

# Foreword

In response to major challenges faced by the developing world today on food insecurity and malnutrition, greater efforts are being made to domesticate new species and improve production traits of commercially important aquatic species. In many developing countries particularly in Asia, national breeding programs for major aquaculture species have been established with some of the improved fish approaching commercialization and widespread dissemination stage. While significant progress has been achieved in this aspect, developing countries are also confronted with concerns about the potential impact of introductions of improved fish and other alien species particularly in Africa, a region known for its rich diversity in freshwater fish. The concern expressed by environmentalists centers on potential negative ecological and genetic implications of introduced species on wild genetic resources due to interbreeding of domesticated stocks with populations from the wild.

In view of the risks associated with indiscriminate introductions, the governments of African countries are now faced with the challenge of ensuring the enforcement of biosafety regulations/guidelines and of achieving the participation and full cooperation of sectoral institutions and key stakeholders. These include not only the public sector institutions (national, regional and international) responsible for issues pertaining to the introduction/release of improved or alien invasive species, but also the private sector groups.

To increase the benefits of aquaculture while protecting the environment/native biota, there has to be better recognition by all sectors/stakeholders of the interdependence of genetic enhancement and genetic conservation. The "Expert Consultation on Biosafety and Environmental Impact of Genetic Enhancement and Introductions of Improved and Alien Species in Africa" held in Nairobi, Kenya during 20-23 February 2002 is a significant step to enhance awareness among African institutions, agencies, planners of the issues involved in improving production through introductions of improved strains/alien species while sustaining the biodiversity.

I recommend the proceedings of the consultation presented to you. You will find it a useful tool as these provide valuable information on the status and potential for genetic improvement, introductions and risks of introduced/alien species, and tools and policies for introductions and transfers of these species.

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