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Organization of the
United Nations

Regional Fishery Body Secretariats' Network (RSN)

Strategy document



RSN

REGIONAL FISHERY BODY SECRETARIATS' NETWORK



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Background

The Regional Fishery Body¹ Secretariats' Network (RSN) was established in the margins of the The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in 1999 to facilitate exchange of information and identification of common interests among regional fishery bodies (RFBs) through FAO.

The RSN is a platform for the exchange of information, identification of common interests, cooperation, consultation and dialogue. FAO supports the RSN by providing secretariat services to the RSN and a venue for meetings and facilitates collaboration on matters of shared interest across the RSN members.

The RSN comprises RFBs with a wide range of mandates, including inland, aquaculture, coastal, offshore (exclusive economic zones and high seas) fisheries, science and conservation. Irrespective of their mandate, the challenges faced by RFBs in the context of international development of fisheries and aquaculture governance are often similar.

¹ Regional Fisheries Management Organizations and Arrangements (RFMO/As) and Regional Fishery Advisory Bodies (RFABs) with some responsibility for research, advice or management of marine or freshwater living resources are collectively referred to in this document as Regional Fishery Bodies (RFBs).

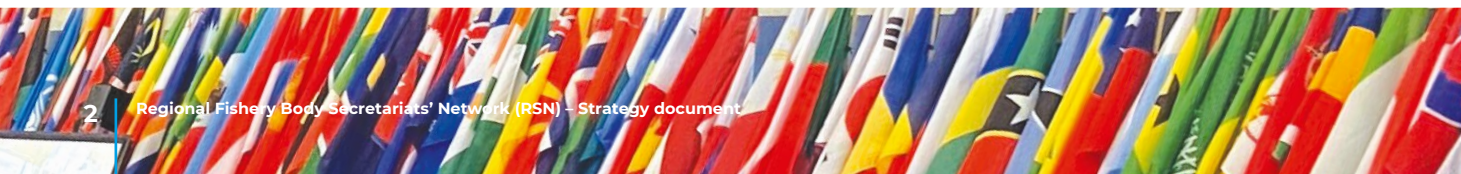


Background

Since 2022, the General Assembly of the United Nations (UNGA, 2022, 2023, 2024) has been calling on States to strengthen cooperation, communication and coordination of measures among existing RFBs, and with other relevant regional and international organizations. COFI (FAO, 2019, 2022, 2023a) also recognizes the key role that RFBs play in achieving sustainable management, including in combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and integrating climate change into the management of shared, migratory and high seas stocks. This was reiterated at the Thirty-sixth session of COFI in 2024 (FAO, 2024) where the Committee called for strengthened support to RFBs, including, through the RSN.

This document sets out the Strategic Goal and strategic advantages of the RSN. Additionally, the Plan of Action included in the Annex is intended as a starting point for a more dynamic document, and outlines areas for cooperative action among the RSN in the near term.

This document should be read alongside the RSN Terms of Reference (ToR) and Rules of Procedure (RoP) adopted at the Ninth meeting of RSN.



Strategic goal

To strengthen cooperation and coordination among RFBs for the benefit of their respective members, and to achieve improved conservation and sustainable management of fisheries and aquaculture resources.

Areas of work

The RSN encourages knowledge exchange and the identification of common interests among RSN member secretariats. In particular, the RSN members, supported by the Secretariat, will work together to, inter alia:

- identify and address common challenges and constraints faced by the Secretariats in achieving goals of the member organizations, through appropriate strategies and mechanisms;
- share experiences and lessons learned;
- foster and facilitate cooperation and collaboration between RFBs secretariats, including pooling efforts and resources where possible;
- raise stakeholder awareness and support the representation of RSN members in international fora and processes;
- act as a collective voice for RFBs in international fora, ensuring regional perspectives are considered in global discussions, and publicize the successes and common challenges of RSN members; and
- promote good practices and effective policies, and define common standards.

The RSN Secretariat will support the Chair(s) and members by providing technical and administrative support to the Network as requested, convening meetings of the Network, and facilitating exchange of information.



Strategic advantage

The RSN provides a global platform for cooperation and collaboration among RFBs, strengthening RFBs capability to support their respective members and enhancing promotion and advocacy of the role of fisheries in global food security, livelihoods, income, and ecosystem management, enabling the following main benefits:

- collaboration in areas of common interest, including in data, research and management, and in navigating common challenges;
- advocacy for shared interests in international fora, and multilateral agreements and processes, or with potential partners;
- shared knowledge in fisheries management and advisory services, including in building capacity among RFBs respective members and transferring technology;
- reduced inconsistency and duplicative reporting mechanisms for Member States of multiple RFBs;
- sharing, cooperation and collaboration in tackling common challenges, including climate change, achieving sustainable management, preventing illegal activities that damage the environment and fish stocks, and implementing multilateral environmental agreements;
- promotion of the achievements of RFBs in contributing to food security; and
- influencing action on a global scale, including through contributions to international agreements and processes.



The diverse composition of the RSN membership reflects the highly diverse nature of fisheries. It enables cross fertilization of ideas and opportunities among RFBs to address common needs and issues. It also enhances the promotion of RFB actions and successes. Non-RFB stakeholders can also engage in the RSN as observers, complementing RFBs' work through their functions and responsibilities.

Collaborative efforts of the RSN have included targeted regional consultations, workshops and side events, collaborative contributions to international fora and joint statements to COFI, and joint newsletters and communications on RFBs activities and challenges.

The success of these collaborations can be seen in the increasing international recognition of the value of RFBs in the conservation and management of global fisheries and aquaculture resources, and a range of further activities are being planned and implemented to ensure continuity and to further advance areas of mutual interest.

A "Plan of Action to Enhance Cooperation and Collaboration" is provided in the annex. The Plan of Action is a living document that will change from time to time, with the agreement of the RSN. This Plan of Action will guide the work of the RSN and will evolve according to the shared challenges and interests of the RSN. Progress on the Plan of Action will be reported to meetings of the RSN.



Annex

RSN Plan of Action to Enhance Cooperation and Collaboration

This Annex is subject to review and revision at the
Twelfth meeting of the RSN in 2028

The ToR of the RSN (FAO, 2023b) outline a range of areas of work to encourage information exchange and the identification of common interests among RSN member secretariats.

Within that broader remit, the RSN, supported by the Secretariat, proposes to undertake the following practical actions over the period 2024 to 2028, to strategically accelerate the benefits of cooperation among RFBs.



STARTING POINT

- Map out current formal arrangements and existing mechanisms for cooperation between RSN members.
- Map RFBs' roles and mandates: provide an overview of the differences and similarities in the region, roles and mandates of RFBs to streamline the sharing of information and events, and identify areas for potential collaboration. The mapping of roles and mandates should also consider sectors, issue themes and groupings, including biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ), World Trade Organization (WTO), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), climate change, administrative procedures and new tools (e.g. effective microorganisms (EM) and aquaculture).
- Recognize and support ongoing dialogues in groupings by region.



2

IDENTIFY priority areas for cooperation and collaboration

- Identify priority areas for cooperation between RFBs, including those highlighted in RSN regional consultations and meetings, such as climate action, tackling IUU and the implementation of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement).
- Identify opportunities to collaborate on scientific matters of shared interest and common challenges, to learn from each other, pool resources and build expertise across regions.
- Within each of these areas, work with relevant programmes where cooperation is already in place, such as the Common Oceans Programme, inter alia, to exchange information and seek resourcing on identified priority areas.

- Seek and identify volunteers from RSN members to help drive information exchange between RFBs, especially on topics of common concern. Leaders proposed for key topics include:

- Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) on IUU Fishing;
- International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) on Climate Change;
- International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) on capacity building, and
- Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organization (BOBP-IGO) on communication.

Proposals on additional areas of common interest are welcomed from other members, including the protection of biodiversity.

- Identify and ensure integration of existing minimum international standards in priority areas.



3



BE MORE TARGETED in exchange of information

- **Utilize the RSN Strategic Document to guide the discussions and work of the RSN**, and include the Strategic Document in the agenda of RSN Sessions, particularly the progress and updates of this Plan of Action.
- **Recognize and utilize existing mechanisms**, including online magazines and newsletters, RSN meetings (including meeting records), online meetings, and the voluntary sharing of information by RSN members. Ensure that these existing resources are accessible and given consideration to their evolution and effective use.
- **Draw on successful precedents for cooperation**. Share examples of different cooperation activities across RFBs and FAO (e.g. FAO Deep Seas Fisheries Project), and consider summary (e.g. a Handbook or Guidelines) on common features of successful cooperative efforts.
- **Circulate dates** of RSN-organized regional consultations in advance (e.g. OECM, Climate Change). Ensure that these meetings are not one-off and are part of the pathway to addressing priority needs.
- **Identify mechanisms to enable more effective information sharing**, including the potential use of artificial intelligence (AI) to facilitate work, including meeting records, where appropriate.
- **Proposal for a small taskforce** from RSN to discuss how to improve on information exchange and sharing of capacity building.



4

DEVELOP a strategic approach to resourcing

In order to ensure continuity and continued momentum in the RSN, increased and sustained resourcing is required.

FAO support, including through the provision of a Secretariat, has underpinned the establishment of the RSN and needs to be maintained. However, additional resources are needed to enhance cooperation and collaboration.

To attract resources, a strategic approach to resourcing will be developed, including the following preliminary steps:

- build the profile and credibility of the RSN, including through collaboration with FAO;
- RSN members and RFB Member States support the objectives and activities of the RSN; and
- communication with existing and potential new donors will be enhanced, to facilitate additional resourcing (monetary, in-kind or logistical contributions) for future activities.



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