

National Conference on Management of Coastal Fisheries in Malaysia 11 – 12 March 2003, Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA

The Department of Fisheries (DOF), Ministry of Agriculture, Malaysia and the WorldFish Center convened the “National Conference on Management of Coastal Fisheries in Malaysia” in Kuala Lumpur on 11–12 March 2003. The conference was in response to increasing concerns about the state of fisheries in the country’s coastal waters, and the call during the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg for governments to restore depleted fish stocks. The Objectives of the Conference were to

- present evaluations of the status of fisheries resources in the country’s coastal waters based on assessments conducted by DOF and WorldFish Center scientists;
- examine the utility of participatory management schemes (co-management) in Malaysia based on studies and experiences of DOF and the WorldFish Center; and,
- identify key follow-up actions/programs (including research needs) for improved management of coastal fisheries in Malaysia.

The conference was attended by more than 60 participants (representing 15 institutions) with recognized expertise in coastal fisheries assessment, management and rehabilitation. The Conference was organized into 5 inter-related sessions, namely **Session I** - Coastal Fisheries Assessment; **Session II** - Fisheries Co-Management; **Session III** - Towards Strategies and Actions for Improved Management; **Session IV** - Working Group Recommendations for Improved Management; **Session V** – Key Conclusions and Closing Program

Session I was held in plenary with the results of assessment studies presented by DOF and WorldFish Center scientists. Substantive deliberations led to a general consensus that the abundance of fisheries resources has substantially declined and that the coastal fishing sector suffers from excess fishing capacity (too many boats and fishers). Session II, also held in the plenary, highlighted presentation of results from studies and experiences on the utility of co-management approaches as ‘vehicles’ for improving fisheries management. Deliberations during Session II led to a consensus on the need to

adopt co-management approaches in Malaysia, given the ineffectiveness of past management implementation strategies. With the consensus achieved in Session I and II, the participants were divided into three working groups (WG) during Session III to consider strategies and actions for improved coastal fisheries management in Malaysia. The working groups were asked to consider specific actions/programs in the following areas: WG1 – Integrated Management; WG2 – Research Needs; and WG3 – Information and Capacity Building Needs. Session IV allowed presentation of the WG outputs (conclusions, strategies and recommendations), and deliberations to arrive at a Conference consensus on the prevailing coastal fisheries situation and appropriate management directions and action programs. The key workshop conclusions, recommendations and follow-up actions were finalized during Session V.

The key conclusions of the Conference were:

1. There are too many boats and fishers (excess capacity) exploiting the fisheries resources in the coastal waters of Malaysia.
2. There is an urgent need for the responsible authorities to implement comprehensive action programs to reduce fishing capacity and rehabilitate resources in coastal areas.
3. Given the ineffectiveness of past approaches, innovative strategies are required, involving effective partnership among government agencies, fishers, and other stakeholders (in a co-management mode).
4. Failure to act urgently in a resolute and effective manner will lead to irreversible damage to the fisheries resources, the incomes of fishers, and the socioeconomic well-being of coastal communities.

The main recommendations of the Conference are:

1. Implement the “Integrated Fisheries Management and Rehabilitation Program (IFMRP)” in the Northwest Coast Area of Peninsular Malaysia. The IFMRP will be a focused, comprehensive program of management, research, information and capacity-building actions. It will be implemented in a highly participatory mode with stakeholders. The IFMRP

will focus and coordinate currently limited institutional resources to attain beneficial impacts over a reasonable time frame. This program will provide an example that can be followed by other regions in Malaysia in the development of their fisheries management and rehabilitation programs.

2. Implement the national activities of the “Malaysia Coastal Fisheries Management and Rehabilitation Program”. This national level program consists of management, research, information and capacity-building actions that will support improved local fisheries management. The program focuses on key national level activities and prepares the institutional environment for implementation of fisheries management and rehabilitation programs in other coastal areas country-wide.

To facilitate uptake, financing and implementation of the recommended programs, the conference participants identified immediate follow-up actions, as follows:

1. Submit a report and brief to the Minister, Ministry of Agriculture, on the key Conference conclusions and recommendations..
2. Create an Advisory Council and Steering Committee, with a Secretariat at DOF, to ‘champion’ the conclusions and oversee implementation of the Conference recommendations.
3. Disseminate the Conference conclusions and recommendations using appropriate mechanisms to the wider community of coastal fisheries stakeholders (including fishers, coastal communities, academe and government agencies) to attain consensus and a wider constituency for the action programs.

The Conference participants urged the DOF and WorldFish Center (the Conference organizers) to follow-up the Conference as a priority actions and recommendations as a priority. The reduction of fishing capacity and rehabilitation of resources and fishing incomes will require long-term, sustained efforts. Therefore, the Conference participants appeal to the wider community of coastal fisheries stakeholders for unity in meeting the challenges ahead.