

What is the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries?



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This booklet describes, in a non-technical manner, some important aspects of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. The purpose is to create greater awareness of the goals and purpose of the Code and to encourage its effective application in all capture fisheries and in aquaculture.

This booklet does not replace the Code of Conduct but simply presents some of the complex information contained within the Code in a simplified form in an attempt to make it more accessible to all users of fisheries.

What is the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries?

Fisheries (which includes the management, catching, processing, marketing of fish stocks) and aquaculture (the farming of fish) provide an important source of food, employment, income and recreation for people throughout the world. Millions of people depend upon fish for their livelihoods. If there is to be enough fish for future generations, everyone involved in fishing must help conserve and manage the world's fisheries.

With this situation in mind, more than 170 Members of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) adopted the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries in 1995. The Code is voluntary rather than mandatory, and aimed at everyone working in, and involved with, fisheries and aquaculture, irrespective of whether they are located in inland areas or in the oceans. Because the Code is voluntary, it is necessary to ensure that all people working in fisheries and aquaculture commit themselves to its principles and goals and take practical measures to implement them.

The Code of Conduct, which consists of a collection of principles, goals and elements for action, took more than two years to elaborate. Representatives from members of FAO, inter-governmental organizations, the fishing industry and non-governmental organizations worked long and hard to reach agreement on the Code. It is therefore a result of effort by many different groups involved in fisheries and aquaculture. In this respect the Code represents a global consensus or agreement on a wide range of fisheries and aquaculture issues.

Governments, in cooperation with their industries and fishing communities, have the responsibility to implement the Code. FAO's role is to technically support their activities but it does not have a direct responsibility for implementation because FAO does not have a responsibility for the development and implementation of national fishery policies. This is the sole responsibility of governments.

Implementation of the Code will be most effectively achieved when governments are able to incorporate its principles and goals into national fishery policies and legislation. To ensure that there is support for these policies and legislative changes, governments should take steps to consult with industry and other groups to promote their support and voluntary compliance. In addition, governments should encourage fishing communities and industry to develop codes of good practice that are consistent with, and support, the goals and purpose of the Code of Conduct. These codes of good practice are another important way of promoting the implementation of the Code.

The purpose of this booklet is to describe, in a non-technical manner, some important aspects of the Code of Conduct. It is hoped that this information will make people more aware of the goals and purpose of the Code and encourage them to implement it in all fisheries, irrespective of whether they are small-scale or large-scale in nature, and in aquaculture. This booklet does not replace the Code of Conduct but simply tries to make more information about it available.

The Code has been translated by FAO into its five official languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French and Spanish. In addition, governments, industry and other organizations have made unofficial translations of the Code into other languages, including Albanian, Croatian, Estonian, Farsi, German, Icelandic, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Russian, Sinhalese, Slovenian, Tamil, Thai, and Tigrina. The text of some of these languages can be found on the FAO Fisheries Department Website on the Internet.

For those people who would like to know more about the Code of Conduct and to obtain a copy of the text, visit the FAO Fisheries Department Website on the Internet. The address of the Website is as follows: <http://www.fao.org/fi/agreem/codecond/codecon.asp>.

If you do not have access to the Internet, please contact: The Chief of Service, FIPL/Fisheries Department, Food and Agriculture Organization, Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00100 Rome, Italy, for a copy. Please be sure to specify whether you want the Code in Arabic, Chinese, English, French or Spanish.



Background

To guarantee the best possible supplies of fish for future generations, the Code of Conduct stresses that countries and all those involved in fisheries and aquaculture should work together to conserve and manage fish resources and their habitats. All people involved in fisheries should strive to maintain or restore fish stocks to levels capable of producing reasonable amounts of catch both now and into the future. The term *maximum sustainable yield* is often used to describe this level of catch. This means that a country's fishing operations and policies should be designed with a view to achieving long-term sustainable use of fish resources, as a means of assuring resource conservation, continued food supplies and alleviating poverty in fishing communities.

Therefore, the real purpose of the Code of Conduct is to help countries and groups of countries, develop or improve their fisheries and aquaculture, in order to reach this goal.

It is well known that the development of good fisheries policies requires finance, skills and experience that may not always be available in developing countries, and particularly not in least developed countries and small island countries. The Code encourages international organizations such as FAO to assist these countries develop their national capacities in order to improve their ability to develop and manage fisheries and aquaculture.

The Code describes how fisheries should be managed responsibly, and how fishing operations themselves should be conducted. It then addresses the development of aquaculture, the linking of fisheries with other coastal zone activities, and the processing and selling of the catch. The importance of countries cooperating with one another in all aspects of fisheries is highlighted in the Code.

The Code does not explain exactly how fishers, industry and governments should take the necessary practical steps to implement the Code. For this reason FAO is developing detailed guidelines on a range of different topics to support the Code's implementation. The purpose of these guidelines is to give practical and technical advice to fishers, industry and fishery managers as to the steps that might be taken to ensure that the Code is implemented as it was intended.



Fisheries Management

The Code advocates that countries should have clear and well-organized fishing policies in order to manage their fisheries. These policies should be developed with the cooperation of all groups that have an interest in fisheries, including the fishing industry, fish workers, environmental groups and other interested organizations.

Where cooperation among countries in fishery conservation and management is necessary because fishery resources are shared among countries, the Code calls for new regional fishery organizations to be established or for existing organizations to be strengthened. Cooperation in this way is the only realistic approach to achieving the long-term goals that were discussed in the preceding section of this booklet. The role of regional fishery organizations is considered further in the section relating to Regional and International Cooperation.

It is important that fishing industries at all levels operate within a clear fisheries management and legal framework so that everyone involved in fisheries has a clear understanding of the rules to be followed.

Fisheries should be managed to ensure that fishing and fish processing are conducted in ways that minimize negative impacts on the environment, reduce waste, and preserve the quality of fish caught. Fishers should keep records of their fishing operations. Governments should have enforceable laws with procedures for determining and punishing violators. Punishment for violations could include fines or even the removal of fishing licences if violations are severe.

When developing fisheries policies, it is important to consider a number of issues. These include, among other things, the costs and benefits of fishing and the environmental and social impacts of fishing.

In preparing these policies, countries should use the best scientific information available while taking into account traditional fishing practices and knowledge where it is appropriate to do so. In the absence of adequate scientific information, countries should act more cautiously in setting fishing limits.

All people and organizations concerned with fishing should be encouraged to share their views and opinions on fishing issues. Particular attention should be given to the needs of local people who depend upon fisheries for their livelihoods. Countries should strive to educate and train fishers and fish farmers, so that they can be involved in developing and implementing policies to ensure sustainable fisheries now and in the future.

To protect fish resources, dynamiting, poisoning and other destructive fishing practices should be prohibited in all countries.

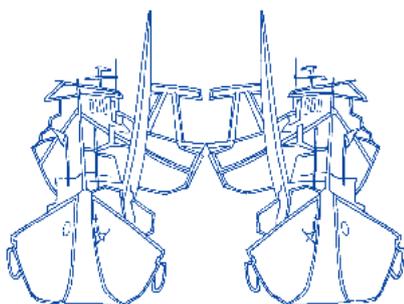
Countries should ensure that only fishing vessels permitted fish in their waters. Such fishing should be done in a responsible manner and in accordance with any rules, regulations or laws that may be applied by a country.

To avoid overfishing (taking so much fish that the fish stocks will decline in the future), the size of the fishing fleet should not be too large for the natural supply of fish. In addition, the effects of fishing gear on the environment (impacts on coral reefs, for example) should be understood before using a new fishing gear. Fishing methods and gear should be selective, and designed to minimize waste and promote high survival rates for escaping fish. Gear should also minimize the catching of fish species that are not wanted (non-target or by-catch fish) or that are endangered. Fishing gear and fishing methods that are not selective or which cause high levels of waste should be phased out.

Vessel supplies should be purchased with a view to minimizing waste and garbage. The owners and crew of fishing vessels should ensure that discharges of waste do not cause major pollution.

To protect air quality, countries should adopt guidelines that aim at reducing the release of dangerous exhaust gas and the release of ozone-depleting substances found in the refrigeration systems of some fishing vessels. These substances should be phased out.

Important fish habitats such as wetlands, mangroves, reefs and lagoons, should be protected from destruction and pollution. Where natural disasters harm fisheries resources, countries should be prepared to take emergency conservation and management measures when necessary.



Flag Countries

Countries that have fishing vessels that fish beyond their waters have the responsibility to ensure that these vessels are issued with appropriate certificates, and are allowed to fish. Countries should keep detailed records of the vessels that fish beyond a country's own waters.

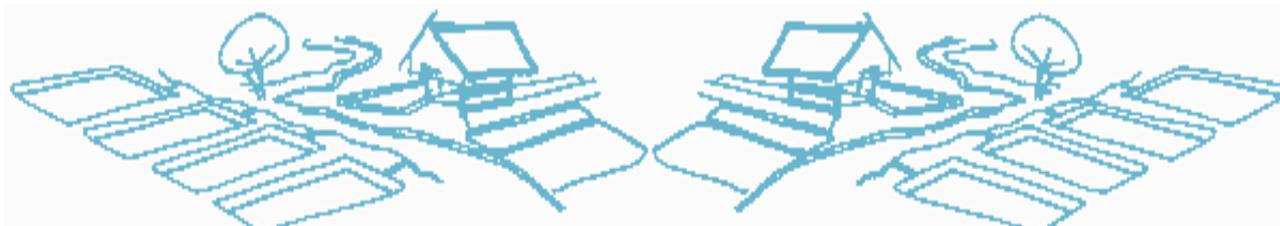
Flag countries (those countries that issue a flag to a fishing vessel) should also make sure that their vessels are safe, and that insurance is carried.

Moreover, vessels and gear should be properly marked, according to national and/or international regulations. Information regarding accidents involving foreign nationals should be provided to relevant foreign governments.

Port Countries

Countries should adopt procedures, such as inspecting foreign fishing vessels when they enter their ports, except in cases when a vessel is in port because of emergency, to assist in ensuring that the vessel has fished responsibly. Port countries should cooperate with the country where the vessel is registered (the flag country) when the flag country requests assistance to investigate possible infringements by its vessels.

Harbours and landing places should be safe havens for fishing vessels. These places should have facilities for servicing vessels, vendors, and fish buyers. Fresh water supplies, sanitation arrangements and waste disposal systems should also be provided.



Aquaculture Development

As a primary goal, aquaculture development should conserve genetic diversity and minimize negative effects of farmed fish on wild fish populations, while increasing supplies of fish for human consumption.

Resources, such as water, bays or land space are often used by more than one user or have the potential for different uses. To avoid disputes and conflict between different users of resources, countries should have policies and plans to ensure that resources are used and allocated on a fair basis.

Countries should take steps to ensure that the livelihoods of local communities, including access to, and productivity of, fishing grounds, are not negatively affected by aquaculture developments. Procedures for monitoring and assessing the environmental effects of aquaculture should be established. In addition, care should be taken to monitor the types of feed and fertilizer used in farming fish. The use of disease-control drugs and chemicals should be minimal because these can have important negative impacts on the environment. It is also important to ensure the safety and quality of aquaculture products

Where the effects of fish farming may extend beyond a country's waters, countries should consult with neighbouring countries before introducing non-native species of fish for farming. To minimize disease from new species, countries need to establish mutually agreed codes of practice or behaviour for introducing and transferring aquatic plants and animals from one place to another. In planning aquaculture projects, techniques should be developed by countries and the industry for restoring and increasing the supply of endangered species (those species that may die out if corrective action is not taken).



Integration of Fisheries into Coastal Area Management

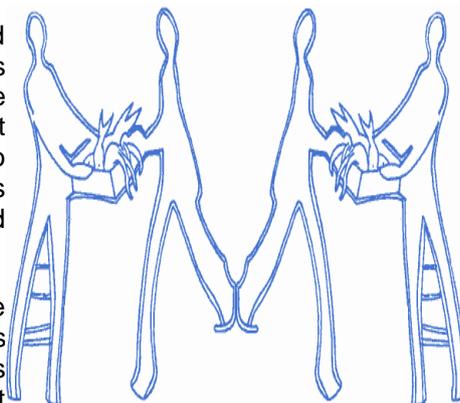
When deciding how coastal resources (for example, water, land, etc) should be used or accessed, the people, including fishers, who live in the area, and their ways of living, should be considered, and their opinions taken into account in the planning process.

Where the coastal zone has multiple uses, fisheries practices should be carried out to avoid conflict among fishers and other users or, if disputes do occur, that they are settled according to established and fair procedures. In addition, countries with neighbouring coastal areas should cooperate with one another to ensure that coastal resources are conserved and well managed.

Post-harvest Practices and Trade Responsibilities

Countries should encourage their people to eat fish and should ensure that fish and fishery products are safe and healthy. Standards for fish quality that can be supervised and enforced by the government should be set to protect consumer health and to prevent commercial fraud (for example, providing incorrect information to consumers about fish that is offered for sale). Furthermore, countries should cooperate to establish common sanitary measures and certification programmes.

Methods of processing, transporting, and storing fish should be environmentally sound (these methods should not have bad effects on the environment). Post-harvest losses and waste after fish is caught should be minimal; by-catch (catches that the fishers do not really want) should be utilized as much as possible; and water and energy, and wood, in particular, used in fish processing should be managed carefully. Where possible, the production of higher-valued or processed products should be encouraged because such products usually bring higher prices for the fishers.



Trade laws governing fish and fish products should be simple, clear, and consistent with international rules. Fishers, environmental organizations and consumer groups should be consulted as countries periodically formulate and review their trade laws and regulations. As a country's laws and regulations are developed or changed, other countries should be notified and given time to introduce changes that may be necessary in their import or export procedures.

It is important that international trade does not involve fish taken from depleted stocks (stocks that are already being fished too much), and that countries cooperate in observing international agreements regulating trade in endangered species. Moreover, trade in fish and fish products should not undermine the conservation and sustainable use of fisheries.

Fisheries Research

Countries should recognize that responsible fisheries policy requires a sound scientific basis. Therefore, countries should make research facilities available and encourage training of young technicians. Technical and international organizations should support countries in their research efforts, devoting special attention to the needs of least developed countries and small island developing countries.

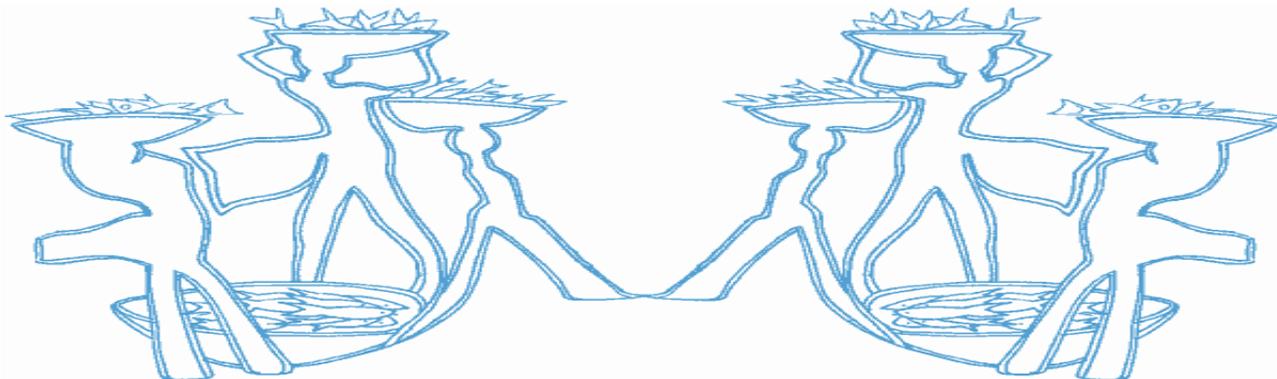
In order to conduct research, countries should monitor the conditions of fish and their habitats and watch for any changes occurring in these conditions. Data should be gathered on the effects of different types of fishing gear on target fish populations and on the general environment. This research is particularly important when a country plans to commercially introduce new gear or fishing techniques. Social and marketing aspects of fisheries.

Countries should join together in international research efforts. Where research is undertaken in another country's waters, it is important that researchers abide by the fishing regulations put in place by the host countries. Fishing and supporting scientific information should be provided to regional fishery organizations and distributed to all interested countries as quickly as possible.

Regional and International Cooperation

It is very clear that countries and regional fishery organizations should cooperate in many matters relating to fisheries. Management measures taken by one country should be compatible with similar measures adopted by other countries particularly when they fish the same fish stocks. Moreover, cooperation through regional institutions should reduce the likelihood of countries becoming involved in fisheries disputes. But when disputes do arise, every effort should be made to settle them as quickly as possible and in a peaceful manner.

Regional fishery organizations should aim to recover the cost of conservation, management and research activities from their members. In addition, representatives from local fishers' organizations should be allowed to participate in the work of regional fishery organizations.



What does all this mean?

As a renewable natural resource, fish can be harvested year after year if countries have wise policies in place and if responsible fishing and utilization practices are followed. Similarly, with aquaculture, fish farming that does not harm the environment should be promoted because this type of culture will make important social and economic contributions to farming communities and the economies of their countries.

If the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries is implemented successfully by all people who are involved in fisheries and aquaculture it can be expected that fish and fisheries products will be available for consumption by present and future generations. In fact, current generations have a moral obligation to ensure that they do not reduce the supplies of fish available for future generations by careless and excessive use today.

The Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries urges countries and their citizens to implement comprehensive and integrated policies in the fisheries sector so that a healthier, more robust sector will result. In the longer-run such responsible behaviour will give good results in terms of the improved status of fish stocks, a more reliable contribution to food security and sustained income-earning opportunities.

If all the world's nations unite in pursuing responsible fishing practices, there will be ample fish supplies for many generations to come. The Fisheries Department of FAO hopes that you have found this booklet informative and that you will contribute to ensuring that the world's fisheries and aquaculture are developed and managed in a responsible way.