

31st Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries
US NOAA/Ocean Trust Side Event
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ASSESSING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF FISHERY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS: A NEW APPROACH IN ASSURING SEAFOOD SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability, although often gauged on a fishery-by-fishery basis, is actually the result of a well-designed and implemented management system. NOAA and Ocean Trust present a structured evaluation process to assess fishery management systems' ability to maintain the sustainability of fisheries under national and state jurisdictions. The one hour briefing will provide information on the methodology and its application to both large offshore and small coastal fisheries. Conclusions will be presented based on initial assessments of fishery management systems in the United States and its potential to offer greater recognition and acceptance of State sponsored sustainability assessments by the public and the marketplace.

Program:

Opening Remarks: Dean Swanson, NOAA Office of International Affairs, USA

Assessing the Sustainability of Management Systems: A new approach in assuring the sustainability of fisheries: Thor Lassen, Ocean Trust, USA

Summary:

Our initiative to assess fish management systems is based on recommendations from a series of international forums (2010-2013) during which 47 presentations were given on the topic of "Science and Sustainability" and discussed by representatives from fishing nations, fishery management organizations, fishery scientists, research institutions, universities, fishery associations, professional science organizations, NGOs, RFMOs and FAO. Key conclusions are posted on www.oceantrust.org which include the:

- Need to support competent science and management organizations
- Recognition of sovereign state management of its resources
- Importance of evaluating management systems vs. status of fisheries

The methodology used to assess fishery management systems is adapted from the FAO *Evaluation Framework to Assess the Conformity of Public and Private Ecolabelling Schemes with the FAO Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries*, but focuses on the management system as a whole rather than that of an individual fishery.

Thus, if the processes within a management system are deemed to be adequate to sustain individual fisheries, then the products from those fisheries should be deemed sustainable (i.e., recognized in the market-place).

As such, the assessment process we present would foster management systems that are proactive and preventative in regard to issues affecting sustainability rather than reactive and recuperative; and provide assurances for the public on the sustainability of fisheries on a much more efficient and cost effective basis.

Two parallel projects were discussed to test the assessment system: one on the national US management program and one on regional programs in the Gulf of Mexico. This approach to assessing fishery management systems is unique in that it:

- (1) provides a systems-based approach to sustainability versus an individual fishery “finished-product” inspection on the status of a fishery, and
- (2) establishes a methodology that can be applied at multiple levels of a fishery management system from a national program as a whole to a regional program.

Flexibility incorporated in the FAO Guidelines is maintained in the evaluation process which recognizes distinctions between marine ecosystems, complexity and size of fisheries (large vs. small scale), and use of proxies or less elaborate reference points.

An analogy to HACCP was given which established a system’s based approach to seafood safety evaluating the entire process as opposed to individual evaluations of samples at the end of the process, promoting efficiency in assuring seafood safety, and flexibility for product control. Like HACCP, a systems approach to sustainability rather than an “end product inspection” on the status of an individual fishery is beneficial:

1. Management systems in conformance with sustainability guidelines are more likely to enhance the productivity of its fisheries with greater yields, while maintaining the sustainability of stocks.
2. Assessing management systems can address and encompass a broader range of fisheries as many fisheries cannot afford or justify the costs or requirements of existing ecolabelling programs for individual fisheries.
3. Assessing management systems also offers a more efficient and cost effective means of assessing sustainability by reducing duplication linked to third party assessments of managed fisheries, and by incorporating FAO criteria into existing management and assessment processes so that once a fishery is approved by a management program it is in compliance with FAO criteria.
4. A systems approach also can be used as a way to synchronize regional efforts or normalize variability in management processes.

Multiple applications are available:

- The process may be used by states to conduct a self-assessment of its fishery management system in support of a national labeling program
- Can validate national programs or state assessments on fisheries for labeling or national branding as many view ecolabelling as a state responsibility, or

- Be used by third parties to assess the conformity of a management system.

Conclusions:

The current assessment tool provides a viable means for evaluating fishery management systems to biological components of sustainability put forth by the FAO.

To our knowledge, this tool is the only comprehensive assessment process based on the FAO Evaluation Framework for evaluating the performance of Coastal State management systems while tracking evidence which upholds that performance.

It has the potential to offer greater recognition and acceptance of State's sustainability assessments by the public and marketplace, and

Can validate and improve fishery management systems by providing a process to systematically document, communicate, and guide the sustainability of fisheries.

Recommendations:

FAO has provided an international forum for the development of guidelines governing the management of fisheries.

FAO led the development of standards for Flag State performance to address high seas (IUU) fishing and Regional Fishery Management Organization (RFMO) performance.

There is no similar internationally recognized mechanism to evaluate the performance of Coastal State management systems.

We recommend that FAO continue its work with member states in the development and application of mechanisms to evaluate and communicate the sustainability of respective fishery management systems with the FAO membership.

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For further information attend:

2014 Science & Sustainability Forum October 27-30 New Orleans, Louisiana, or contact Thor Lassen, Ocean Trust +703 343 1444 tjlassen@oceantrust.org, Visit oceantrust.org

Attendance: 32 COFI Members, FAO Observers, FAO Secretariat - Iceland, Norway, Spain, Uruguay, Peru, UK, Korea, Japan, US, Canada, FAO, IFFO, OECD, ICFA