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WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION (WECAFC)
ELEVENTH (VIRTUAL) SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY GROUP (SAG)
25-27 April 2022
Main decisions and recommendations of the thirty-fourth session of COFI and seventeenth session of WECAFC

A. SUMMARY

This document contains highlights of the topics discussed at the 34th Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) and the 17th Session of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC). The full reports of both sessions are made available respectively as WECAFC/SAG/XI/2022/inf.4 and WECAFC/SAG/XI/2022/inf.5.

B. MAIN DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**THIRTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES. ROME, 1–5 FEBRUARY 2021****MATTERS OF GENERAL INTEREST**

The Committee:

1. **endorsed** the 2021 COFI Declaration for Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture¹ to renew its commitment to the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, recognize the transformations in the sector since the endorsement of the Code, and refocus priorities to secure the long-term sustainability and resilience of the sector.

¹ <https://www.fao.org/3/cb3767en/cb3767en.pdf>

2. **requested** FAO to continue supporting Members in the development and implementation of national plans of action to combat Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing.
3. **emphasized** the importance of accurate data to support decision-making, and the relevant function of FAO in collecting, analysing and disseminating statistics, and **requested** that FAO continue to assist Members in strengthening statistical capacity and delivery of data, especially in data-poor situations, as well as in integrating innovative technologies.
4. **requested** increased work in relation to support for small-scale and artisanal fisheries and to intensify support to Members.
5. **expressed** its commitment to the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA) in 2022 and recommended promoting the importance of small-scale and artisanal fisheries and aquaculture in relevant events.
6. **called upon** FAO to proceed with developing draft voluntary guidelines for the regulation, monitoring and control of transshipment, and to convene an expert consultation to review the draft.
7. **emphasized** the importance of safety at sea and working conditions in the fisheries sector and **welcomed** the close cooperation between FAO and the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO), including through the Joint Working Group on IUU fishing and related matters, and **requested** FAO to further strengthen international cooperation on occupational health and safety issues in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors and to promote decent work for fishers and fish workers.
8. **requested** that FAO continue to work with Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and related fora, to help ensure that decisions made in these fora and their implementation are based on the best scientific information available and relevant technical information
9. **agreed** to continue a transparent and inclusive consultation process on the proposal of the establishment of a new sub-committee on fisheries management, under the leadership of the Chairperson of COFI, and looked forward to a proposal being submitted at COFI 35.

GLOBAL AND REGIONAL PROCESSES OF PARTICULAR INTEREST TO WECAFC

The Committee:

1. **requested** FAO to continue providing technical support in the framework of negotiations on fisheries subsidies carried out in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and **highlighted** the importance of reaching an outcome in the negotiations to prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, and eliminate subsidies that contribute to IUU fishing, and the need to refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognizing that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the WTO fisheries subsidies negotiations.
2. **welcomed** the increase in the number of Parties to the Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing (PSMA), but stressed that further efforts are needed to address the challenges faced in combatting IUU fishing.
3. **commended** the regular participation of FAO in the process of deliberation on an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the

conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) and **noted** that the outcome of the negotiations of this instrument may have implications for the implementation of fisheries instruments and the role of fisheries institutions; **requested** FAO, within its mandate, to continue providing technical advice and relevant information, including on the objectives and implementation of existing fisheries instruments, noting that this process and its result should not undermine existing relevant legal instruments and frameworks, as well as relevant global, regional and sectoral bodies, as indicated in the United Nations General Assembly Resolution (A/RES/72/249 paragraph 7²).

4. **called** on Members to ensure the presence of fisheries and aquaculture experts within their delegations at relevant international fora, both directly and indirectly related to fisheries and aquaculture.
5. **underscored** the central role of Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (**RFMOs**) and Regional Fisheries Advisory Bodies (**RFABs**), within their sphere of competence, in the implementation of international fisheries instruments, such as those aimed at combatting IUU fishing and **highlighted** that RFMOs and RFABs play a key role in supporting and strengthening fisheries science, fisheries management and monitoring, control and surveillance, at both national and regional level.
6. **noted** the important role that RFABs, RFMOs and other regional initiatives play in mainstreaming biodiversity in the conservation and sustainable use of aquatic resources, and **requested** FAO to strengthen its support to them in this arena.
7. **called upon** FAO to further increase its support to marine and inland RFMOs and RFABs, including those bodies with a mandate on aquaculture, particularly in the strategic reorientation of the **Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission**, the Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic, the Regional Commission for Fisheries, and provide technical assistance to the establishment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden Aquaculture and Fisheries Organization.
8. **noted** with concern that the COVID-19 pandemic had affected many global and regional processes related to fisheries and aquaculture, including RFMOs and RFABs, and that countries were facing difficulties in participating in certain RFMOs' meetings that have been organized virtually.
9. **noted** the developments in Latin America and the Caribbean of sport fisheries to generate new opportunities for small-scale and artisanal fisheries, and highlighted the importance for FAO to continue providing follow-up and support to work on this topic.

SEVENTEENTH SESSION OF THE WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION, MIAMI, USA, 15–18 JULY 2019

I. REVIEW OF THE STATE OF FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE IN THE WECAFC REGION

1. The Commission **requested** future review should include supplementary information such as description of WECAFC fishery categories and the status of main fishery resources, social and

² <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N17/468/77/PDF/N1746877.pdf?OpenElement>

economic aspects of WECAFC fisheries as well as details on fishing operations. Future review should also exclude large pelagic fisheries that fall within the mandate of ICCAT (or at least to present it separately), and include information on the fisheries in high seas.

2. Topics such as climate change and sargassum influxes, in particular how it relates to the management of fisheries exploiting species such as dolphinfish or shrimp should be included in the future reviews and estimates of IUU fishing be included to the extent possible.
3. Moreover, future reviews should attempt to reference relevant policies and instruments that exist in the region
4. The Commission **requested** the recreational fisheries sector be given more consideration because of its social and economic relevance and that an analysis on aquaculture development to better understand the reasons for its proceeding slowly in the region.

II. IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE, VULNERABILITIES AND ADAPTATION IN THE WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE

1. The Commission **stressed** the importance of analyzing, understanding and addressing climate change impacts in a comprehensive and inclusive manner consistent with an ecosystem approach to fisheries, taking into account poverty reduction and small-scale fisheries.
2. While underlining that the inclusion of fisher folk and other stakeholders in decision-making process and adaptation planning is essential for climate change adaptation success, the Commission **recognized** the need to strengthen policies, infrastructure building and maintenance, including basic infrastructure for low-income fishing communities, in order to improve adaptation and resilience to climate change. The Commission also noted that adaptation strategies are contextual-based.
3. The Commission **recognized** the need to explore potential adaptation measures such as sea ranching of vulnerable species (e.g., Caribbean spiny lobster,) and limiting production and marketing periods in support of stock preservation.
4. The Commission **noted** that some opportunities can be drawn from climate change impacts. In several areas the mangrove growth was observed to be quicker, hence contributing to the restoration of coastal habitats. In addition, the influx of sargassum has contributed to the appearance of certain species (and life-history stages) into coastal waters with consequent increases in catchability of some species, with varying benefits to fisherfolk depending on the fishery targeted (fishers targeting dolphinfish have experienced increased benefits).
5. The Commission was informed of observations on changes in species composition and catchability in their waters and highlighted the need to include observed and projected impacts of climate change in fisheries management arrangements.
6. Climate-related challenges to the fisheries sector need to be addressed at the national and regional levels and WECAFC is essential in this respect. Reference was also made to the need to consider the contribution of the fisheries sector in the mitigation of the climate change, as appropriate.

7. The inclusion of gender issues in climate-related studies and policies was considered critical. However, there is a need for clarifying the complexities of gender-related issues that were qualified as going beyond male vs female considerations.
8. The Commission **noted** that there are lessons learned that can be drawn from post disaster rehabilitation to refine existing policies and programmes and scale-up to other countries and fisheries. Fast response systems to speed up the recovery after extreme events and disasters was highlighted as a critical need in the region. It was stressed that institutions responsible for risk management need to be involved when addressing climate risks in the fisheries and aquaculture sector.
9. The Commission **stressed** the need for capacity building on climate finance to facilitate access to funds such as the Global Environment Funds or Green Climate Funds, building on training workshops carried out in the Region.
10. The Commission **noted** the importance of including the fisheries sector in Nationally Determined Contributions as a fostering element to access funds and further stressed the need for capacity building and guidance on this matter.

III. INTERSESSIONAL ACTIVITIES OF WORKING GROUPS AND OTHER MATTERS REFERRED TO THE ATTENTION OF THE COMMISSION

1. The Commission **agreed** to expand the mandate of the existing Joint Working Group on Flying Fish in the Eastern Caribbean to incorporate flying fish, dolphinfish and other pelagic species not managed by ICCAT.
2. The Commission **noted** the need to review the Terms of Reference of the SAG and to identify initiatives for improving its operations. As well, the Commission **noted** the need to review the amended Terms of Reference of selected Working Groups.
3. The Commission **expressed** deep concern about the FAO's declining support to its Regional Fisheries bodies. To reverse this trend it **called on** each and every Member to advocate at the national level and through Members' respective diplomatic representations in Rome (FAO Headquarters) for more support from the FAO for the WECAFC Secretariat and the work of the Commission.

IV. REPORT OF THE EIGHTH, NINTH AND TENTH SESSIONS OF THE SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY GROUP (SAG) OF SAG

1. The Commission **expressed concern** that, as the output of the Commission's subsidiary bodies has been steadily increasing and encompassing issues beyond core stock management, SAG was being called upon to review and advise upon management, technical, and policy issues beyond its purview, such as IUU fishing-related/MCS and measures that relate to technical or compliance matters. The Commission **recommended** a review of the terms of reference of SAG to ensure that its composition and duties meshed with the Commission's current work, and stressed, in the meantime, the importance of having experts on relevant issues participate in SAG meetings.

2. The Commission **requested** the Secretariat to ensure that all adopted recommendations and resolutions be made available in a dedicated space on the WECAFC website to facilitate tracking, as well as Members' efforts to implement them and identify follow up actions.
3. The Commission **acknowledged** the importance of sharing scientific information with fishing communities and other stakeholders once analyzed by scientists in order to raise their awareness and improve their involvement in fisheries management processes and practices through local meetings, fora and publications in the relevant language. It therefore **encouraged** Members to explore the possibility to organize periodic fora to disseminate scientific research findings to fisher folk and other stakeholders in a way that is meaningful and easily understood.
4. The Commission made a **strong appeal** to countries to engage and advocate for fisheries and aquaculture to become one of the regional priorities, at the next FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean

V. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FIRST PREPARATORY MEETING FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF WECAFC INTO RFMO

1. The Commission **endorsed** the Roadmap for Progressing towards the Development of a Model for a Regional Fisheries Management Entity or Arrangement in the WECAFC Area, which includes the terms of reference for the intersessional work.

VI. CARIBBEAN SPINY LOBSTER (PANULIRUS ARGUS) FISHERY REGIONAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

1. The Commission **acknowledged** the need for traceability measures to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing as well as coherent data collection plan for catches of spiny lobster.
2. The Commission **expressed full support** for the Fishery Management Plan and recommended sharing of information and common management measures for this plan.

VII. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CONSERVATION, MANAGEMENT AND TRADE OF QUEEN CONCH UNDER CITES

1. The Commission **recommended** the review of the conversion factors of the conch meat and all other subsequent products. It was agreed that the nominal weight, which includes the shell of the mollusk, should not be considered and that the whole animal weight extracted from the shell should be used for calculation.

VIII. OUTCOME OF THE FOURTH MEETING OF THE SCIENTIFIC SUB-GROUP OF THE CFMC/OSPESCA/ WECAFC/CRFM/CITES QUEEN CONCH WORKING GROUP

1. Data Collection/Transparency – The Commission **recommended** that when countries conduct studies, the data be stored in hard copy and digital copy to have a good record of the work and guide any standardizations

2. Diver safety – The Commission **recommended** a regional study be conducted in select countries with regard to the status of diving technic in WECAFC region; this would capture the efforts that have been made and actions that have been taken on occupational safety in the region.
3. "Queen Conch Stock Assessment Manual – The Commission **recommended** that CFMC support an update and expansion of the methods presented in the queen conch stock assessment manual published by CFMC in 2008, particularly looking at sampling designs that include representation of their entire population and establishment of sustainability criteria when defining production and export quotas (e.g., adult density, 8 percent or less of exploitable standing biomass, etc.), provide a digital version of the manual, and provide training on use of the manual in English, Spanish, and French to be posted online in order to reduce the cost of having broad participation of key fisheries officers across the Caribbean.
4. A proposal to determine the genomic connectivity across the Caribbean using the SNPs technique will be developed, capitalizing on the significant support already received from University of Rhode Island. Results from this work are expected to provide information useful to counteract illegal fishing, and so a pilot from countries exporting QC and sharing common grounds (Colombia, Jamaica, Honduras, Belize and Nicaragua) was recommended. Information will be also useful for understanding small-scale population structure needed for management.
5. "Two sub-groups will continue addressing recommendations needed for simplifying the process of generating Non-Detriment Findings(NDF), integrating the 2012 QC Working Group recommendations.
6. The Commission **recommended** a special consideration of climate change within the Queen Conch management plan consistent with an ecosystem approach to fisheries.
7. The Commission **noted** a request for a study on the marine pollution by microplastics and the impacts on the marine species of the consumption of plastics and on human health, emphasizing the importance of continuing the awareness raising on these effects.
8. The Commission **recognized** the need for more reliable results from the density surveys conducted in spawning areas, thus the benefits from training in the conduct of density surveys, but **expressed concern** with safety in conducting and capacity to carry out surveys in deep waters.

IX. PROGRESS AND FUTURE WORK IN THE CARIBBEAN MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR SPAWNING AGREGATION

1. The Commission **recognized** the need for monitoring and management of Lane snapper (*Lutjanus synagris*), Yellowtail snapper (*Ocyurus chrysurus*), as well as grunts (*Haemulidae*) which are caught together with Nassau grouper and mutton snapper (i.e. the species are caught together in a multi-species fishery).

2. The Representative of the SPAW Protocol, Ms Sandrine Pivard, highlighted the opportunity for collaboration between the SPAW and the WECAFC SAWG.

X. THE REGIONAL PLAN OF ACTION TO PREVENT, DETER AND ELIMINATE ILLEGAL, UNREPORTED AND UNREGULATED (IUU) FISHING IN WECAFC MEMBER COUNTRIES (2019–2029)

1. The Commission referred to the challenges posed by IUU fishing in undermining the sustainability of marine fishery resources and considering the fact that regional collaboration is essential, it **underscored** the value of this RPOA-IUU in fostering greater cooperation and information sharing among Members.
2. The Commission **expressed gratitude** to FAO and CRFM for the support in the development of National Plans of Action, the update of legislation and the capacity building activities carried out at national level with fisheries and enforcement agencies.
3. The Commission **recommended** that a deeper analysis of the root causes is carried out for a more comprehensive approach in solving the issue, especially in consideration of artisanal and small-scale fisheries that are operating for subsistence purposes.

XI. THE WECAFC DATA COLLECTION REFERENCE FRAMEWORK AND CAPACITY BUILDING ON STATISTICS

1. The Commission **adopted** the DCRF recommendation as an Interim Data Collection Reference Framework, pending additional technical edits to be provided intersessionally, in order to adopt the Data Collection Reference Framework at the next plenary meeting of WECAFC.
2. The Commission **emphasized** the usefulness of the regional database for improving data collection, data management, including visualization and sustainable management of fisheries resources.

XII. REPORT BY THE SECRETARY ON THE FINANCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS OF THE COMMISSION

1. The Commission further **underscored** the urgent need to increase the FAO regular budget support for WECAFC.
2. The Commission **requested** that, at the next WECAFC session, a more detailed budget breakdown, including FAO budget and also all voluntary contributions from Members, is presented in a table format to facilitate review of the financial situation of the Organization in comparison with the previous session and the projections for the subsequent session.

XIII. PROGRAMME OF WORK OF WECAFC (2019-2020)

1. Several members **recommended** that the Secretariat engage actively with the focal points of each Member to ensure effective communication intersessionally. It was **suggested** to

publish a list of planned events and working group focal points on the WECAFC website and ensure a timely update of the calendar.

2. The Commission **agreed** to include parrotfish in the programme of work as appropriate.
3. The Commission **recommended** to strengthen the scientific investigations on Sargassum and its impacts in the region on the fish populations, the fisheries and the fishing communities.

XIV. HIGHLIGHTS OF ISSUES AND BENEFITS OF THE STATE OF THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT AND ASSOCIATED ECONOMIES (SOME E)

1. The Commission **encouraged** the Secretariat to continue to collaborate and coordinate with its member countries, the CLME+ PCU and ICM members. as well as with the Interim Fisheries Coordination Mechanism (IFCM) to support the SOME E mechanism, as reflected in Resolution WECAFC/17/2019/18. The Commission **adopted** Resolution WECAFC/XVII/2019/18 relevant to the reporting mechanism within WECAFC for the Status of Marine Environment and Associated Economies (SOME E).

XV. OVERVIEW AND UPDATE OF THE PROCESS TOWARDS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A COORDINATION MECHANISM CONCERNING THE CONSOLIDATION OF A REGIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR INTEGRATED OCEAN GOVERNANCE

1. The commission **acknowledged** the challenges associated with the degradation of the marine environment in the CLME+ region and its important resource base and the need for coordinated ocean governance interventions, for increased efficiency within and amongst the regional political integration organisations, with broad mandates covering multiple issues, including mandates addressing enhanced ocean governance and management.
2. The Commission **considered** the possibility of ICCAT becoming a part of the Interim Fisheries Coordination Mechanism for collaboration in achieving sustainable fisheries.
3. The Commission **requested** the Secretariat to liaise with ICCAT Secretariat in view of developing a MoU between the two organizations on matters of common interest.