

# FAO Does NOT Manage Fisheries

Prepared by the Fish Working Group  
of the Species Survival Network

Discussions at CoP13 have suggested that the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) may be the appropriate body to manage international trade in marine species. This is not correct. By its terms, CITES is the relevant international treaty for dealing with trade in all species, including marine species, that are or may be affected by international trade. The Convention states that the CITES appendices “shall include all species that are or may be affected by international trade.”

Furthermore, FAO is not a fishery management body. FAO’s Committee on Fisheries collects and disseminates fisheries data and provides technical support and guidance. According to FAO itself, “The FAO Committee on Fisheries supplements rather than supplants other organizations working in the field of fisheries and aquaculture.” FAO does oversee a small number of regional fishery bodies, but most of these have no authority to manage or regulate fisheries.

## THE MANDATE AND FUNCTIONS OF FAO’S COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES:

FAO’s *Committee on Fisheries (COFI)* website, [www.fao.org/fi/body/cofi/cofi.asp](http://www.fao.org/fi/body/cofi/cofi.asp), states:

*The two main functions of COFI are: to review the programmes of work of FAO in the field of fisheries and aquaculture and their implementation; to conduct periodic general reviews of fishery and aquaculture problems of an international character and appraise such problems and their possible solutions with a view to concerted action by nations, by FAO, inter-governmental bodies and the civil society.*

Neither of these functions involves regulation or management. Instead, COFI’s main task is to gather and analyze fisheries’ statistics. Its Sub-Committee on Fish Trade discusses fish trade and marketing issues, but it does not regulate international trade. **Only CITES has the mandate to do this.**

## REGIONAL FISHERY BODIES WITH A RELATIONSHIP TO FAO

The FAO oversees a small number of regional fishery bodies, but only two of the bodies have actual management or regulatory authority:

**The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)** manages tuna and tuna-like species in the Indian Ocean and adjacent seas.

**The Regional Commission for Fisheries** in the Middle East promotes the development, conservation, rational management and best utilization of living marine resources, as well as the sustainable development of aquaculture in the area.

**The remaining bodies have no regulatory powers.**

**The Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission** promotes the full and proper utilization of the living aquatic resources in its area by the development of fishing and culture operations and related processing and marketing activities. **The Commission has no regulatory powers.**

**The Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic** facilitates the coordination of research, encourages education and training, and assists its members in an advisory management capacity in establishing rational policies to promote the rational management of resources. **The Committee's recommendations are not binding on its members.**

**La COPESCAL**, covering Latin America, Jamaica and Suriname, promotes scientific investigations for the rational use of fishery resources. In addition, it gives advice to regional governments to establish the scientific basis for fishery regulations and the development of aquaculture, recreational fishing, commercial harvest, trade and use of fish. It also encourages capacity building and education. **La COPESCAL has no regulatory powers.**

**The General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean** promotes the development, conservation and management of living marine resources, formulates and recommends conservation measures, and encourages training cooperative projects. **Member states are not obligated to give effect to Commission recommendations.**

## **CONCLUSION**

The prospects for useful collaboration between CITES and FAO are substantial. FAO's expertise in the collection and dissemination of fisheries information and statistics could be of great benefit to the CITES Parties. However, the text of the Convention makes it clear that **CITES, and CITES alone, has the primary mandate for listing and regulating marine species that are or may be affected by international trade.**