



Convention of Biological Diversity offers new perspectives for aquatic research

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At the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, June 1992, the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) was signed by 157 States, a record number for a new Convention of this type. The CBD entered into force on December 29, 1993 and 168 States are now Parties to the Convention, including 45 of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. Tinker (1995) has hailed the CBD as one of a «new breed» of treaties that will balance the needs of developing countries and industrialized countries with respect to natural resources management. It provides an enabling mechanism for its Parties to serve the needs of their peoples, of this and future generations.

The CBD defines biodiversity as: «the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems» (CBD 1994).

This definition recognizes that aquatic biodiversity, the biological basis of fisheries and aquaculture, is firmly on the CBD's agenda. Aquatic biodiversity includes not only the target plants and animals that are harvested or farmed but also the many microbial, plant and animal species that feed and shelter them and that maintain their environment. Literally millions of species are involved, many yet to be described. Some aquatic ecosystems, such as coral reefs, probably compare with tropical rainforests in their species diversity. The future of aquaculture and of fisheries management

depends upon the management of such ecosystems and their biota and not the management of target species alone.

The CBD is at present focussing a major part of its efforts on aquatic species and ecosystems. In 1995, its Second Conference of the Parties (COP) resolved to address the conservation and use of marine and coastal biodiversity (Joergensen 1996). In 1996, the third COP produced the «Jakarta Mandate on Marine and Coastal Biodiversity» and a subsequent meeting of marine experts in March 1997 began to develop a work programme in five thematic areas: integrated marine and coastal management; marine and coastal protected areas; sustainable use of coastal living resources; mariculture; and alien species. Biodiversity in inland waters will be a main agenda item for the meeting of the CBD's Subsidiary Body for Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) to be held in Montreal in September 1997 and for the fourth COP to be held in Bratislava in May 1998.

Hence, the time is opportune for more involvement of fisheries scientists, educators, and managers in activities facilitated by the CBD. How can this be achieved and how can this high profile for aquatic species and ecosystems in the CBD's deliberations be sustained? An important means to this end is that fisheries scientists, educators and managers make greater efforts to become fully aware of these opportunities and work proactively with their national delegations to the CBD and its relevant bodies, especially the SBSTTA to provide technical inputs and the Clearing-House Mechanism (CHM) for sharing the information needed for effective cooperation.

The CBD gives extensive rights to the Parties over the biological resources within their boundaries. It also sets out obligations for the Parties to document their biodiversity and to evolve strategies for its conservation and sustainable, equitable use. Fisheries experts, at national, regional and international levels, could contribute much more to these tasks, helping the national authorities concerned and raising the profile of aquatic biodiversity on their agendas. In making such efforts, it is

important to accept not only the uniqueness and value of the CBD as an enabling mechanism but also that it takes time and patience for ideas to be translated in action in this arena of diverse interests.

The key to widening awareness about the CBD and to initiating and accelerating activities on aquatic biodiversity and fisheries is the sharing of knowledge and information. This will be a major function of the CHM. An ongoing EU-ACP project implemented by ICLARM and described by J.M. Vakily *et al.* (see this *Bulletin* Vol.10(1)) also emphasizes acquisition and dissemination of information on biodiversity as the key to strengthening fisheries management in the ACP countries. ICLARM is currently developing a classified list of literature and websites on aquatic biodiversity and fisheries to help users to access some of the large volume of information available. This list includes the most important current sources of information about the CBD as well as publications and periodicals on aquatic biodiversity in general, marine biodiversity, freshwater biodiversity, and useful comparisons from the field of agrobiodiversity. Readers needing a copy of this list (for which suggestions of additions are warmly welcomed) should contact the author of this article.

References and Sources of Additional Information

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+ see bibliography in French ■