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For Immediate Release

Asia bracing for climate change impact on fisheries

Kathmandu, 27 May 2011- “Climate change may cause unprecedented disruptions to aquatic and coastal systems upon which many millions of Asian people depend. It is vital that governments in the Asia-Pacific region understand the risks, identify vulnerable systems and develop adaptive strategies”, FAO’s Simon Funge-Smith said today at the end of a meeting convened by the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission (APFIC) with 48 representatives from government fisheries and climate change agencies, and international and non-governmental organizations.

Increased policy attention and financial resources for climate change adaptation and mitigation in the fisheries/aquaculture sector are urgently needed; and the marine fishery and aquaculture sectors need to be closely integrated into national climate change policies.

“It is vital that the interactions between capture fisheries and aquaculture with other sectors such as agriculture and disaster management are integrated into the policy planning processes,” Funge-Smith, senior fishery officer at the FAO regional office in Bangkok, added.

Fisheries and aquaculture in Asia and the Pacific provide considerable trade, employment and food security and some of the densest rural populations of the world are found on coastlines and floodplains of the region.

Impacts from climate change such as increasing ocean acidification, shifting fish distributions and more frequent cyclones may increase the negative impacts on capture fisheries which are already at their limits through over exploitation, coastal degradation and pollution.

Productivity and viability in aquaculture operations are also expected to be negatively impacted by factors including higher sea water levels, flooding, increased competition for water resources and disease occurrence patterns.

The way forward

The meeting stressed the need for adaptation and mitigation efforts from policy to grass roots level.

Fisher and farmer community involvement will help lessen vulnerability as well as strengthen fisheries and aquaculture management in order to improve resilience to climate change.

The workshop heard that the understanding of the effects of climate change on fisheries and aquaculture remains limited, pointing to the need to increase monitoring and develop simple tools and approaches that would help prioritize efforts.

Adaptation to climate change by fisheries and aquaculture would be strongly promoted by concrete actions to improve current management approaches. Action here would reduce stress on ecosystems and increase the resilience of operations and the livelihoods of millions of people depending upon them.

Fisheries and aquaculture industries can also contribute to climate change mitigation by actions including more efficient fuel use or fishing methods, increased energy efficiency in aquaculture operations and pumping as well as the use of aquaculture species with a lower carbon footprint.

The workshop *Implications of climate change on fisheries and aquaculture: challenges for adaptation and mitigation in the Asia-Pacific Region* took place from 24 to 26 May in Kathmandu, and was organized by the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission (APFIC) in collaboration with the Directorate of Fisheries Development of the government of Nepal.

Support was provided by the Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme for South and Southeast Asia (RFLP) and the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Programme (BOBLME).

Countries in attendance were: Bangladesh, Cambodia, China PR, India, Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR , Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Timor Leste, Sri Lanka, Thailand, USA, Viet Nam.

Regional Organizations participating were: The South East Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC), The Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia (NACA), The WorldFish Center, Mekong River Commission (MRC), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

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Asia and the Pacific is the most important region of fish production in the world through its capture fisheries and aquaculture. Capture fisheries production in Asia and the Pacific region reached 48.3 million tonnes in 2008, which contributed to 51 percent of global capture production. In 2008, Asia and the Pacific region produced 46.6 million tonnes of aquaculture products (total aquaculture production excluding aquatic plants), representing 89 percent of global aquaculture production. Overall, Asia and the Pacific region currently contribute some 65 percent of the world fisheries production (aquatic plants excluded).

The Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission (APFIC) has 20 member countries. For more information see www.apfic.org