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# LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN SMALL-SCALE, ARTISANALFISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE COMMISSION

## XIX REGULAR MEETING

## Panama City, Panama, June 25-27, 2025

# OVERVIEW OF INLAND FISHERIES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

**Summary**

Inland fisheries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) reached 0.4 million tonnes in 2023, which represented 3.2% of the region's total catches. Although inland fisheries have shown an increasing trend from 1974 to 2015, in recent years it has stabilized. The importance of this activity for food and nutritional security, as well as for the self-employment of especially vulnerable and indigenous riverside communities, is highlighted. Brazil and Colombia are the main producers, accounting for 69% of regional inland fisheries production. However, a possible underestimation of volumes is identified due to difficulties in recording catches, especially in remote areas. In addition, the sustainability of inland fishing activity is affected due to various threats such as water pollution, overexploitation, as well as the fragmentation and destruction of habitats.

**Recommendations**

- Implement more efficient systems in line with the characteristics of the sector to record catches, especially in remote communities, which allow a more accurate picture of inland fish production.

- Implement fisheries management measures with an ecosystem and integrated watershed management approach that involves stakeholders in the development of management plans and ensures the protection of the most vulnerable species and long-term sustainability in the economic, social and ecological dimensions.

- Establish stricter regulations and implement monitoring, control and surveillance measures that adapt to the characteristics of the activity, including through the participation of users in the design, implementation and feedback of effectiveness.

- Agree on multisectoral strategies to ensure the reduction of negative externalities that affect inland fisheries, such as water extraction, pollution from mining, agrochemicals, sewage, and industrial waste, to protect aquatic ecosystems.

- Conduct environmental impact studies to assess the effects of watershed changes, including

changes in river flows and the construction of dams, to understand the impacts on river ecosystems and migratory species, seeking solutions that minimize or mitigate damage.

## Introduction

This document provides a synthesis of the updated situation of inland fisheries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), as part of the background information for the sectoral analysis in the framework of the XIX Meeting of COPPESAALC. The FAO State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2024 (SOFIA) and the FishstatJ (2025) database were mainly used as main sources of information for the preparation of this document.

## Inland fisheries catches

For the year 2023, global inland fisheries production was estimated at 12 million tonnes. In LAC, this volume reached 0.4 million tons, maintaining what was reported in 2020. By 2023, inland fisheries contributed 3.2% to the region's total catches (Table 1).

**Table 1: Inland fisheries production in LAC (million tons) in the period 1974-2023**

| Inland Fishing | 1974 | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 | 2010 | 2015 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Worldwide total | 5.0 | 5.1 | 6.4 | 8.6 | 10.9 | 11.2 | 12.1 | 11.5 | 11.4 | 11.4 | 12.0 |
| Total ALC | 0.3 | 0.3 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.4 |
| Contribution to LAC catches (%) | 5.1 | 6.2 | 6.8 | 5.6 | 4.7 | 4.7 | 3.3 | 3.3 | 3.5 | 3.4 | 3.2 |

Between 1974 and 2015, inland fisheries in LAC showed an upward trend, stabilizing at around 500 000 tonnes, experiencing a decline in the last decade and standing at around 400 000 tonnes (Figure 1).

It is important to note that it is very likely that the increase in the volume of these catches is associated with an improvement in the records of landings, since it is deduced that the volume is underestimated due to the difficulties in the collection of information, particularly in remote populations, so the quality of the information has historically been poor and the timeliness reflects time lags.

Inland fisheries are also a direct source of food for many indigenous communities located in remote areas, which also makes it difficult to record their catches and to reflect their contribution by virtue of the number of people engaged in this subsistence activity.

The period 2016 and 2023 reflected a reduction in the reported volume of catches, which is partly attributed to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected trade in fishery products, but also reduced the presence of government agencies responsible for collecting fisheries statistics in remote areas, preventing access to many landing sites or data collection.

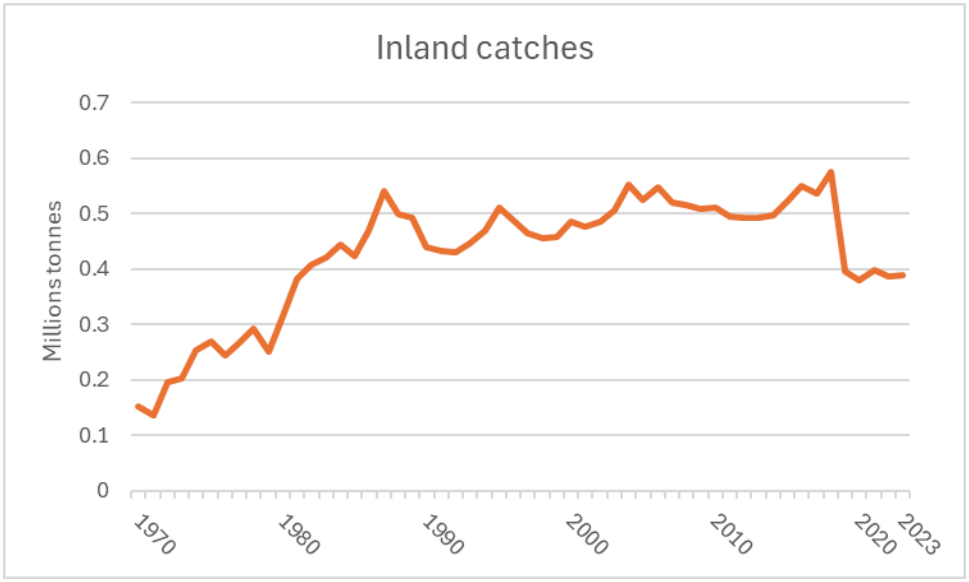


**Figure 1. Behavior of the volume of inland catches in LAC between 1974 and 2023**

Between 2020 and 2023, there was a 3% increase in inland catches in LAC; unlike the period between 2015 and 2020, with a decrease in regional production of -27%. These contractions may reflect the weakness of statistical systems or, more worryingly, they may indicate a reduction in the abundance of target species, which is difficult to assert given the lack of supporting scientific information and in addition to the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic that affected the supply chain and access to landing points.

Table 2 presents estimate of inland water catch volumes by country for the period 2015-2023. The relative contribution of inland fisheries to the region's total catches for the year 2023 increased by 3.9% from the previous year.

**Table 2. Inland Catches, contribution of inland fisheries to total national catches, and LAC and Growth Rate 2015-2023**

| Country | 2015 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | Contribution of inland fisheries to total catches by country (%) for 2023 | Contribution by country to total LAC inland catches for 2023 | Growth rate for the period 2015-2020 | Growth rate for the period 2020-2023 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Brazil | 225 000 | 225 030 | 226 030 | 226 030 | 226 020 | 29% | 58% | 0% | 0% |
| Colombia | 18 554 | 20 758 | 21 068 | 32 170 | 41 240 | 41% | 11% | 12% | 99% |
| Peru | 37 499 | 16 293 | 18 237 | 28 476 | 25 347 | 1% | 7% | -57% | 56% |
| Mexico | 151 416 | 33 078 | 45 709 | 19 505 | 24 907 | 1% | 6% | -78% | -25% |
| Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela | 33 654 | 22 000 | 22 000 | 22 000 | 22 000 | 11% | 6% | -35% | 0% |
| Paraguay | 17 000 | 16 975 | 17 560 | 17 905 | 17 975 | 100% | 5% | 0% | 6% |
| Argentina | 18 885 | 19 433 | 17 267 | 13 132 | 11 958 | 1% | 3% | 3% | -38% |
| Plurinational State of Bolivia | 7 000 | 7 500 | 7 600 | 7 800 | 7 850 | 100% | 2% | 7% | 5% |
| Guatemala | 2 360 | 2 360 | 2 360 | 2 360 | 2 360 | 17% | 1% | 0% | 0% |
| Uruguay | 3 434 | 7 995 | 10 910 | 8 155 | 2 255 | 3% | 1% | 133% | -72% |
| Republic Dominican | 1 234 | 1 670 | 2 127 | 2 140 | 2 166 | 13% | 1% | 35% | 30% |
| Jamaica | 698 | 912 | 869 | 900 | 900 | 7% | 0% | 31% | -1% |
| Suriname | 790 | 850 | 850 | 850 | 850 | 3% | 0% | 8% | 0% |
| El Salvador | 458 | 706 | 848 | 850 | 850 | 2% | 0% | 54% | 20% |
| Nicaragua | 618 | 630 | 548 | 714 | 720 | 1% | 0% | 2% | 14% |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cuba | 1 870 | 1 723 | 1 472 | 997 | 642 | 5% | 0% | -8% | -63% |
| Honduras | 100 | 600 | 600 | 600 | 600 | 3% | 0% | 500% | 0% |
| Ecuador | 105 | 150 | 391 | 306 | 300 | 0% | 0% | 43% | 100% |
| Panama | 405 | 277 | 1 030 | 51 | 82 | 0% | 0% | -32% | -71% |
| Costa Rica | 50 | 50 | 50 | 50 | 50 | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Chile | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Other LAC countries | 1 301 | 638 | 633 | 705 | 680 | 0% | 0% | -51% | 7% |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| **Total ALC** | **522 431** | **379 626** | **398 159** | **385 695** | **389 752** | **4%** | **100%** | **-27%** | **3%** |

The two main producers of continental catches in the region for 2023 were Brazil (58%) and Colombia (11% of the regional total). Together, both countries accounted for 69% of the total regional inland fisheries production (Table 2).

Inland fisheries account for the total fisheries catch for the Plurinational State of Bolivia (7 850 tonnes) and Paraguay (17 975 tonnes). In other countries, its relative contribution to total catches is highly significant; for example, by 2023, it contributed 29% of Brazil's total fish catches, while 41% of Colombia's fish catches were inland fisheries and 17% of Guatemala's fish catches.

In the last decade, Brazil, the main producer in the region, registered a stabilization of around 226 thousand tons. It is possible that the volume is still underestimated, since a significant portion is destined for self-consumption and is not recorded, especially in hard-to-reach villages with underreporting of catches and use.

With respect to the main species caught in the period 2021-2023, Table 3 highlights the 51.4% reduction in catches of tilapia (nei) and common carp, which is the result of a reclassification of the production of restocking-based fisheries in Mexico as aquaculture in the years 2019-2022. On the other hand, prochilodus (nei) registered a decrease of -12.9% in catches, but it seems to be a result of the fact that a part of the landings are reported at the level of species such as *Prochilodus magdalenae*. Arapaima catches increased by 37%, possibly a result of the co-management initiatives that have been implemented in the countries of their distribution.

**Table 3. Main species caught in LAC inland waters**

| Species | Scientific name | Volume Captured 2021 | Volume Captured 2022 | Volume Captured 2023 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Prochilodus NEI | *Prochilodus* spp | 39 733 | 39 983 | 34 572 |
| NEI Freshwater Fish | Osteichthyes | 32 739 | 36 463 | 28 003 |
| Freshwater Siluroids NEI | Siluriformes (=Siluroids) | 26 785 | 25 780 | 24 582 |
| Bagre Laulao | *Brachyplatystoma vaillantii* | 23 047 | 23 898 | 23 784 |
| NEI Caracids | Characidae | 22 430 | 22 825 | 22 575 |
| South American silver sea bass | *Plagioscion squamosissimus* | 18 834 | 18 775 | 18 757 |
| Tilapias NEI | *Oreochromis* spp | 384 03 | 13 249 | 18 657 |
| Prochilodus del Río Magdalena | *Prochilodus magdalenae* | 0 | 8 000 | 15 995 |
| *Prochilodus kissing* | *Semaprochilodus insignis* | 15 436 | 15 195 | 14 923 |
| *Brachyplatystoma rousseauxii* | *Brachyplatystoma rousseauxii* | 14 651 | 14 572 | 14 535 |
| NIS Cyclides | Cichlidae | 12 849 | 13 520 | 12 974 |
| *Hoplias aimara* | *Hoplias aimara* | 8 880 | 8 880 | 8 880 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| NEI Low-Eyed Catfish | *Hypophthalmus* spp. | 8 660 | 8 660 | 8 780 |
| *Prochilodus mariae* | *Prochilodus mariae* | 8 220 | 8 135 | 8 370 |
| Sorubims NEI | *Pseudoplatystoma* spp. | 8 348 | 9 561 | 8 318 |
| *Meshed Prochilodus* | *Prochilodus reticulatus* | 5 749 | 9 098 | 7 290 |
| Common tent | *Cyprinus carpio* | 13 263 | 7 966 | 6 443 |
| Canes de río NEI | *Macrobrachium* spp | 5 528 | 5 218 | 6 360 |
| *Mylossoma plateado* | *Mylossoma duriventre* | 3 334 | 4 667 | 5 386 |
| *Schizodon fasciatus* | *Schizodon fasciatus* | 4 767 | 4 750 | 4 755 |
| Curimata cyprinoides | *Curimata cyprinoides* | 4 730 | 4 730 | 4 730 |
| Cachama | *Colossoma macropomum* | 4 194 | 4 184 | 4 618 |
| *Tripotheus angulatus* | *Triportheus angulatus* | 3 472 | 3 568 | 3 686 |
| Arapaima | *Arapaima gigas* | 2 690 | 2 770 | 3 685 |
| Pirañas NEI | *Serrasalmus* spp. | 3 423 | 3 513 | 3 424 |
| **Total** | | **330 165** | **317 960** | **314 082** |

Although inland fisheries production is lower than that of marine fisheries, its social importance is significant because it represents the pillar of food security for multiple coastal communities, many indigenous, located in the vast watersheds of the region. In addition, they provide self-employment to thousands of inhabitants of these communities, allowing the barter of fish for other food and supplies and monetary income from the sale of surpluses.

Among the problems that most affect the sustainability of inland fisheries, in addition to the effects of climate change on aquatic ecosystems, are water pollution by agrochemicals, sewage from human settlements, industrial waste, and heavy metals from mining; in addition to the overexploitation of aquifers, deforestation and land use change; and the introduction of invasive species. In South American countries where there are large rivers and where river fishing is important for the riverine population, the destruction of habitats and the obstruction of channels by dams have become serious threats, particularly for migratory species.

Several countries share the large basins and bodies of water in the region, which requires concerted management of shared fishery resources (including migratory species) and the aquatic ecosystems that support them. However, this coordination is still in its infancy, and the lack of appropriate regional frameworks hinders the sustainability of fisheries. According to the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, States should cooperate at the subregional and regional levels to ensure compatible measures that promote the conservation and responsible use of transboundary aquatic resources.

## Conclusions

- Although inland fisheries represent only a small contribution to the total catch in the region, their importance is reflected in the social, economic and cultural dimensions, as they contribute to food and nutrition security, employment and income generation, local trade, as well as to the traditions of riverine communities and indigenous peoples.
- Inland fisheries, in addition to being a sector that produces food, employment and income for coastal communities, is essential to the resilience of coastal and indigenous communities and to the health of ecosystems.
- Inland fisheries production in LAC maintained an upward trend between 1974 and 2015,

stabilizing at about 500 000 tonnes. However, it has fallen in the last decade, standing at around 400,000 tonnes.

- There are various efforts made by countries to estimate the volume of inland catches, but the lack of accurate data and changes in collection systems make it difficult to analyse trends, so efficient participatory recording and monitoring mechanisms are required, so as to facilitate the sustainable management of inland fishery resources.
- The reliability of inland catch estimates would be cost-effectively improved by including more details on fish consumption in the Household Consumption and Expenditure Surveys that most countries conduct regularly, such as the species consumed, their origin (inland or marine), the method of production (caught or farmed), and whether the fish was caught by the household itself or acquired. However, it is essential that data is also collected in more remote settlements, where fish consumption is often higher.
- The sustainability of inland fisheries is mainly threatened by pollution and intensive water extraction, overexploitation of fishery resources, loss of biodiversity, and habitat fragmentation and degradation that lead to changes in ecosystems.
- The main challenges in the region are to strengthen regional coordination for the sustainable management of shared fishery resources, including migratory species, to improve the quality of fisheries statistics through the use of household consumption surveys that better capture the subsistence dimension of the sector, and to promote integrated watershed management approaches that articulate water governance, land, forests and fishing.
- The sustainability of the sector requires the implementation of intersectoral, participatory and evidence-based approaches, which recognize the multiple functions of aquatic ecosystems, the central role of local and indigenous communities, and the need for public policies in line with the realities of the sector. It also requires greater transboundary coordination and a better assessment of the real contribution of inland fisheries.

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