

Questionnaire regarding the Aarhus Convention's Almaty Guidelines

Answers by NAFO

17 October 2006

1. Please provide any comments on the Guidelines, in view of your forum's own processes, activities and particular characteristics.

NAFO subscribes to the principle of rights to access to information, public participation in decision-making in the interest of transparency. There are rules of procedures of NAFO to ensure effective participation of the public through the acceptance of observers in plenary meetings of the NAFO bodies.

2. Does your forum have any formalized rules or procedures concerning access to information, public participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters?

Yes. There are formalized rules of procedures in accepting observers in the plenary sessions of the subsidiary bodies of NAFO --- the General Council, Fisheries Commission and Scientific Council. Observers can be intergovernmental organizations, non-Contracting Parties, and NGO's that support the general objectives of NAFO.

Observers are eligible to participate in all plenary sessions except meetings held in executive session or meetings of Heads of Delegations. They are not eligible to vote. They may make oral statements during the meeting, distribute documents at the meeting, and engage in other activities as appropriate.

All Observers admitted to a meeting shall be sent or otherwise receive the same documentation generally available to Contracting Parties and their delegations, except those documents deemed confidential by a Contracting Party or the Executive Secretary.

Also, NAFO has a media policy in place that allows journalists to attend the opening and closing sessions of meetings. NAFO publishes press releases right after its Annual Meeting.

3. Does your forum have any non-formalized practices concerning access to information, public participation in the decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters? If yes, please provide an overview.

Yes. Most documents, e.g. meeting proceedings, fish catch statistics, adopted decisions, scientific advice, are available to the public through the public pages of the NAFO website. Working Papers circulated during the meetings and vessel monitoring system data are considered confidential. General inquiries for information are usually accommodated.

4. Are there any current or future work plans of your forum that may affect the extent of or modalities for access of information, public participation in the decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters? In yes, please provide an overview.

Yes. Following the adoption of the St. John's Declaration, NAFO commenced its Reform process by revising the text of the Convention and strengthening Monitoring, Surveillance and Control measures. This has generated a lot of press attention and interests among the NGOs with similar conservation objectives. With the heightened public awareness, it is expected that NAFO will receive more requests for information and invitations for observers.

5. In particular, what kind of challenges, if any, has your forum encountered with regard to access to information, public participation in the decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters (for example, low involvement of civil society, or practical difficulties in managing public participation)? If appropriate, please provide a description underlining those experiences you think could be most useful to consider when reviewing the relevance and practicality of the Almaty Guidelines.

NAFO has to strike the balance in accommodating the conflicting interests of the different stakeholders in the fisheries sector. It is a challenge for the NAFO Secretariat to serve both the interest of the Contracting Parties, NGOs and general public in the interest of conservation of fishery resources.