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EUROFISH: A Two Year Report Card

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EUROFISH, the International Organization for the Development of Fisheries in Central and Eastern Europe, is the successor to the FAO executed regional project, EASTFISH and was established in 2001 by the Agreement for the Establishment of the International Organization for the Development of Fisheries in Eastern and Central Europe.¹ A major goal of the EASTFISH project was to become established as a self-financing international organization in order to enable its work to be continued and to provide a long-term service to the development of fisheries in Central and Eastern Europe. The new organization was named EUROFISH and it has formally existed since the signature of Romania at FAO Headquarters in October 2001. The other founding member countries are Albania, Denmark, Latvia, Norway and Turkey. Bulgaria and Croatia joined recently the Organization, and Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania and Italy have signed the agreement and ratification is expected in the foreseeable future.

The countries of Central and Eastern Europe are facing increasing challenges in the new millennium, but are also presented with many opportunities. In the fisheries sector, these opportunities abound, particularly in processing, aquaculture and trade. A marketplace of over 350 million people in Central and Eastern Europe alone will generate demand for new and more diverse fish and fish products for the region and entrepreneurs from both the west and east will meet to form strategic partnerships to respond to this and other opportunities.

Despite the fact that EU enlargement will assist certain countries in this area, the geographical region is becoming so large that there is a need for institutions with a focus on specific subject matters - in this case fish - to facilitate the information and decision processes. Eurofish is such a specialized body, representing the aquaculture, fish processing and trade sectors and also providing an effective and targeted contribution to the EU enlargement process.

Overview of the Agreement

The Eurofish Agreement specifies in detail the objectives and functions of the organization. The objectives include, *inter alia*:

- the provision of information on fish marketing and contribution to trade promotion;
- the development of the fisheries of the region in accordance with current and future market demand;
- the promotion of private-sector investments and partnership arrangements in fisheries and aquaculture;
- the provision of assistance for infrastructure and human capacity development and other projects;
- the upgrading and modernization of the fisheries in the region; and
- the promotion of technical and economic cooperation among its members in the fisheries sector.²

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¹ Adopted at Copenhagen, Denmark, 22 May 2000; entered into force, 12 October 2001. The text of the Agreement is reproduced at <www.fao.org/legal> and at <www.intfish.net/treaties/eurofish.htm>. For general background information on Eastfish and Eurofish, see <www.eurofish.dk>.

² Eurofish Agreement, Article 3.

To this end, the Agreement sets out a wide-range of functions for the organization, including, but not limited to:

- providing members with marketing information on fishery products, including sales opportunities and supply prospects within and outside the Region;
- advising members on technological developments, product specifications, processing methods and quality standards in accordance with market requirements;
- assisting members in developing new products and marketing opportunities; and
- assisting members in the planning and implementation of national fish market information and research activities.³

The main decision-making body in Eurofish is the Governing Council, which is composed of all members. No other bodies are formally established under the Agreement, although the Governing Council is empowered to establish such committees or working groups as may be required for the achievement of the objectives of Eurofish.⁴

Membership of Eurofish is limited to European States and States outside Europe which have been authorized by the Governing Council to accede to the Agreement. Membership is also open to regional economic integration organizations, such as the European Community.⁵

Eurofish in practice

The activities of Eurofish can be broadly divided into three groups:

Knowledge Management and Communication

In line with its first objective, to provide information on fish marketing and contribute to trade promotion, Eurofish focuses on packaging knowledge into various regular print and electronic products, most notably the EUROFISH Magazine and the Eurofish website,⁶ but also the Russian Fish Report, Globefish Market Reports, European Price Report, Fish Commodity Updates and occasional single publications, for instance the “Guide to Hygiene within the Fish Industry” - now in five languages.

Trade Development

Focusing on facilitating trade in fish and fish products, the main activities are the organization of conferences, trade fairs, trade missions, other matchmaking activities, policy fora and on provision of micro and macro trade and market advice and advice on investment climates in Central and Eastern Europe; promotion and support for the presence of Central and Eastern European companies at international food and seafood exhibitions; undertaking commissioned market studies and collaboration in projects aimed at market organization for European Union accession countries.

Training

Focusing on food safety and quality, good aquaculture practices, marketing and value addition. This targets both the government and private sector and involves the identification of technical assistance and training needs and the provision of assistance to national authorities in the preparation of projects.

³ *Ibid.*, Article 4.

⁴ The functions of the Governing Council are set out in full in Article 8 of the Agreement.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Article 6.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, n. 1.

Eurofish also actively seeks funds to deliver training activities in fish marketing, value addition, quality assurance (food safety) and good aquaculture practices.

Regime inter-linkages

Eurofish exists exclusively to help governments and companies from the region to respond to business opportunities and to further the development of fisheries in Central and Eastern Europe in a sustainable and environmentally sound manner. In doing this, it has been able to build on several years cooperation and management under the Eastfish organization. Furthermore, Eurofish does not operate in isolation, as it has and will continue to actively strengthen its formal and informal partnerships with like-minded organizations and companies.⁷ As a membership organization, Eurofish will naturally favour those countries that are full members. Membership of Eurofish also means the country will benefit from close links to FAO Fisheries Department and will be joining the FISH INFO network, a global grouping of organizations with the same mandate as Eurofish, but for other regions of the world. The other individual organizations in the network are Infofish for South East Asia, Infoyu for China, Infosamak for the Middle East, Infopêche for Africa and Infopesca for Latin America. The network is supported by Globefish in the Fisheries Division at FAO Headquarters.

⁷ Cooperation with other organizations is expressly provided for in Article 13 of the Eurofish Agreement. This applies particularly to the FAO, with which Eurofish is required to establish a “working relationship” but also other organizations which might contribute to the work and further the objectives of Eurofish and with which Eurofish may enter into agreements.