



**THE FOURTH REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON SHARED STOCKS:
RESEARCH AND MANAGEMENT
IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA**

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**REGIONAL FISHERIES STATISTICS
OF THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN REGION**

By:

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1. INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of this paper is to introduce briefly SEAFDEC planned strategies and actions for improving fishery statistics and its systems of Southeast Asian countries in light of development and management of sustainable fisheries with an emphasis on management of shared stocks. The paper also emphasizes that strengthening of national fishery statistical systems as well as sustainable data collection systems should be promoted as the long-term approach for management of sustainable use of shared fish stocks in Southeast Asia.

Background

Many countries have embarked upon innovative programs and policies to ensure the development and management of sustainable fisheries in Southeast Asia. The need for relevant, reliable, and realistic statistics for formulating and evaluating fishery programs and policies has inevitably expanded manifold for development and management purposes. Fishery statistics and its systems, by the nature, serve national needs and depend upon national administrative structure. The development of a national fishery statistical system is a national subject, which may well satisfy both local and national requirements. Strengthening of fishery statistics then appears to limit only to national actions.

However, with the accelerating problems, which are common to regional countries such as resource depletion, conflicts over resources particularly shared fish stocks and so on, coupled with various international requirements such as those of UNCLOS relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks (the UN Fish Stocks Agreement), the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF), etc., the regional aspect of fishery statistical systems has therefore become increasingly important. In this connection, it is timely that countries in the region should move forward to take necessary actions

to promote common approaches in standardizing data collection, so that the region could use the data with greater value. Such perspectives and actions will ensure sustainable data collection and further strengthening of fishery statistical systems in the region.

The need of a sustainable data collection should not be limited to individual countries alone but the prospect of having an integrated fishery statistical system among countries in the region should also be looked upon. If the region can collect, collate and analyze fisheries data on a more detail basis, it is confident that such data and information can be of prime importance for the fisheries management and development on a regional basis. Data and information on shared fish stocks could be more fully understood so that such stocks could be exploited more responsibly for the benefit of countries in the region. Countries could make informed decisions on joint ventures reducing risks and failures. With such information, countries in the region could work closely to ensure that fisheries management, planning and development could be done on a broader basis to benefit all countries in the region. Having an integrated fishery statistical system and also common approaches in data collection would also ensure more effective results from joint fisheries research. This therefore implies that mobilization and coordination among regional countries in the integration of data, information and experience is highly essential.

2. RECENT SEAFDEC INVOLVEMENT IN THE STRENGTHENING OF FISHERY STATISTICS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

It has been a number of occasions that SEAFDEC was requested by its member countries to pay greater efforts in developing fishery statistics in the region. At the last SEAFDEC Council Meeting in March 1999, the Council took note of the proposal on the improvement of fishery statistics in Southeast Asia in the view of relevant, accessible, reliable, realistic, comparable and timely information for formulating and evaluating fishery programs and policies. It was also suggested that the issue be placed under the SEAFDEC-ASEAN Fishery Consultative Group (FCG), a new collaborative mechanism of fisheries in the region, in order to gain greater political supports from the regional countries. Moreover, it was also emphasized at the last SEAFDEC Program Committee Meeting in November 1999 that SEAFDEC should further develop relevant programs and coordination to improve fishery statistics in the region.

Back in October 1998, an important milestone was marked when SEAFDEC convened the Consultation of Senior Administrators and Managers on the Strengthening of Fishery Statistical Systems in Southeast Asia. The Consultation adopted recommendations on appropriate actions for of the improvement of fishery statistical systems as well as long-term regional cooperation for fishery statistics in Southeast Asia. These include promotions of standardized classification of data as required at the minimal level for a national fishery statistical system, development of human resources at different levels, regionally comparable data systems, etc.

In addition, with the recent meeting of APFIC on the Ad-hoc Working Group of Experts in Capture Fishery Data Collection held in September 1999 where in SEAFDEC also participated, the regional countries have made a step forward in promoting common approaches and sustainable data collection systems. In addition, the meeting also reviewed the Guidelines for the Routine Collection of Capture Fishery Data, which could be used as one of the important references for fishery statistical development programs in the future.

3. STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS REQUIRED FOR IMPROVEMENT OF FISHERY STATISTICS

Based on recommendations made at various occasions, SEAFDEC has identified four main strategies for improvement of fishery statistics, namely, strengthening of national fishery statistical systems; promotion of data exchange and regionally comparable data systems, development of human resources at various levels; and coordination and collaboration among member countries and concerned agencies.

Strengthening of national fishery statistical systems

SEAFDEC is now developing a plan of actions for improvement of fishery statistics in Southeast Asia for submission to the next Council Meeting in coming March. This long-term strategy takes into consideration the Minimum Requirements of a National Fishery Statistical System with a step by step approach as the point of departure coupled with the promotion of a coordinating mechanism on fishery statistics at the national level to facilitate the strengthening. The improvement of quality of data as required for fishery development and management is also focused. It is also expected that through the SEAFDEC-ASEAN FCG mechanism after the approval of the Council of SEAFDEC, ASEAN would provide a strong support on the plan. The dissemination of the regional plan of actions will then be followed to create awareness on the issue.

SEAFDEC has also acknowledged different level/status of data collection and statistical systems in various countries. This has led to a new SEAFDEC pipeline project in collaboration with ASEAN on research in national fishery statistical systems. However, further elaboration and coordination with ASEAN is still on going.

Promotion of data exchange and regionally comparable data systems

SEAFDEC will continue the compilation of fishery statistics particularly catch and effort statistics to promote data exchange among countries in the region. It is planned that more meaningful/analyzed information based on statistical data will be developed in line with the requirements for management of fisheries.

With the assistance of internet technology, SEAFDEC is simultaneously developing its Digitized Atlas to accommodate databases of the compiled data to provide access to wider audience. Use of e-mail network through a dedicated e-mail of SEAFDEC; *statgroup@seafdec.org*, is a mechanism to facilitate exchange of data and information.

In addition, SEAFDEC recognizes that the Guidelines for Routine Capture Fishery Data Collection could be used as an important reference to promote regionally comparable data systems. Where appropriate, SEAFDEC will develop relevant programs for the purpose.

Development of human resources at various levels

SEAFDEC has planned to organize training for various target groups on collection and compilation of fishery statistics, routine capture fishery data collection, bio-statistics application for stock assessment, etc. in order to strengthen the national capabilities in data collection and information analysis. However, due to the insufficient resource persons, SEAFDEC would collaborate with international organizations such as FAO to develop appropriate programs. In addition, workshops/consultation when appropriate will be organized to exchange views and experience among national administrators and managers of fishery statistics.

Coordination and collaboration among member countries and concerned agencies

SEAFDEC plans to promote coordination and collaboration among SEAFDEC Departments and member countries as well as among other related organizations to avoid duplication of efforts but rather make it supplementary. The Regional Fisheries Policy Working Group (WGRFP) established at the Secretariat and the Technical Forum for Regional Fisheries Policy (TFRFP) would help facilitating such actions.

4. CONCLUSION

It should be recognized that improvement of fishery statistics in the Southeast Asia is substantially important for the development and management of sustainable fisheries in particular the shared fish stocks. Fishery statistics maintained at national levels should be regarded as the main source of information for the long-term and sustainable management of shared stocks. Along this line, strengthening of national fishery statistical systems and promotion of sustainable data collection systems for management of shared stocks should be given a first priority to fulfil the purpose.

Since the arrival of MV SEAFDEC in 1995, SEAFDEC has promoted the Collaborative Fishery Resource Surveys to obtain information and data for better insights of fishery resources. Due to the nature of the fishery resource surveys that much time is required for the interpretation of data and information, and the financial implication is substantial, the activities should be regarded as a supplementary source of information to the national fishery statistical systems providing a frame, which could be used for an interval of 10 or 15 years for further focused studies on ad-hoc or need bases.

The regional cooperation in the development and management of fisheries particularly on shared fish stocks is substantially important. The cooperation should take into consideration the sustainable data collection systems, human resources development for fishery statistics, exchange of data and information, etc.. In this connection, SEAFDEC will collaborate with the international organization like FAO for technical supports to facilitate the tasks. And lastly, the administrators and managers of fishery statistics should be encouraged to play a proactive role as they are providing a foundation for fishery scientists to assess the status of fishery resource and fisheries for management purposes.

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