being made by Members in combating Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing and emphasized the importance of the coming into force of the 2009 Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU Fishing (PSMA) as soon as possible. The Committee requested FAO to expand its efforts to effectively implement the International Guidelines on Bycatch Management and Reduction of Discards. The Committee endorsed the Voluntary Guidelines for Flag State Performance. The Committee reiterated its support for the Global Record's continued development. The Committee endorsed the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) and agreed to dedicate them to Ms. Chandrika Sharma, the Executive Secretary of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF). The Committee welcomed FAO's proposal for a Global Assistance Program (GAP) for implementation of the SSF Guidelines and recommended to further develop the GAP in a participatory manner. The Committee acknowledged FAO's Blue Growth Initiative (BGI) and suggested the establishment of a BGI working group to further develop its application. The Committee acknowledged the importance of inland fisheries and recommended that inland fishery issues be better included in national, subregional, regional and global instruments addressing water use and food security. The Committee urged FAO to provide guidance and increase capacity development in the areas of data collection and analysis, stock assessment, management, postharvesting, and policy development. The Committee welcomed FAO's new Strategic Objectives as a basis for focusing FAO's work in fisheries and aquaculture.

**Website:** <http://www.fao.org>

**NOAA Fisheries Contact:**

Cheri McCarty  
Office of International Affairs and Seafood Inspection  
National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA  
1315 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910  
Telephone: 301-427-8369  
Cheri.mccarty@noaa.gov