

# The ecosystem approach to fisheries: on the way to implementation<sup>1</sup>

Serge M. GARCIA  
FAO Fisheries Resources Division

## Summary

The Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) was adopted in FAO in 2003, following the 2001 Reykjavik Conference. Within the overall policy framework of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF), the EAF technical guidelines, published in 2003, together with other CCRF guiding documents on fisheries management, sustainability indicators, precautionary approach, ecolabelling, etc., provide a very substantial amount of support to EAF implementation.

FAO has contributed at to the implementation effort during the last 5 years (and indeed since the adoption of the CCRF in 1995) at global, regional and national levels, promoting international collaboration, elaborating and promoting international plans of action, producing guidelines, undertaking detailed scientific studies (e.g., on sea birds, turtles, criteria for CITES listings, deep sea governance, etc.), executing field projects at global regional and national levels, developing information networks and advocating EAF in regional fishery bodies. In the process as well as in the process of implementation of related frameworks (e.g., on sustainable livelihoods, ecologically sustainable development, precautionary approach) a number of lessons were learned.

The main implementation challenges relate to, *inter alia*, preparedness, system boundaries, implementation capacity, policy alignment, EAF bureaucratic mainstreaming, updating of legislations and regulations, integration of sectors, administrations and scientific disciplines, organizing effective participation, mobilizing sufficient scientific support, and, last but not least, mobilizing real political commitment.

Some of the key implementation issues relate to the development of a culture of risk analysis and management, the development of relevant indicators within adequate policy frameworks, and the adaptation of conventional fishery science to sustainability science in order to deal properly with uncertainty, the development of an integrated assessment paradigm, process and tool-box.

It is concluded that much more effort is needed, particularly at regional and national levels, with strong support to developing countries and poor communities, if EAF is to be something else than a new form of rhetoric posturing in front of the perennial problem of unsustainable natural renewable resources use.

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<sup>1</sup> Summary of a presentation to the Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea (ICP), New York, 12-16 June 2006. A full version of the paper will be presented at 30th Virginia Law of the Sea Conference on Law, Science & Ocean Management, organized by the Center for Oceans Law and Policy, University of Virginia, Dublin, Ireland, 12th - 14th July 2006.