

**FAO**

## Responsible Fisheries

The Reykjavik Conference on Responsible Fisheries in the Marine Ecosystem met from 1-4 October, 2001. The Conference was organised by the Government of Iceland and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), and was co-sponsored by the Government of Norway.

The Conference was called to gather and review the best available knowledge on marine ecosystem issues; to identify means by which ecosystem considerations can be included in capture fisheries management; and to identify future challenges and relevant strategies.

Participants included policy-makers and administrators in fisheries and ocean management within national and international institutions, together with scientists, representatives of industry, NGOs and other interested parties.

According to the FAO, about 50 per cent of the world's marine fishery resources are fully exploited, 25 per cent are over-exploited and about 25 per cent could support higher exploitation rates. However, despite warnings, the trend towards more over-fishing observed since the early 1970s has not yet been reversed. Global fish production has increased from 19 million tonnes in 1950 to about 130 million tonnes in 2000. This includes 36 million tonnes produced by aquaculture. Most of the capture fisheries (estimated at 85 million tonnes) come from the oceans. By-catches and discards are estimated at about 20 million tonnes per year. The main challenges facing fisheries today include: over-fishing; over-capacity; environmental impact of fishing; illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing (IUU); poor selectivity and discarding and the environmental state of the coastal zone; fish trade and eco-labelling.

According to a paper from FAO's Fishery Resources Division, total fish catches from the North-West and the South-East Atlantic are levelling off after reaching their maximum levels a decade or more ago.

Over the last few years, the number of fishing vessels has tended to decline in developed countries and increase in some developing countries. Technological developments, however, have increased the fishing capacity of individual vessels. Thus the pressure from over-dimensional industrial fleets on stocks and small-scale fisheries has grown significantly. FAO notes that despite limited progress in some areas, on a global scale, marine degradation has continued and even intensified in most places. Apart from over-fishing, the main problems are: alteration and destruction of wetlands, mangroves and coral reefs through landfill, sedimentation, pollution from sewage, river runoff and atmospheric contamination.

During the Conference participants met in plenary sessions and a Scientific Symposium, in which invited experts presented their research. During the Symposium,

participants focused on key scientific issues for ecosystem-based fisheries management (EBFM). One of the papers presented described the attributes and limitations of existing ecological models. It noted the great uncertainty involved in using models, and advised a precautionary approach. In describing current fish stock control mechanisms, the paper's author mentioned the benefits and challenges of using closed areas and total allowable catch (TAC), and of regulating fishing effort and mesh sizes, noting that no one solution would suffice, and that the problem of over-capacity affected all these control systems and needed to be included as a factor in models. The expert pointed out that the real problem was one of fleet size and criticised the failure to address this problem. He challenged the current perspective on managing marine resources and supported harvesting marine resources using the smallest fleet size possible at a minimum level of fishing mortality that does not lead to serious long-term catch loss.

Participants also heard presentations on incorporating ecosystem considerations in fisheries management. Drawing from an extensive study by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), one expert explained how most common control measures, such as TAC, limited licences, area closures and controls on fish size and sex, were found to be ineffective in ensuring conservation. He said only Individual Fishing Quotas (IFQs), which are rights-based and provide incentives to mitigate the competitive "race-to-fish" between companies, have been found to be a potent and valuable tool for fisheries management. In this regard, he cited the community harvesting cooperatives in the US and Canada as successful examples of the IFQ approach. The expert emphasised that the real problem in fisheries management lies primarily in its governance structure and in the alliance of short-term interests between elected officials and fishermen and the fishing industry. He questioned EBFM's effectiveness in improving the fisheries situation if nothing was done to improve fisheries governance.

Another expert described how the Operational Management Procedure (OMP) can successfully unify harvest control laws, risk, uncertainty and the precautionary principle in fisheries management. He explained that the OMP, unlike traditional fisheries management approaches, takes explicit account of scientific uncertainties, applies the precautionary principle and performs comprehensive simulation testing to derive TACs, and also shows decision-makers the trade-off between catch levels and the risk of resource depletion. He explained that OMP has been successfully used in operational (by-catch) interactions, as demonstrated in its ability to calculate company trade-offs between annual catches of sardines and anchovies in South Africa.

A discussion on the points raised in the Symposium was followed by the second plenary session, which discussed a framework for future action. Delegates considered an outcome document from the conference, the *Reykjavik Declaration on Responsible Fisheries in the Marine Ecosystem*.

This Declaration was the result of extensive discussions and negotiations among FAO member States, which were held in an open-ended drafting committee established at the start of the conference. Conference Chair Arni Mathiesen reported that an unbracketed Chair's text proposed compromise language aimed at achieving a consensus among delegates on the final wording of the Declaration.

Japan indicated that although it would not block the consensus, it would abstain from joining it. Delegates then adopted the Declaration by consensus.

**Reykjavik Declaration**

The preambular section reaffirms that UNCLOS – the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea – sets out the rights and duties of States on the use and conservation of the ocean and its resources, including the conservation and management of living marine resources. It also recalls agreement on several additional commitments, including the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and Agenda 21.

It recognises, *inter alia*, the need to strengthen and sustain management capacity to incorporate ecosystem considerations, and stresses the need for further development of scientific knowledge on the ecosystem and the ecological impact of fishing.

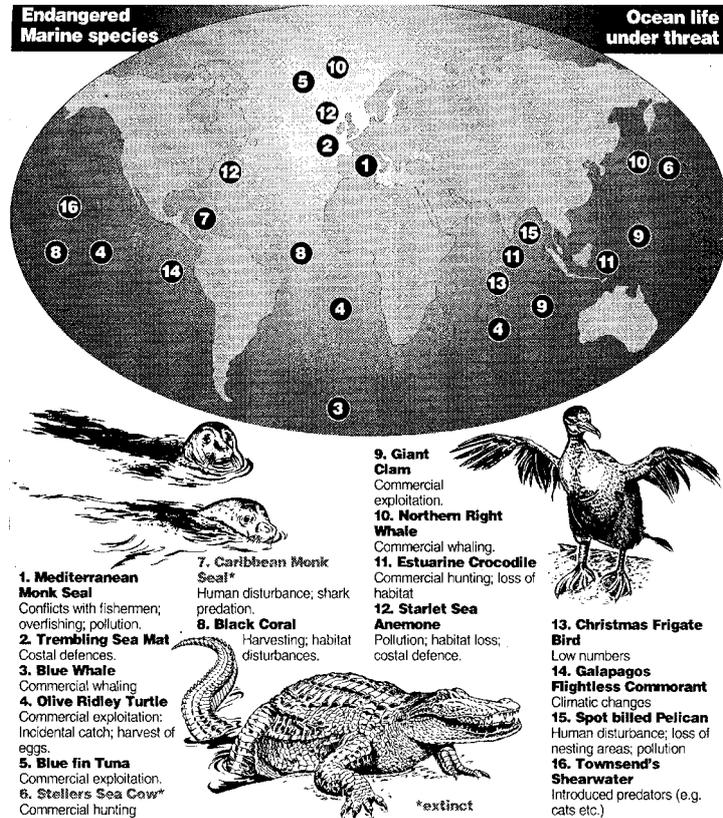
The Declaration concludes with a request to the Government of Iceland to convey the Declaration to the UN Secretary-General, the FAO Director-General, the Chair of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and relevant organisations, for their consideration.

Following the adoption of the Declaration, Japan and Saint Lucia made statements clarifying their respective positions.

Japan expressed disappointment that the Declaration had in its view failed to address a number of major issues that were the theme of the conference. The delegate described it as a “regressive step and missed opportunity” to move toward the inclusion of ecosystem considerations in fisheries management. He explained that one source of disagreement in the drafting committee had been the use of the term “living marine resources,” which he had deemed appropriate, as it had been used in UNCLOS and other UN and FAO agreements and documents. He said Australia, the US and New Zealand had refused to accept this term in the Declaration, and argued that this “puts us back 20 years” and contradicts the aims of ecosystem management. He said discussions during the Scientific Symposium on the role of marine mammals and consumption of fish by marine mammals should have been reflected in

the Declaration. He stated that some countries’ refusal to include it had turned this into a political meeting along the lines of the International Whaling Commission (IWC). Japan also expressed disappointment that the Declaration had not included a proposed paragraph on market access and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, which the delegate believed was a key issue at the conference.

Saint Lucia indicated that although it had joined the “spirit of consensus,” it believed that the Declaration had



Courtesy: The Observer

not paid sufficient attention to marine mammals and their consumption patterns. The speaker stated that in spite of reports indicating a substantial increase in whale populations since the moratorium in 1986, the focus continued to be on industry over-capacity rather than on dietary habits of marine mammals. He noted that the IWC was hosting a meeting in Saint Lucia to discuss marine mammals’ consumption of fish species. Asserting the use of a “blocking mechanism approach” by some States to marine mammals and their role in EBFM, he said this issue should be de-politicised.

In his closing remarks, the Chair said the organisers and sponsors of this scientific conference had aimed to promote an exchange of knowledge and to provide input to the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). He noted that although achieving consensus on the Reykjavik Declaration had not been easy, hard work and long hours had produced a result that he believed would provide a very useful input for the World Summit. (MJ)