

Title: **The Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries**

Author(s): Anthony Charles

Abstract: Conventional management of fisheries and other natural resources developed to deal with single-species extraction-oriented industries. Ecosystem-based management broadens beyond that conventional management through a "systems" perspective that emphasizes ecosystems and the human activities taking place within them. In this sense, it returns to longstanding ways of viewing human-nature interactions, as in many aboriginal societies. Indeed, the FAO perspective on ecosystem-based management, as in the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries, integrates human aspirations, societal objectives, and institutional arrangements, as well as ecosystems and habitats, into management discussions. The Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries undoubtedly has its roots in the realization that the structure and health of aquatic ecosystems was too often neglected as a factor and an objective in conventional fisheries management. From the perspective of optimizing the sustainable production from the fishery, this is an important extension in thinking about management. However, the implications of the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (and its broadening of attention beyond single-species approaches) are much greater, because this serves to (1) facilitate the recognition of people and communities as inherently connected to (or even components of) the aquatic ecosystems, and (2) give credibility to a "fishery system" approach that fully links humans and natural ecosystems into "social-ecological systems". As the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries becomes established and even institutionalized in fisheries management, its human dimensions are being more fully addressed. Indeed, FAO is completing a supplement to its Technical Guidelines on the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (2003) focusing on the human dimensions, to deepen our understanding of the role that social, political, economic and institutional considerations should play in the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries. In these guidelines, attention is paid to (a) the "entry points" that are crucial in developing a context-specific approach, (b) aspects of context, policy definition, management plan development, monitoring and evaluation, and adaptive processes, (c) supportive information systems (from scientific data to traditional knowledge), and (d) sustaining the approach financially and politically. The great strength of the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries, as a vehicle for dealing with human concerns such as poverty alleviation, is the combination of two attributes. First, it is sufficiently broad to be able to comfortably incorporate all the other approaches - the sustainable livelihoods approach, the wellbeing and wealth-based (rent maximization) approaches, the human-rights and human security framework, and resilience-based management. Second, while the same breadth might be claimed by other approaches, the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries has another key attribute - built-in credibility and acceptance. As the proponents of this IIFET session note, this approach has achieved legitimacy in international fisheries policy, with the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 producing an international commitment to implement the ecosystem based approach to fisheries management by 2015. Therefore, the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries provides a strong mechanism not only to move toward ecosystem health, but to deal with poverty issues and other human-oriented concerns as well.