

Windhoek Declaration on an Aquatic Biosecurity Framework for Southern Africa

On 13-14 October 2009, 32 participants from 8 countries¹ of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and 2 countries of the East Africa Community (EAC)² representing fisheries and veterinary agencies and universities³ and 11 resource persons and representatives from several regional and international organizations and a veterinary institute⁴ participated in a High Level Scoping Meeting of Regional Fisheries and Veterinary Authorities towards developing an Aquatic Biosecurity Framework for Southern Africa.

The participants affirmed the importance of aquaculture and fisheries as significant opportunities for economic growth, poverty reduction and improved food security in Africa, but reiterated that better management, policies, capacity, investment and a regionally harmonized approach to biosecurity⁵ risk management are needed to support responsible development. The region's considerable aquatic resources, including major river systems such as the Zambezi and Nile, present an ideal opportunity for the African region's aquaculture and fisheries sector to contribute to its own food security, nutritional well being, poverty reduction and economic development with, under appropriate management, minimum impact on the environment and maximum societal benefit.

The participants expressed concern about the alarming spread of the serious fish disease, Epizootic Ulcerative Syndrome (EUS), in the Zambezi River system, since late 2006, and the significant social and economic impacts of the disease, particularly among poor and vulnerable communities that are dependant on these aquatic resources for food and income.

The outbreak of EUS in Southern Africa has highlighted a serious lapse in regional aquatic biosecurity management, which now requires urgent and concerted action for improvement. Improvements are needed in the development of appropriate and effective policy and regulatory frameworks and risk management strategies and their efficient implementation at community, national and regional levels. Intra-regional trade and shared waters mean that a coordinated and cooperative approach to aquatic biosecurity is essential. Harmonization of national policies and regulatory frameworks on aquatic biosecurity is paramount. Impacts on livelihoods of fishers and farmers caused by EUS need to be better understood, and practical coping strategies identified and supported.

The participants expressed serious concern about the risk of EUS moving out of the Zambezi River system to other major river systems in Africa, such as the Nile, and the potential threat to the livelihoods of millions of people dependent of river resources and economic impacts, including risks to domestic

¹ Angola, Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Tanzania should be included but did not participate in the meeting.

² Kenya, Uganda

³ University of Nairobi (Kenya), Makerere University (Uganda) and University of Zambia

⁴ FAO, OIE, Norwegian Veterinary Institute, WorldFish Center

⁵ Biosecurity is strategic and integrated approach that encompasses policy and regulatory framework for analyzing and managing relevant risks to human, animal and plant life and health, and associated risks to the environment.

food supplies and valuable export industries such as the Nile perch. Concerted preventative and awareness raising measures are required by regional countries, with assistance and cooperation from the international community.

The participants recognized and appreciated the work of the FAO since the first appearance of EUS in the Zambezi River, contributing to national capacity building in disease diagnostics, surveillance, risk assessment and primary aquatic health management in Southern African countries. The contributions by OIE on improving veterinary capacities in the regional countries were also recognized. Such cooperation should continue to be strengthened in support of capacity building for implementation of improved aquatic biosecurity measures for the region.

The participants unanimously agreed that biosecurity is of prime importance to fisheries and aquaculture development, particularly in shared watersheds like the Zambezi River basin and others in the region. It safeguards animal health, protects biodiversity, promotes environmental sustainability and enhances food safety. The livelihoods of many people depend on fisheries and aquaculture, including some of the most vulnerable in the region. The Windhoek participants have prepared a framework for action; now political will and resources are necessary for implementation.

The participants agreed that the primary responsibility for actions to address this emerging rests with the governments of the region. However, FAO, in partnership with OIE and its Regional Animal Health Centers in Africa, and other agencies such as the WorldFish Center and the National Veterinary Institute of Norway had been requested to support a regional cooperative programme to assist in implementing the regional aquatic biosecurity programme, and take preventive measures to reduce risks to fisheries, aquaculture and livelihoods from further spread of this fish disease to other river systems in Africa.

The participants further recommended that the outcome of this meeting and the current status of the EUS pandemic in Zambezi River system be communicated to Fisheries Secretariats of SADC and NEPAD. The meeting requested FAO to facilitate presenting the declaration to the upcoming Fisheries Ministerial Meeting of the Southern African Development Cooperation (SADC) to be held in November 2009 in Windhoek, Namibia. The Honorable Minister of Fisheries of Uganda would also present the outcome to the next meeting of the Council of Ministers for Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization to be held on 5th-6th November in Nairobi, Kenya to raise profile and consensus on actions to improve aquatic biosecurity in Africa.

The participants thanked the Government of Namibia for hosting the meeting and declared their commitment to continue to cooperate in development and implementation of aquatic biosecurity framework, including a regional emergency action plan for Southern Africa.