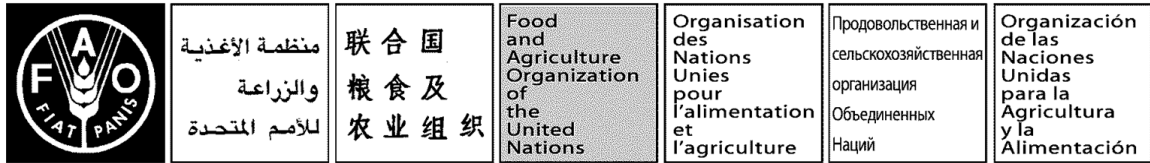


April 2022

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WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION (WECAFC)
ELEVENTH (VIRTUAL) SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY GROUP (SAG)
25-27 April 2022
Intersessional Activities – Review of the WECAFC work programme 2019-2021

This document gives an overview of the intersessional activities of the Commission and FAO in the WECAFC (Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission) area of competence. The last programme of work (2019-2021) was approved by the Commission at the 17th Session (WECAFC17)¹ held 15-18 July 2019 in Miami, United States of America.

This intersessional period was marked by (i) the large number of virtual events as imposed by the impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic, (ii) the increased engagement of the Executive Committee as the key statutory body assigned to implement the decisions of the Commission between its sessions, to carry out such tasks as entrusted to it by the Commission, and (iii) implementation of other core activities of the Commission not originally in the workplan, such as the review of the working groups (WG) terms of reference (TORs), and the preparation of the 2022-2027 Strategic plan. The coordination of an ever-increasing number of intersessional meetings of the working groups and other subsidiary bodies such as the ad hoc intersessional working group (IWG) under the direct oversight of the Chair of the Commission, follow-up actions including expanding and strengthening existing partnerships, have exceptionally mobilized the meagre human and financial resources of the Secretariat. As an illustration, the data for 2020 and 2021 with COVID-19 restrictions still showed increasing (virtual) meetings. The savings in travel costs regarding the annual USD40, 000 programme funds dedicated to WECAFC have all been wiped out by the translations of documents, publication processes and the simultaneous interpretation services offered for selected meetings. Additional budgetary support to the Secretariat was provided in hiring junior consultants from the resources allocation of the FAO Subregional Office for the Caribbean, a measure that reduced the workload to an extent.

¹ The endorsed report of the Seventeenth Session of the Commission (WECAFC17): <http://www.fao.org/3/ca8259t/CA8259T.pdf>

The current document, which fits within the above context, aims to present the key achievements spread across the four main headings of the 2014-2020 strategic plan, being integrated in the new strategic plan and yet to be endorsed:

- Area 1: Improve regional fisheries governance
- Area 2: Increase regional information and collaboration in fisheries
- Area 3: Strengthen regional fisheries management and best-practices approaches for fisheries and aquaculture
- Area 4: Create an enabling environment within the WECAFC Secretariat to support the achievement of the goals and objective of the Commission

1. Major activities of the Executive Committee of the Commission

The former Chair of the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) and the Secretariat of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) initiated in October 2019 the review of the terms of reference (TORs) of SAG, as an effort to address the need expressed by the Commission at its 17th session, to revise them, in order to improve the SAG's methodology of work, and to reinforce its composition and its coordination with the ad hoc working groups, other subsidiary bodies and stakeholders. The process subsequently headed by the Chairperson of the Commission engaged WECAFC members in the review from June 2020 to February 2021, before an electronic endorsement of the interim terms of reference and a new group of seven members was formed following a call for expression of interest launched in March 2021.

The changes, which resulted in the electronically endorsed interim SAG TORs, prompted the development of new/harmonized TORs of the working groups. Indeed, during the development process of these TORs, some members made a valid point for organizing and standardizing the work of the many Working Groups of WECAFC. This suggestion was first made by the USA, which offered to assist the Secretariat in the exercise. The Secretariat then initiated in December 2020 the preparation of draft TORs, building on TORs of other regional fisheries advisory and management bodies and some corporate working groups. These were then shared as soon as consensus was gained in February 2021 on the interim SAG TORs. The engagement of members in the review of WGs TORs was conducted from April to June 2021. Convener positions of WGs such as Moored Fish Aggregating Devices (MFADs) Working Group, Flyingfish-Dolphinfish and Spiny lobster were filled, while the others remained in effect until the next meeting of the WGs for confirmation or replacement.

For the first time in the history of the Commission, the Executive Committee has met more frequently than ever. The 2014 Revised Rules of Procedure of WECAFC state that the Executive Committee shall meet at least once a year. This body met three times in 2021 and already twice in 2022.

The development of the new strategic plan 2022-2027 was discussed at the first and second meetings of the Executive Committee held on 3 June and 21 June 2021. It was commissioned from 22 July to 30 November 2021 to gather inputs from the working groups. The consolidated document was subsequently shared with the Executive Committee, then SAG members on 29 December 2021 for a preliminary review before the circulation to WECAFC members followed on from 18 January to 4 March 2022.

The review of the 2014 Rules of Procedure is another task tabled at the second 2022 meeting of the Committee, 5 April and may generate a brainstorming exercise by members before WECAFC18.

2. WECAFC working groups meetings

Ten meetings of seven out of the 11 working groups of the Commission were held, while three out of the four WGs that have not met contributed to at least one intersessional activity, either the preparation of tailored TORs or provision of inputs to the strategic planning process. Detailed intersessional reports, including the recommendations and resolutions, workplan, any management plan or plan of action, strategy, etc. will be separately prepared by each of those 10 WGs for presentation to the 11th session

of the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG11), 25-27 April 2022. Following is a snapshot of the meetings held:

- Fourth and fifth Meetings of the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES Working Group on queen conch

The two meetings were held in San Juan, Puerto Rico, respectively from 16 to 17 December 2019 (full in-person), and virtually from 13-14 December 2021. They were hosted and organized by the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC) with technical and financial support from the USA National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and the WECAFC Secretariat. The technical report of the study on *Study on Health and safety in the dive fisheries of key species in the WECAFC region* commissioned, based on WECAFC17 deliberations on the safety of fishers and funded by the FAO small-scale fisheries Global Assistance Programme, was presented at the fifth WG meeting. It gave rise to useful recommendations, including a dedicated programme on the occupational safety and health issues in the region. The proceedings of the fourth meeting can be found at the link <https://www.fao.org/3/cb1126b/CB1126B.pdf>; the report of the fifth meeting is in the preparation process for publication.

- Third meeting of the CFMC/WECAFC/OSPESCA/CRFM Working Group on Spawning Aggregations, held in San Juan, Puerto Rico, 18-19 December 2019

This meeting held back-to-back with the fourth queen conch WG meeting primarily aimed to review and finalize the spawning aggregations management plan and address specific recommendations from the WECAFC17. The draft Regional Fish Spawning Aggregation Fishery Management Plan: Focus on Nassau Grouper and Mutton Snapper" (FSAMP) is ready to be presented to SAG. The link to the report can be found at: <https://www.fao.org/wecafc/publications/detail/en/c/1473198>. An important issue discussed at the previous plenary of the Commission which required a follow up by this WG was to review the available information on parrotfish and make recommendations. A technical document from the study supported by CFMC can be found at <https://www.fao.org/wecafc/publications/detail/en/c/1469227/>

- Fourth (virtual) Meeting of the Regional Working Group on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing, held 8-9 September 2020

The meeting was made possible through generous financial assistance provided by the European Union's Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG-MARE), through Trust Fund project GCP/SLC/016/EC: "Support to implementation of the Regional Plan of Action to deter and eliminate Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing in the Western Central Atlantic" and the FAO CLME+ Sub-Project of the UNDP/GEF CLME+ Project. At that meeting, a report of a survey, the *"Assessing WECAFC Member States' Readiness to Implement the Regional Plan of Action to Deter and Eliminate IUU Fishing"* was presented. This survey aimed to develop an understanding of the readiness of the member states to be able to address and meet the measures outlined in the Regional Plan of Action to prevent, deter and eliminate the illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (RPOA-IUU)-2019-2029 endorsed by WECAFC17. A regional questionnaire was used to assess member states' readiness, the timeline for implementation, and priority level for each of the associated measures in the RPOA-IUU. Another key document presented was a climate finance community (especially GEF) funding proposal. More information about the meeting can be found at the link <https://www.fao.org/wecafc/publications/detail/en/c/1473201/>

- Third and Fourth (virtual) meetings of the WECAFC/CRFM/IFREMER working group on the Shrimp and Groundfish of the Northern Brazil-Guianas Shelf

These meetings were made possible through financial support provided by the FAO-UNOPS Inter-Agency Agreement on "Catalyzing Implementation of the Strategic Action Programme for the Sustainable Management of Shared Living Marine Resources in the Caribbean and the North Brazil Large Marine Ecosystems" (Project UNJP/RLA/217/OPS), which is focused on the shrimp and groundfish fishery resources of the Northern Brazil-Guianas Shelf, and the Sustainable Management of Bycatch in Latin America and Caribbean Trawl Fisheries (REBYC II LAC) project, which includes Brazil, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago among the beneficiary countries. The third meeting was held

26-27 November 2019 in Paramaribo, Suriname, while the fourth meeting was a virtual event held 18 and 19 November 2020. A subsequent FAO/CLME+ "high level" (Fisheries Directors/Senior officers) meeting took place on 23 June 2021, which led to the validation of the main document for review by SAG11, besides the workplan and the tailored TORs, the Regional Strategy on the Management of bycatch and discards in Latin American and Caribbean [WECAFC] bottom trawl [shrimp and groundfish] fisheries. The reports can be found at: <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb2365en> and <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/es/c/CB4638EN/>

- The (Virtual) Extended session and Conclusion meeting of the Second meeting of the WECAFC-CRFM-OSPESCA Fisheries Data and Statistics Working Group (FDS-WG). These were held 25-28 May 2021 and 10 March 2022 respectively.

The finalization of the interim Data Collection and Reference Framework (i-DCRF) was an extensive intersessional work of this WG. The instrument is slated to be presented together with other deliverables for review and endorsement by SAG11 then WECAFC18.

- Second Meeting of the WECAFC/OSPESCA/CRFM/CITES/CRFM Working Group on Shark Conservation and Management, 20-22 October 2021

The preparation of this meeting, including the agenda items and experts and the review of the key background document, involved the extremely valuable contribution of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). The Task Force established during this meeting led the finalization of the draft document of the Regional Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks, Rays and Chimaeras in the WECAFC area, which is planned for review by SAG11 and eventually, the Commission. The proceedings of this meeting, made possible through the WECAFC ring-fenced (regular programme) funds, is in the preparation process for publication.

- Fourth (Virtual) Meeting of the Moored Fish Aggregating Devices (MFADs) Working Group, 14-16 February 2022

The meeting was made possible through generous financial assistance provided by the European Union's Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG-MARE), through Trust Fund project GCP/SLC/217/EC "Support to the Secretariat of WECAFC in implementing targeted actions of the 2019-2020 Workplan on improved regional fisheries governance". The report is in the preparation process for publication, while the guidance documents and best practices for enhanced management decision in Moored Fish Aggregating Devices fisheries and related (or interacting) species presented at the fourth WG meeting, have been finalized for SAG11.

3. Other subsidiary bodies activities

The main intersessional activity undertaken was under the oversight of the Ad hoc Intersessional Working Group (IWG) established by WECAFC17, which is tasked with implementing the Roadmap for progressing towards the development of a model for a regional fisheries management entity or arrangement in the WECAFC area.

The IWG made of all WECAFC members is spearheaded by the Chair of WECAFC and two Vice Chairs representing the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) and the Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organisation (OSPESCA). Under its oversight, the Secretariat through the ring-fenced (FAO Regular Programme) funds of WECAFC, facilitated the administration of a questionnaire to members and partners, from 6 February to 6 March 2020, to gather priorities and experiences to inform the work of the IWG. The report of the findings was presented at the Virtual Meeting of the IWG to prepare for the Second Preparatory Meeting for the Strategic Reorientation of WECAFC held on Friday, 23 October 2020.

The deliberations concluded to the strengthening of the IWG co-chairs with the establishment of a drafting group tasked with developing specific text options related to the mandate and objectives. Brazil, European Union (member organization), Grenada, Mexico, and Netherlands, were the other members

of the Commission which joined as drafting group members, together with one additional member each from CRFM and OSPESCA. The IWG co-chairs is tasked with supporting the work of the Drafting Group and offer overall guidance on process and outputs as needed.

Using the revised report and additional analysis of the first report, a new questionnaire was developed, with more targeted questions, including concrete options for selection. This questionnaire was administered to members from 14 May to 4 June 2021. The Secretariat consolidated summary findings consistent with agreed template was shared with the co-chairs and the Drafting group on 14 June, to convene to develop specific text options for the Mandate and Objectives. This group met thrice, on 28 May, 9 and 16 June 2021. It defined its objective and working methods and timeline, which included a virtual seminar for the Drafting Group to present the text options in late July 2021 and convening of the 2nd Preparatory Meeting for WECAFC strategic reorientation in Fall of 2021. The timetable and commitment are yet to be amended for implementation.

4. Resource mobilization, Projects development and implementation

In terms of new projects in the 2019-2021 period, supported by WG conveners and leads of thematic task forces, the Secretariat prepared proposals and with funding by the Regular Programme funds from the FAO subregional office's allocation. Most of them materialized into active projects now being implemented. These are:

- GCP/SLC/020/EC- *Support to the activities of the transversal WECAFC, CRFM, OSPESCA, IFREMER and CFMC Fisheries Data and Statistics Working Group (FDS-WG)*: The USD 180 800 grant has a focus on three main activities: the organization of the second WG meeting, the operationalization of the WECAFC regional database by developing national capacity to upload data in the system, and finally, the reinforcement of national capacities in fisheries data and statistics.
- GCP/SLC/217/EC- *"Support to the Secretariat of WECAFC in implementing targeted actions of the 2019-2020 Workplan on improved regional fisheries governance"*: This USD 278,550 project supports two activities within the approved 2019-2020 Programme of Work of WECAFC (Activity 3.9) incorporates "Increased knowledge of and experience with offshore FADs (Fish Aggregating Devices) in the WECAFC region" and "Evidence of the implementation of the Roadmap towards the preparation of the Second Preparatory". It therefore benefits the moored FADs WG and the Commission's strategic reorientation process by establishing the relevant information and scientific knowledge base.
- GCP/SLC/219/EC- *"WECAFC - Strengthening the Scientific basis (FAO)- Support to the secretariat of WECAFC for an effective implementation of priority actions of the Programme of Work agreed at the 17th Session of the Commission"*. The overall objective is to strengthen the WECAFC Secretariat's coordinating role of connected undertakings on fisheries governance, with the majority of the USD 185,361.45 grant targetting the Regional Steering Committee for the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA) 2022 and the second component in support of the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES Working Group on Queen Conch to advance data collection efforts for sustainable queen conch fisheries and conservation management.

The above projects added to another ongoing core project of WECAFC, the GCP/SLC/016/EC- *"Support to implementation of the Regional Plan of Action to deter and eliminate Illegal, Unreported"* USD197,531.80, which was instrumental in the development and endorsement by WECAFC17 of the 2019-2029 Regional Plan of Action to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU Fishing (RPOA-IUU) in the WECAFC. It also enabled the virtual logistics of the fourth WG meeting held 8-9 September 2020 and the 23 October 2020 meeting of the IWG as part of its second component on the strategic reorientation of the Commission. This project has been extended several times, given the uncertainty around the dates

of the Second Preparatory meeting for the Strategic Reorientation. It is active until 31 December 2022, assuming that the dynamics within the IWG and drafting group would enable a meeting beforehand.

The significance of the financial and in-kind contribution of the NOAA-Fisheries through CFMC must also be acknowledged. This indeed materialized through the organization of the meetings of the queen conch and spawning aggregations working groups, the funding of studies, generation of information for informed SSTAG discussions and the commitment to support the last established WG of WECAFC, the Flyingfish-Dolphinfish WG.

There are regional projects hosted by WECAFC Secretariat to which it is participated as an implementing partner, in particular the GEF-funded projects:

- *Catalysing Implementation of the Strategic Action Programme for the Sustainable Management of shared Living Marine Resources in the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems*, which ended in March 2021. The project contributed to the RPOA-IUU process and the participation of members to WECAFC17.
- *Sustainable Management of Bycatch in Latin American and Caribbean Shrimp Fisheries, (REBYC-II LAC)*, which also ended in 2021, developed the Regional Strategy on the Management of Bycatch and Discards in Latin American and Caribbean bottom trawl fisheries awaiting the review by SAG11, , as document WECAFC/SAG/XI/2022/8. This project jointly organized with the CLME+ project the fourth meeting of the WG on Shrimp and Groundfish in the Guianas-Brazil Shelf.
- *Climate Change Adaptation in the Eastern Caribbean Fisheries Sector* which covers seven (Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago), and aims for increased resilience and reduced vulnerability to climate change impacts in the Eastern Caribbean fisheries sector, through introduction of adaptation measures in fisheries management and capacity building of fisherfolks and aquaculturists. This project has an end date of 30 June 2022.
- *Developing Organizational Capacity for Ecosystem Stewardship and Livelihoods in Caribbean Small-Scale Fisheries” (StewardFish)*. This project, slated to end in April 2022 aimed at implementing the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem plus Strategic Action Programme (CLME+ SAP) within Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines by empowering fisherfolk throughout fisheries value chains to engage in resource management, decision-making processes and sustainable livelihoods, with strengthened institutional support at all levels.

As part of ongoing resource mobilization efforts, the Secretariat coordinated the development of proposals in support of the Spawning Aggregations WG (for EU DG Mare as donor), Queen Conch WG (submitted to CITES). Other pipeline projects involving WECAFC as implementing partner, though not as core projects of the Commission are in the pipeline for funding by GEF:

- The more advanced project expected for implementation in the second half of 2022 is the “*BE-CLME+*”: *Promoting National Blue Economy Priorities Through Marine Spatial Planning in the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem Plus*, a USD6.5 million project which covers six countries (Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Panama, and Saint Lucia). It will promote blue economy development in the CLME+ through marine spatial planning (MSP) and marine protected areas (MPAs), ecosystem approach to fisheries (EAF), and sustainable fisheries value chains, in seeking to address the marine environmental threats to realizing national climate-resilient blue economies in the Caribbean, which are hampered by several key barriers and management and policy gaps, such as limited implementation of the ecosystems approach to fisheries management and insufficient integration of climate-resilient blue economic development; inadequate knowledge and enabling frameworks for Caribbean fisheries value chains, and inadequate capacity at both the regional and national levels to institutionalize sustainable fisheries within blue economy approaches that promote sustainable development benefits.
- *Enhancing capacity for the adoption and implementation of EAF in the shrimp and groundfish fisheries of the North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystem (EAF4SG)*, which seeks to advance adoption and implementation of the ecosystem approach to fisheries (EAF) in the shrimp and

groundfish fisheries in the North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystem, supporting country implementation of the CLME+ SAP. The 48-month project of USD1,776,484 project is a follow-up to the *Catalysing Implementation of the Strategic Action Programme for the Sustainable Management of shared Living Marine Resources in the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems*, and will benefit Guyana, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

- *Strategies, technologies and social solutions to manage bycatch in tropical Large Marine Ecosystem Fisheries (REBYC-III CLME+)*, a 6.5 million USD project to benefit Barbados, Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago. It seeks to manage bycatch and reduce discards in the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems (CLME+), thereby promoting sustainable and responsible fisheries that provide economic opportunities, while ensuring the conservation of marine living resources, supporting country implementation of the CLME+ SAP, and with successful solutions for potential scale up to other LMEs.

5. WECAFC website, visibility and advocacy actions for increased support to the work of WECAFC

Given its importance as a subject discussed by the WECAFC17, which indeed triggered a recommendation to the Secretariat, due attention was paid to restructuring the website of the Commission. This work started in late 2020 under the oversight of the Secretariat of WECAFC, with the assistance of relevant FAO Headquarters unit and a consultant hired from the FAO Regular Programme (SLC allocation), and contribution with photos and links to videos by some working group members. The new website with completely different features from the previous one, particularly captivating and user-friendly as information sharing tool and visibility mechanism of the work of the Commission, can be accessed on the link <https://www.fao.org/wecafc/en/>. It incorporated the suggested improvements by WECAFC members as reflected in the proceedings of the last plenary, namely:

Paragraph 40 “...*In addition, 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*”
Para

Paragraph 97: “...*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*”

As part of the paper of the technical commissions of the region for the 36th FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and Caribbean held in April 2020, the Secretariat presented the main recommendations of WECAFC17. It underscored the urgent need for FAO’s dedicated financial efforts towards the programme of work agreed upon and committed by the Commission.

Within the framework of the 34th Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI34) held 1-5 February 2021, the Secretariat contributed to papers, on (i) SSF on the preparation of IYAF2022 as a response to a recommendation of WECAFC17, and (ii) Developments in Global and Regional processes related to fisheries and aquaculture, in which an update was provided on the status of the strategic reorientation. This COFI was particularly marked by praiseworthy statements from members for the work of WECAFC and advocated for more support from the FAO for the WECAFC Secretariat and the work of the Commission. This unwavering plea is a sign that members, namely Brazil, European Union, Guatemala, Mexico and the USA can use multilateral forum to demonstrate the commitment made at the 17th plenary of the Commission. Indeed, the Commission had called on each 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.

The Secretariat of WECAFC contributed to reports in several other opportunities offered:

- reporting on the status of implementation of resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly (specifically resolution 73/229 entitled, “Towards the sustainable development of the

Caribbean Sea for present and future generations”), mainstreaming WECAFC-related information into the Briefs on Line for the FAO Director General,

- corporate newsletters (RSN/Regional Fishery Body Secretariats’ Network, Technical network on Small-scale Fisheries, and FAN/FAO Aquaculture Newsletter),
- the Western Tropical Atlantic Region Scientific Priorities for the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030 and engage and identify new and expanded stakeholders and partnerships and annual meetings of the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute.

6. Partnership, data and information sharing for improved regional governance in fisheries

Partnership was addressed throughout the intersessional period, whether with the traditional partners within the CLME+ SAP framework or beyond. Following is a summary of the relevant actions:

- With CRFM, OSPESCA and other IGOs within the SAP CLME+ framework

The Interim Fisheries Coordination Mechanism (IFCM) had three meetings since the last Plenary of WECAFC, with one organized on 19 July 2019 in Miami a day following the end of the Commission meeting. Among the agenda items was the follow-up on outputs from WECAC 17, which featured the deliberations on the way forward regarding the strategic reorientation. The meeting agreed to the consideration of the issue of WECAFC reform for the deliberations of the Second Joint CRFM-OSPESCA Ministerial Meeting, planned for 2 October 2019. In her presentation, the Secretariat of WECAFC provided an update on the process until WECAFC17, with the landmark achievement at the March 2019 Barbados meeting, and the roadmap towards the Second Preparatory meeting. The meeting ended with a call to CRFM and OSPESCA members to collaborate on the strategic reorientation process.

The Secretariat has attended other technical and governing bodies meetings of CRFM (Forum, FISHCAM working group, Ministerial Council) and events connected to the Interim Coordination Mechanism (ICM) for the Sustainable Management, Use and Protection of shared Living Marine Resources in the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems, gathering other IGOs in addition to WECAFC, OSPESCA and CRFM, i.e. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO-IOC), The Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), The Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD), and The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat. The development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the permanent coordination mechanism was a sustained intersessional activity, which engaged members and benefitted from the legal guidance of FAO. Up until the beginning of 2021, the Secretariat used to benefit from the human (experience and scientific guidance) and/or financial resources from the Implementation of the Strategic Action Programme for the Sustainable Management of shared Living Marine Resources in the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems and StewardFish projects for the attendance of the meetings and review of documents within the ICM MoU and subsequent PROCARIBE+ project development. The Secretariat is expecting the translated (into the three languages of the Commission) final MoU to process the necessary internal arrangements for signature by the FAO Director General on behalf of WECAFC.

The partnership with CRFM and OSPESCA has been expanded beyond the IFCM or ICM, consistent with the 8 June 2020 Too Big To Ignore virtual event on COVID-19 and Smallscale Fisheries in the Caribbean: Impacts, Solutions and Adapting to an Uncertain Future. In her presentation, WECAFC Secretary underscored the importance of strengthening existing partnerships (e.g. with CRFM, CANARI, CNFO, CONFEPESCA, UWI-CERMES, GCFI, Fisheries Authorities, NFOs, etc.) and collaborating with key partners/stakeholders in the region to more effectively build a resilient SSF/Fisheries sector to deal with such external shocks. This was instrumental in the establishment of

the IYAFA 2022 Coordination Committee to buttress coordinated actions in the celebration of the international year. The Coordination Committee is comprised of representatives from CANARI, CNFO, CRFM, GCFI, OSPESCA, UWI-CERMES, but it remained open to additional members being co-opted, if they signalled their intention to join.

- With RFMOs and other arrangements in the region

This refers mainly to fostering collaboration and regional cooperation with ICCAT, NAFO, COPPESAALC, Sargasso Sea Commission, through mutual participation to thematic, technical and annual meetings. Under this specific point, falls the efforts made in initiating the implementation of the Commission's recommendation regarding the collaboration with ICCAT. The Commission indeed requested the development of a MoU between the two organizations on matters of common interest. in line with the Recommendation in paragraph 118 of the proceedings of the 17th Session, the Secretariat liaised with the ICCAT Secretariat to develop a draft MoU. The Secretary of WECAFC participated in the 26th annual meeting of ICCAT in 2019 to follow up on the matter. The review was done by the FAO Division of Legal and Constitutional Matters, but subsequent feedback from ICCAT was not cleared to enable the WECAFC Secretariat to share with members the version which meets the requirements of the legal unit. Given the fact that there has been no advancement to date, there is a likelihood that this MoU will be a post-WECAFC18 work intersessional process. In the meantime, ways have been explored to leverage existing mechanisms for collaborative activities that would not require the adoption of a new WECAFC-ICCAT MOU. It is worth to recall that there is already a longstanding agreement in place between ICCAT and FAO that could provide all of the necessary legal basis for cooperation with WECAFC, as an Article VI body. Throughout the MoU drafting to the review, the Secretariat was immensely guided by the Chair of the Commission, who is also confident that the existing framework could enable to undertake an exchange of letters that would outline the specific areas where both organizations seek to work together. The Secretariat was also informed that the USA is willing to contribute USD230 000 to support WECAFC for collaborative work of the kind envisioned under the draft ICCAT/WECAFC MOU.

Conclusion

This report demonstrates that a lot of work was done in terms of implementing the intersessional work programme. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the trends noted at WECAFC17 of a growing workload of WECAFC has not shifted, notwithstanding the limited human and financial resources of the Secretariat. The commendable support by members through generous financial contribution, the exceptional assistance of some partners in direct organization of working group meetings and assuming the working groups' convener role, are good mitigation measures, but more efforts need to be deployed by all members. In acknowledging the sustained coordination work by a Secretariat composed of only two staff members, moreover tasked with the development of the fisheries and aquaculture programme of 13 CARICOM countries, FAO and WECAFC members need to be mindful of the commitments made at the 17th plenary of the Commission and are once again called upon to make all necessary efforts to strengthen the capacity of the Secretariat