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# The FAO guidelines for the development and use of indicators for sustainable development of marine capture fisheries and an Australian example of their application

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## Abstract

Guidelines for developing and implementing sustainability indicators for marine capture fisheries were drafted during a recent expert consultation jointly organised by Australia and FAO in Sydney (Australia). This paper provides an overview of the guidelines and illustrates their application with an Australian example. As a background to the guidelines, the concept of sustainable development (SD) for marine capture fisheries was discussed and an agreed set of definitions and usage of common terms developed. The guidelines then outline the five sequential steps that need to be addressed in developing a meaningful set of indicators in the context of a Sustainable Development Reference System (SDRS). The five steps are:

1. specifying the scope of the SDRS;
2. developing a framework to agree on components within the system;
3. specifying criteria, objectives, potential indicators and reference values;
4. choosing the set of indicators and reference values;
5. specifying the method of aggregation and visualisation.

These steps are further elaborated in terms of how to scope the SDRS, define the dimensions and hierarchical levels to be included in the system, set multiple objectives and link these to indicators and reference values (e.g. targets, thresholds and/or standards). The guidelines also provide some examples of possible indicators, criteria for selecting some indicators over others and present ways of aggregating and visualising the indicators so that progress towards

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## **1. Introduction**

This paper presents an overview of the guidelines developed during a recent Technical Consultation on Sustainability Indicators in Marine Capture Fisheries organised by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry-Australia (AFFA) and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). It also reports on progress being made by Australia in implementing the guidelines. The authors acknowledge the valuable input and contribution of all the participants of the Consultation (listed under acknowledgments). The intent of this paper is to bring the achievements of the Technical Consultation to a broader audience so that the guidelines can be considered and hopefully implemented by national and international agencies, worldwide.

The guidelines were produced to support the implementation of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries by providing decision- and policy-makers in marine capture fisheries a handy tool to operationalise sustainable development. The guidelines should also assist fishing companies and associations and non-government organisations with an interest in fisheries and fisheries resources develop better tools to implement certification and accreditation of fisheries products.

The guidelines recognise that the capacity of different nations to develop and implement indicators will differ and they attempt to provide a flexible framework so that all nations can develop indicators that are consistent with international reporting requirements. They also should facilitate the sharing of information at the relevant national, regional and global levels. The guidelines stress that indicator-based systems are not an alternative to the more comprehensive sets of information and the more detailed modelling that are conventionally used to manage fisheries. However, trends in indicators may stimulate changes in policy as well as the general approach to fisheries management.

## **2. Sustainable development and fisheries**

The concept of sustainable development broadens earlier models of economic growth and development which were too narrow to make balanced judgements on the costs and benefits of various policy options, especially in respect to the longer-term implications of decisions. Sustainable development is simply “development which meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” [1]. It should be stressed that the focus of the concept is on development, which is concerned with meeting human needs and aspirations (human-well-being). These include providing adequate food and shelter, reduced poverty, improved health and increased education worldwide.

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