

Improving Better Understanding and Knowledge of Fisheries for Planning and Management in Southeast Asia: Experience and Challenges¹

**By
Pouchamarn Wongsanga²**

Abstract

Due to the multi-functionality and importance of fisheries in Southeast Asia, the need for better understanding and knowledge of this sector for planning and management has been well accepted and regarded as a priority issue that require greater attention. This paper reviews the recent regional policies related to improvement of data and information for fisheries, which highlight its unique tropical multi-species and multi-gear nature.

In line with the principles of sustainable development and responsible fisheries, the policies underline the importance of utilizing best scientific evidence for fisheries development and management, which can be obtained through routine data (i.e. statistics, licensing data and records) and non-routine data (i.e. research/surveys). The paper also draws experience and lessons learned in Southeast Asia in improving data and information for fisheries. These are, for example, in-country coordination and regional cooperation to identify sources of data and information; mechanisms for sharing and maximizing utilization of existing available data and information as well as indicators for planning and management; and capacity building both in terms of institutional and human aspects for data collection, processing, analysis and presentation to ensure their quality and timeliness in user-friendly fashion. Standardization/harmonization of statistical standards and classification, and regional initiatives and partnerships to facilitate sharing of expertise, data and information such as in the form of regional guidelines and the ASEAN Network for Fishery Statistics have also contributed to better collection and utilization of data and information for fisheries over the recent years.

Nevertheless, there are still rooms for improvement in the manner data and information is collected and utilized. These imply the near future challenges that need to be addressed and better tackled. High-level policy recognition on the importance of and required support for better data and information for planning and management lies at the forefront. The sectoral approach proves to provide little progress towards sustainable resource utilization and thus data and information is needed for integrated planning and development of multiple water resource use. Collaboration and networking among agencies concerned in aquatic resource utilization and management need to be intensified. The same is applied for involvement and cooperation with stakeholders under co-management approach, and usage of information technology, which in the recent years has provided multiple benefits to data and information collection, integration and sharing as well as institutional and human capacity building.

¹ A paper presented at the East Asian Seas Congress, 12-16 December 2006, Haikou City, Hainan Province, PR China.

² Information Program Coordinator, the Secretariat, Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC)