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WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION

Report of the

SIXTH MEETING OF THE WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION (WECAFC) WORKING GROUP ON QUEEN CONCH

San Juan, Puerto Rico, 16 March 2023

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FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
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PREPARATION OF THIS DOCUMENT

This is the report of the sixth meeting of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) Working Group on Queen conch. This meeting was held in a hybrid format, with most attendees participating virtually and several attendees participating in-person in San Juan, Puerto Rico, on the 16 March 2023.

The meeting was kindly hosted and organized by the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC) with technical and financial support from the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission.

This final report provides a record of the meeting's proceedings as well as the adopted recommendations.

ABSTRACT

The sixth meeting of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) Working Group on Queen conch (QCWG) was held in a hybrid format. The meeting was hosted in San Juan, Puerto Rico on 16 March 2023, but most attendees participated in the meeting remotely. The following members and regional partner organizations participated: The Bahamas, Belize, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the United States of America, the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC), Centre for the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife for the Wider Caribbean Region (CAR SPAW/SPAW RAC-Guadeloupe), the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM for its acronym in English), the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC for its acronym in English), the Organization for Fisheries and Aquaculture of the Central American Isthmus (OSPESCA for its acronym in Spanish). The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES for its acronym in English), the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI), the Regional Committee of Marine Fisheries and Marine Aquaculture of Guadeloupe (CRPMEM for its acronym in French) the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Wildlife Conservation Society (Belize). Two experts were also in attendance from the Scientific, Statistical and Technical Advisory Group of the Queen conch Working Group (QCWG/SSTAG).

Discussions focused on monitoring the implementation of the Regional Queen conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan, various Queen conch recommendations and resolutions along with recommendations adopted at the 18th meeting of the Commission in 2022. Participants reviewed the CITES CoP19 decisions and recommendations and discussed the progress of activities as called for in the Work Plan for 2022–2024. Various updates were given on projects, including an update on advancing data collection efforts for sustainable Queen conch fisheries being conducted under the project entitled, “Support to the secretariat of WECAFC for an effect implementation of priority actions of the Programme of Work agreed at the 17th Session of the Commission” being funded by the EU. Participants learned about collaborative work on Queen conch, especially at the regional level, and an overview of the inter-sessional activities undertaken. These include a genetic proposal to identify stocks for the purpose of determining connectivity and enhancing traceability, and a collaborative Blue BioTrade project aimed at improving sustainability and traceability for Queen conch in three WECAFC member countries.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Animals Committee
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CF	conversion factor
CFMC	Caribbean Fishery Management Council
CLME+	Caribbean and North Brazil shelf Large Marine Ecosystem
CoP	Conference of the Parties
CRFM	Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism
CRPMEM-IG	Comité régional des pêches maritimes et des elevages marins de Guadeloupe
EAFM	ecosystem approach to fisheries management
EEZ	exclusive economic zone
ESA	Endangered Species Act
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FMP	fisheries management plan
GCFI	Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
IUU	illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing
NDF	non-detriment finding
NFA	national fisheries authority
NGO	non-governmental organization
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NTAC	national total allowable catch
OECS	Organization of Eastern Caribbean States
OIRSA	Regional International Organization for Plant Protection and Animal Health
OSPESCA	Organization for the Fishing and Aquaculture Sector of the Central American Isthmus
PROCARIBE	Protecting and Restoring the Ocean's natural capital, building resilience and supporting region-wide Investments for sustainable blue socioeconomic development (in the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems)
QC	Queen conch
QCWG	Queen conch working group
SC	Standing Committee
SICA	Central American Integration System
SNP	single nucleotide polymorphisms
SOMEE	The State of the Marine Environment and associated Economies
SSTAG	Scientific, Statistical and Technical Advisory Group
SVGEF	Saint Vincent and Grenadines Environment Fund
TAC	Total Allowable Catch Limits
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
USVI	United States Virgin Islands
VMS	vessel monitoring systems
WECAFC	Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission
WG	Wildlife Conservation Society

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

1. The joint working group was first established by the 14th session of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) in February 2012. This meeting was organized with support from the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC) and the United States of America National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service.

2. The Queen conch working group (QCWG) last met virtually 13–14 December 2021 in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

3. Discussions at the QCWG meeting focused on the progress made towards the implementation of the *Regional Queen conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan* and recommendation adopted at the 17th meeting at the Commission in 2019.

4. The meeting adopted the following two recommendations:

   - **Qualitative progress of the regional Queen conch fisheries and conservation management plan** – Recommend updating the qualitative values collected in 2019–2020 with additional communication among all countries in the Wider Caribbean participating in the Queen conch fishery and using the information presented at the 2021 working group meeting.
   - **Counteracting IUU Fishing/Genetic Study** – Recommend that the QC SSTAG liaise with the Regional working group on IUU Fishing to further strengthen activities counteracting IUU fishing and pursue the implementation of the QC genetic proposal.

5. The objectives of the sixth meeting of the QCWG were to:

   - update the status of implementation of the *Regional Queen conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan* and a timeline for implementation of any outstanding elements.

   - update the status on the implementation of QCWG recommendations, Recommendation WECAFC/17/2019/12 on Improved Compliance with Trade Measures for Queen conch, Recommendation WECAFC/XVII/2019/13 on Queen conch Conversion Factor adopted at WECAFC17 and WECAFC/XVIII/2022/3 on Increased efforts in the implementation of the *Regional Queen conch Fishery Management and Conservation Plan* in the WECAFC region.

   - receive updates on CITES decisions and country reporting to WECAFC.

   - review of Workplan Activities (2022–2024) and identification of priority activities.

   - receive updates on the Queen conch pilot study in Jamaica for advancing data collection efforts for sustainable Queen conch fisheries.

   - develop Recommendations for consideration and possible adoption during WECAFC 19. Update the status of the implementation of the *Regional Queen conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan*, and a timeline for implementation of any outstanding elements. Update the status of implementation of QCWG recommendations, Recommendation WECAFC/XVII/2019/12 on Improved Compliance with Trade Measures for Queen conch, Recommendation WECAFC/XVII/2019/13 on Queen conch Conversion Factor adopted at WECAFC17 and WECAFC/XVIII/2022/3 on Increased efforts in the implementation of the *Regional Queen conch Fishery Management and Conservation Plan* in the WECAFC region. Update on CITES decisions and country reporting to WECAFC, review of Work Plan Activities (2022–2024), identification of

priority activities, Queen conch Pilot Study in Jamaica for advancing data collection efforts for sustainable Queen conch fisheries along with development of recommendations for consideration and possible adoption during WECAFC 19.

6. Other purposes of the meeting were to discuss the regional proposals/projects needs to improve species sustainability, provide an overview and status on the study to determine Queen conch genetic connectivity, the improvement of the conch landings and the Blue Biotrade Project.

7. The QCWG meeting was conducted under the leadership of the working group Convener and meeting Chair, Ms Maren Headley from CRFM.

Participation

8. The sixth meeting of the WECAFC Queen conch working group was held in a hybrid format (with in-person and virtual attendance) with most participants attending virtually. The meeting was attended by officers of national institutions, entities, and authorities responsible for implementation of policy, legal, and operational aspects of fisheries management and/or implementation of the Regional Queen conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan in the WECAFC region. The following countries and regional partner organizations participated: The Bahamas, Belize, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the United States of America, the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC), Centre for the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife for the Wider Caribbean Region (CAR SPAW/SPAW RAC-Guadeloupe), the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM for its acronym in English), the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC for its acronym in English), the Organization for Fisheries and Aquaculture of the Central American Isthmus (OSPESCA for its acronym in Spanish). The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES for its acronym in English), the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI), the Regional Committee of Marine Fisheries and Marine Aquaculture of Guadeloupe (CRPMEM for its acronym in French) the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Wildlife Conservation Society (Belize). Two experts were also in attendance from the Scientific, Statistical and Technical Advisory Group of the Queen conch working group (QCWG/SSTAG). See Appendix B for the list of participants.

Funding

9. The meeting was kindly hosted by the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC). The meeting also received support from the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS).

10. Ms Headley opened the meeting to participants for introduction for those in-person as well as those attending online. The CITES Secretariat was then introduced.

11. Ms Karen Gaynor of the CITES Secretariat, expressed her thanks to the meeting organizers and her regret that she could not attend the meeting in-person. In agreement with Mr Rolón's earlier comments she noted the lack of responses from participating countries of the request for information, emphasizing that the importance of the QCWG has become enhanced, due to the decisions adopted at CoP19. She specified that providing information to the QCWG also informs CITES as well, which means that the activities the working group is doing on Queen conch has more importance in the CITES arena.

Election of chairperson for the meeting

12. Ms Maren Headley as Convener of the working group volunteered to chair the meeting. Ms Karlisa Black from Jamaica's National Fisheries Authority and Ms Candice Webb-Russell from the Bahamas' Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources acted as rapporteurs.

13. Ms Headley then introduced the meeting agenda, which was adopted with one amendment requested by WECAFC Secretariat, Ms Yvette Diei Ouadi to begin with agenda items 6, 7 and possibly 8.

Update of WECAFC work on Queen conch and overview of intersessional activities

14. The WECAFC Secretariat, Ms Yvette Diei Ouadi presented on the update in Queen conch work and an overview of inter-sessional activities. The presentation focused on the work under the working group, specifically on the period since last meeting which occurred in December 2021, up to the 18th session of the Commission and the preparation of the workshop. She reviewed and recalled the recommendations made, the planned activities and projects that came out of the last meeting (5th working group meeting) 13–14 December 2021, held in Puerto Rico (Hybrid). She shared the date of the 19th meeting of the commission which is to be held in September 2023. In addition, she highlighted the lack of resources for data collection and the difficulties countries are experiencing to complete non-detriment findings (NDFs) for export as required under CITES. She further mentioned an EU funded project in 2018/2019 geared towards guidance on the making of NDFs and how the projected ended without being able to meet this objective in 2021.

Update of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) work on Queen conch by CITES secretariat

15. Ms Karen Gaynor (Scientific Officer for Fauna, CITES Secretariat) provided an update on the CITES activities on Queen conch, new decisions adopted at the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP19), highlighted the increased importance of the working group in relation to the implementation of those decisions, ongoing activities, and upcoming CITES meetings that are of relevance for the group where discussions on Queen conch will take place. She then outlined an analysis on the recent trade data on Queen conch between 2016–2021 and ended with the outcome of the Blue Biotrade Project.

16. Ms Gaynor stated that CoP 19 adopted four new Decisions on Queen conch (one directed to range States of *Strombus gigas*; one to the Secretariat; one to the Animals Committee (AC) and one to the Standing Committee (SC). She clarified that the main difference between these decisions and those adopted at CoP18 is that instead of range States providing updates on activities to the CITES Secretariat, they are requested to provide progress reports on activities to the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CFRM/CITES QCWG and the Secretariat will report on progress by the working group to the AC and SC. This avoids the need for range States to report twice. It is therefore important for range States to report to WECAFC.

17. She also outlined several other ongoing relevant activities including work on the development of NDF guidance and how this could serve as an important case study for the NDF technical workshop envisaged under Decision 19.132 (planned for December 2023, to be confirmed). Other activities related to enforcement (identification of priorities and genetic study), pending report on traceability to SC77/78, and linkages were also presented. Some upcoming meetings where Queen conch could be a case stuty are AC32 (Geneva, 19 to 23 June 2023), SC77 (Geneva, November 2023, to be confirmed) and NDF expert workshop (December 2023, to be confirmed).

18. Recently reported trade in queen conch for the CITES trade database was presented which higlighted discrepanices between export and import data for countries.

19. The outputs from Phase 1 of the UNCTAD/OECS/CITES Blue BioTrade Project on Queen Conch were presented and proposals for phase 2 were outlined (possibly develop similar actions for seamoss). Implemented in Grenada, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, this project did a stakeholders mapping exercise, delivered three individual country case studies and an action plan. There would be funding by Carribean Biodiversity Fund for the phase 2 to be implemented until mid-2026. For more information see: https://unctad.org/project/blue-biotrade-promoting-sustainable-livelihoods-and-conservation-marine-biodiversity

20. Upon conclusion of the presentation Ms Gaynor issued an invitation to participants to take part in an NDF guidance work stream on aquatic species.

21. Ms Cimo gave thanks for the presentation, highlighting the work and connection between CITES and WECAFC as well as emphasizing the importance of reporting. She inquired about the graph provided on exports and imports, whether the graph could be shared with participants so that a closer look can be taken.

22. Ms Gaynor agreed to share the presentation for further reflection, indicating that it is a lot of information to take in and it is a snapshot taken from the trade database that provides a very useful overview, comparing data between importers and exporters because it highlights possible question marks.

Overview of Queen conch working group recommendations and implementation status of recommendations WECAFC/XVII/2019/12, WECAFC/XVII/2019/13 and WECAFC/XVIII/2022/3

23. Ms Maren Headley from CRFM Secretariat presented an overview of the Queen conch working group recommendations and the two previous Commission meetings and their implementation status.

24. Ms Martha Prada expressed thanks for the detailed presentation and thanked the members for the immense work done on ensuring sustainability of this fishery, noting the many activities related to the progress in the Scientific, Statistical and Technical Advisory Group of which she is the general coordinator. She also reminded the meeting that there is a technical document produced by the group recommending countries to use specific conversion factors (CF) and that if possible Ms Headley could share some of the data that has been collected in the last three or four years for the group to assess how the CF have been applied. The group has noticed that despite the immense dedication of Queen conch experts, it is frustrating that technical reports do not indicate the use of the recommendations from the group. Informing that the SSTAG experts will meet 12 to 13 April where more technical advice can be provided for specific countries, she queried if Ms Headley and the country representatives can provide national reports and data.

25. Ms Headley endorsed the call for countries to provide updated data on stocks to inform the update of conversion factors because the SSTAG has done a lot of work to get the CF streamlined.

26. Ms Patricia Hubert-Medar stated that most countries do not have the resources to undertake stock assessments annually or for a period of time. She questioned whether there have been any development of a model or way to see trend data to determine the CF in relation to the data that has been requested.

27. Ms Prada noted the realization of experts in regard to the lack of resources for data collection and underlined why the level of information on landing was expected to be improved, not only to perform stock assessments but to at least get a proper estimation of landings inclusive of all captures meaning national consumption and export. The expert group has generated a technical

document about CF, including the new ones, for countries to follow the best available scientific recommendations. Without knowing the most basic information about how much the region is producing meaning extracting from their natural populations, it would be very challenging but good to estimate the level of harvest that would allow sustainability of the resource.

28. Mr Nelson Ehrhardt stated that he will expand on the need to collect the proper data in his presentation, there is a need for statistically robust CF and this depends on appropriate sampling and collection of biological data. The project being implemented in Jamaica is bringing this forward, to have validated data to use for this purpose. He drew attention to the needed publication of a final technical report completed about three years ago referring to new methodology on CF.

Status of Queen conch fisheries management plan implementation in Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) member states

29. CRFM region Matrix was reviewed by Ms Maren Headley. She reminded members of the overall objectives of Regional Fisheries Management Plan and presented the overall status of the regional measures from the members of status in the CRFM Region.

30. She stated that the overall objective of the 10-year Regional Queen conch fishery management and conservation plan is to guide the implementation of a set of identified management measures that can be applied at the regional or subregional level for the sustainability of Queen conch populations, as well as for the maintenance of a healthy fishery and the livelihoods of the people involved in the fishery. The Regional Queen conch Fishery Management and Conservation Plan was published in 2017.

31. The implementation status of the 14 management measures for CRFM member states is provided in the Table in Appendix C. The implementation status ranked from 3-full implementation, 2-Moderate, 1-Low and 0- No implementation.

32. The matrix was circulated in 2021, in advance of the fifth Queen conch meeting and member states were asked to update it this year. However, updates were only received from The Bahamas and Jamaica.

33. Upon conclusion of the presentation, Ms Gaynor noted that Haiti (which is not a party to CITES) has been subject to a recommendation to suspend trade in Queen conch under CITES since 2003.

34. Ms Headley stated that no contact with Haiti has taken place for a while due to various national issues but it would be useful to know what is happening in the country as they are a member of CRFM.

Status of Queen conch fisheries management plan implementation in Organization for the Fishing and Aquaculture Sector of the Central American Isthmus (OSPESCA) member states

35. Mr Manuel Perez on behalf of OSPESCA (Central America Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization) presented the status of Queen conch fisheries in OSPESCA member countries. He stated that on average there is low domestic consumption with main producers (Nicaragua, Belize, and Honduras) exporting most of the Queen conch to the United States market as the main destination. Panama and Costa Rica have a permanent closed season and Guatemala and the Dominican Republic do not have international trade.

36. Fisheries are industrial and artisanal with SCUBA and free diving. He noted that there have been no big changes in the way fisheries operates and recent trends in landings or exports keep the same pattern.

37. Statistics are reported to FAO and CITES, and imports to the United States of America are known. Nevertheless, FAO and CITES statistics do not match import statistics to the United States. No declining trends in landings or export quotas were observed in any of the countries. Nicaragua predominates in landings, followed by Honduras and Belize. The same trend is observed in exports. All exporting countries have CITES regulations, although not all are preparing NDFs. Exporting countries are still in the process of preparing NDFs. Local trade occurs in non-exporting countries, although there is no reliable data on the levels of consumption and local trade of the species exists.

38. Belize, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic have national CF. A licensing system exists for industrial and permits for artisanal fleets.

39. In the region there is a seasonal closure, but it is not harmonized among countries. Monitoring in exporting countries takes place for landings and exports data, field surveys and some stock assessments are also conducted. CITES permits and controls are also part of the national legislations. Traceability on Queen conch occurs only in one country.

40. Mr Perez also stated that a regional statement was sent to United States authorities in charge of the process of potential inclusion of Queen conch under the Endangered Species Act. He pointed out that more integration and coordination at the WECAFC level was necessary to provide guidelines to the countries on the preparation of a broader regional position. He indicated that Queen conch stock assessments, are mainly based on field surveys (i.e. density and area of distribution estimates, sex, size and maturity).

41. At the conclusion of the presentation Mr Pérez emphasized on the need to define and standardize a stock assessment manual for Queen conch *Strombus gigas* and an algorithm for estimating catch quotas, the results of which can be used to prepare the NDF required by CITES in those countries that trade conch internationally. He also stated the need to standardize the experimental design at the regional level of exploratory fishing cruises to define population density and habitat range. Another recommendation was to design and apply a satellite logbook system to monitor fishing operations that allows the estimation of densities in fishing banks.

42. He suggested that all the above could be applied in three pilot sites in the Caribbean (chosen as the most representatives). OSPESCA considers that one of these pilot sites could be chosen in the Central American region (e.g. Nicaragua). This initiative could provide much more solid elements, with validated data and stock assessment methodologies, to make better management decisions and carry out the necessary changes, even at the level of national or international legislation, such as CITES, to guarantee the best utilization and conservation of the resource.

43. After the presentation, Ms Martha Prada noted that it was interesting that there were no impacts on the fishery given the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors such as hurricanes. She further stated the confusion on how production has not been negatively affected due to these factors as anticipated. She further requested recommendations on how any of the OSPESCA members can begin to implement any of the recommendations by SSTAG. Mr Perez noted that there was a 2–40 percent diminishment in production. There have been a few hurricanes; no downward trends like they have seen with lobster, which is an area of concern. In Nicaragua for artisanal but in particular to conch there was no threaten, no closure etc. as life remains the same. He also noted that countries, since 2005, use and continues to use FAO conversion factor however, there have been some updates. Honduras and Nicaragua surveys are being conducted. Recommendation to improve on improving communication with the government.

44. Ms Prada further stated and clarified that she did not mean to imply that conversion facts do not exist in the region. She also cited recommendation on preferable CF to provide live animal without shell and number of individuals by kg/weight. Mr Manuel Perez replied that countries are

not reporting on this, hence the relevance of the suggestion by Ms Prada to discuss at the SSTAG meeting how to make CF enforced by countries.

45. Ms Cimo commented that at the last QCWG meeting there was a discussion on the extensive management in OSPESCA region, noting there was a discussion on Nicaragua's 680 tonnes of clean meat quota with recollection that this was based on some scientific work. The question was as to whether the quota was still in place as she could not remember if it was included within the presentation. She also wanted to confirm that Honduras had a scientific quota, that later became a regular export quota to be used for monitoring QC in trade and requested an update of the status of this quota.

46. Mr Perez responded by alluding to the CITES export data presented in the OSPESCA status report. Export statistics show no change in Nicaragua quota (300-400 tonnes from 2016–2021) with a similar situation in the case of Honduras with a quota of 388.51 tonnes. There was an increase in the 2015 quota; however, there was no reporting of any export quota. Honduras increased its quota from 300 to 400 tonnes.

47. Ms Gaynor wanted to address the frustration with the making of NDFs, noting that CITES is aware and that it is not limited to OSPESCA countries. She stated that an NDF technical expert workshop being prepared by CITES will take place in December with 11 work streams, to include one that focuses on NDF addressing how do you make an NDF in situations of low capacity and limited data. This is a lot of the concerns many countries have: they do not have the capacity to do stock assessments and detailed surveys, so they struggle determining what can be a sustainable take. The marine/aquatic work stream will provide very important guidance as there is no one way everybody has to make an NDF. It is expected that the output of the workshop will produce guidance in all these different areas and when it is finished it will be to test the guidance in the field, as well as there is hope for a case study on Queen conch to which this can be applied.

48. She stated that now it seems overly complicated, but many countries have management plans in place along with mitigation measures and all they are missing is that final step to be able to determine what quota they can establish, to do the final step of the NDF. All this work is ongoing, so hopefully it won't take many years before a suitable guidance to be able to make NDF.

Status of Queen conch fisheries management plan implementation in WECAFC member states which are not members of CRFM/OSPESCA

49. Ms Maria Lopez-Mercer (NOAA Fisheries, Sustainable Fisheries) along with colleagues Orian Tzadik (NOAA Fisheries, Protected Resources), Laura Cimo (NOAA Fisheries, Office of International Affairs, Trade and Commerce), Kevin McCarthy (NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Fisheries Science Center and Debra Abercrombie (United States Fish and Wildlife Service), provided an overview of Queen conch management and regulations for the United States Caribbean, including United States territories of Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands.

50. Within the United States, Queen conch only occurs in waters off the state of Florida, Puerto Rico (United States territory) and the United States Virgin Islands (USVI) (United States territory). Although the federal government does not have management authority in state or territorial waters, there are management measures in place consistent with most provisions of the *Regional Queen conch Fishery Management and Conservation Plan*, which was adopted by the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) at its 16th meeting. Management of Queen conch in federal waters around the United States. Caribbean is the responsibility of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) in partnership with the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC). Federal waters begin where Puerto Rico and USVI jurisdictional waters end and extend up to 200 miles into the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea. NOAA Fisheries undertakes science,

seeks to enforce compliance with its regulations, monitors commerce of this species, and works with international partners towards the conservation and sustainable management of this species. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is responsible for domestic implementation of CITES.

51. The United States regulates and monitors Queen conch harvest. Closures are in place based on scientific advice. Specifically, harvest of Queen conch is allowed in the territorial waters of Puerto Rico (0–9 nautical miles) and the USVI (0–3 nautical miles) only during their open seasons; harvest can occur from 1 November to 31 July in Puerto Rico and 1 November to 31 May (or when quota is met) in USVI. Harvest is prohibited in Florida state waters. Within United States federal waters, Queen conch can only be harvested east of 64°34' W (portion of the Lang Bank area off the east coast of St Croix, USVI) from 1 November to 31 May (or until the territorial/federal quota of 25.68 tonnes is met).

52. The United States has not prepared non-detriment findings (NDFs) for Queen conch because the United States does not export Queen conch from United States populations. Exports of Queen conch from the United States are re-exports (i.e. they are specimens that have previously been imported into the United States from another country).

53. Commercial fishers are required to be licensed prior to fishing in United States federal waters, Puerto Rico's territorial waters, or USVI's territorial waters.

54. There are measures in place to restrict autonomous diving for Queen conch. In United States federal waters of the Caribbean, no person may harvest Queen conch by diving while using a device that provides a continuous air supply from the surface. Regulations are also in place in the territorial waters of Puerto Rico and the USVI to prohibit the use of these devices to fish.

55. In the United States, NOAA Fisheries Office of Law Enforcement has agreements with the government of Puerto Rico and USVI to help patrol and monitor compliance with Queen conch regulations.

56. There are programmes at the federal and local levels to educate all fishers on science, management, and regulations related to marine resources, including Queen conch, such as the Marine Resource Education Programme and territorial government-sponsored programmes such as the Puerto Rico "Programa de Educación a Pescadores Comerciales". The CFMC has an Outreach and Education Advisory Panel.

57. Management plans are in place for fishery resources in federal waters off Puerto Rico; and St Croix, St Thomas and St John, USVI, including the Queen conch. More information can be found on United States management at: https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/southeast/sustainable-fisheries/sustainable-fisheries-caribbean. The CFMC and NOAA Fisheries are currently developing a Fishery Ecosystem Plan to integrate ecosystem approaches into existing management of marine fishery resources, including the Queen conch.

58. United States' imports of Queen conch are monitored for compliance with CITES. FWS has wildlife inspectors at United States' ports of entry that are designated for the importation and exportation of wildlife and wildlife products. They inspect Queen conch imports and confirm those imports are accompanied by proper CITES documentation. NOAA Fisheries has also proposed that Queen conch be included in the list of species monitored under its Seafood Import Monitoring Program. More information can be found at: www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/seafood-import-monitoring-program-proposed-rule-expand-species-groups-and-improve.

59. On 8 September 2022, NOAA Fisheries published a proposed rule to list the Queen conch as *Threatened* under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Public Comment were opened for 60 days initially and extended for another 35 days until 15 December 2022. One hundred and fifty-four total comments were received, a Virtual Public Hearing was held on 6 December 2022 with 137 attendees. Currently, NOAA is reviewing comments to make final listing determination. If the decision is to list the species, the final rule will publish within 1 year of proposed rule - September 2023.

60. Benthic habitat maps of Puerto Rico and USVI have been developed by the NOAA National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science and partners to support a diversity of science-based management decisions. Studies have also been undertaken towards evaluating the fishery potential of Queen conch in United States jurisdictions, focused on understanding the Queen conch population dynamics in United States waters. NOAA Fisheries and state/territorial partners are also working together to develop robust monitoring programmes and support additional research to fill crucial information gaps and data collection needs.

61. In the United States, co-management strategies are inherent in the process for developing and implementing fishery management plans. Fishers are directly involved in fishery management decisions and cooperative research. There are also opportunities for stakeholders to apply for NOAA's competitive grant programmes.

62. In terms of Queen conch meat processing in the United States Caribbean, harvest in St Thomas is for personal consumption. Queen conch may be imported from St Croix, Anguilla, and St Vincent and the Grenadines. In St Croix, most of the meat (98 percent) is prepared and sold as "partially clean"; this equates to 75 percent clean. In Puerto Rico, all meat is sold as "partially clean" and equals about 80 percent clean.

63. With respect to the WECAFC recommendations that have been adopted for Queen conch, the United States has implemented several of these recommendations. The 2017 Harmonized Tariff Schedule to facilitate monitoring of imports. As noted above, United States imports of Queen conch are monitored by FWS wildlife inspectors at United States designated ports of entry, who confirm that all shipments are accompanied by proper CITES documentation. Training is provided to inspectors on the identification of Queen conch shells.

64. Although the United States has not developed CF for Queen conch in trade, NOAA Fisheries is interested in further exploration of this issue with CFMC and other stakeholders.

65. Other gaps and management needs within the United States for the sustainable use and conservation of Queen conch include assessing the status of the Queen conch population in the United States Caribbean, monitoring recreational landings, addressing enforcement limitations, curbing poaching during closed seasons, and addressing Queen conch habitat loss and degradation, among others. There is also a need to address safety at sea issues associated with the requirement that conch be landed in their shell.

66. Upon conclusion of the presentation, Mr Rolón posed the question of what would trigger the 4(d) rule regarding the ESA listing for Queen conch and how much time will it take in the future?

67. Mr Tzadik stated that once a species is listed it opens the door for a 4(d) rule, once the listing is final they are mandated to get the critical habitat proposed ruling out within a year. Concurrently, the development of a recovery plan would need to happen through the creation of a recovery planning team that could include individuals from NOAA Fisheries along with other experts in the field. A recovery outline would be generated, then the recovery plan which would have to specify that the recovery planning team suggest the implementation of a 4(d) rule. If that were the case, then they would go ahead and the same team would probably look to other experts to what that 4(d) rule

would be. The process is not quick and due diligence is required. There is no timeframe on a 4(d) rule but that would be when it can be initiated, after the listing is finalized, critical habitat proposed ruling out within a year of each other.

68. Ms Headley also added that she looks forward to updates and working with NOAA on this issue of listing Queen conch as threatened under the ESA.

Update of European Union (EU) project to advancing data collection efforts for sustainable Queen conch fisheries and conservation management in the WECAFC region

69. Mr Nelson Ehrhardt (Consultant) presented the presentation which was co-authored by Stephen Smikle and Karlisa Black of the Jamaican National Fisheries Authority (NFA) and Alexander Tewfik (Consultant). The presentation provided an update and overview of the European Union project "*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*", which took place in Jamaica and provided advanced data collection efforts for the sustainable Queen conch fisheries and conservation management in the WECAFC region.

70. The pilot project was established by the FAO-WECAFC Secretariat in response to QC SSTAG recommendations. In 2021, the Secretariat submitted a proposal to the European Union seeking funds in support of the project. The proposal was approved in early 2022 and in July 2022 the FAO-WECAFC Secretariat entered into a cooperative agreement with the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI) to act as the implementing agency of the pilot project in Jamaica.

71. Jamaica was selected by FAO considering that their Queen conch artisanal and industrial fisheries may be representative of many Queen conch fisheries throughout the WECAFC region. Following initial contractual procedures with FAO, GCFI contracted Drs Nelson Ehrhardt and Alexander Tewfik to be responsible for developing and implementing training materials, field protocols and analysis methods and the National Fisheries Authority (NFA) of Jamaica to be the governmental institution responsible for the implementation of the pilot project in the field. The consultants, together with the NFA, began implementation of the pilot project in September 2022 with the project expected to be completed in August 2023.

72. It was stated that the objectives of the pilot project are:

- to enhance the technical and strategic capacities of the NFA regarding the adoption of statistical processes that are statistically valid when collecting information about spatial and temporal fishery landings and fishing effort of the Queen conch (which is listed in Appendix II, CITES); and
- to generate a formal understanding on how to incorporate key Queen conch population dynamic characteristics in statistical sampling experimental designs that could generate unbiased information about fishery statistics of the Queen conch populations.

73. It was mentioned that the conceptual frame for the implementation of the pilot project utilizes a frame survey approach to estimate average catch per trip of a sample of artisanal boats (i.e. for a few boats, over a few landing sites, on a few occasions), and fishery census data to expand average catch per trip to total artisanal statistical population (i.e. total artisanal fleets, all landing sites and across the fishing season). Landings and fishing effort statistics for the industrial fleets follow an existing fishery census approach created by the NFA to record and classify all landings realized by industrial vessels (i.e. total industrial vessels, all landing places and all fishing season).

74. It was indicated that project activities started in September 2022 with a general training on statistical principles for sampling followed in October-December 2022 by a NFA self-assessment of existing fishery statistical procedures historically used in Jamaica. During January-March 2023 conclusions drawn from the self-assessment were used by the project to develop statistical protocols for the field work. Training on the specifications will follow at the end of March 2023 while field data collections will take place during the fishing season starting in April 2023 with a consultant engaging directly with NFA staff and fishers at landings sites.

75. It was expressed that training and methodologies used by the pilot programme are based on previously funded technical consulting sponsored by the Caribbean Fishery Management Council in 2019, 2020, and 2021 and consisting of the following important reports:

- Ehrhardt, N., and M. Perez. 2019. Final report to the Caribbean Fishery Management Council on project "Priority 1 to improve understanding of Queen conch conversion factors by reanalyzing existing data". 24 p.
- Ehrhardt, N. 2020. Training Module I: Training on landings and fishing effort estimation in Queen conch (Aliger gigas) fisheries. Caribbean Fishery Management Council. 63p.
- Ehrhardt, N. 2021a. Training Module II: Population density estimation in Queen conch fisheries (Aliger gigas). 88p.
- Ehrhardt, N. 2021b. Training Module III: Training on assessment methods for annual catch quota estimation in Queen conch (Aliger gigas) fisheries. Caribbean Fishery Management Council. 72p.

76. It was communicated to the audience of the presentation that these reports are available from the CFMC and that it is hoped, seconded by others (e.g. OSPESCA representative) that the FAO-WECAFC Secretariat will seek financial assistance to realize the publication and dissemination of these materials across the region.

77. Finally, it was mentioned that the pilot project is in fact a feasibility study that will generate results to facilitate a full national implementation of the findings in Jamaica with the potential of expanding the experiences across the region where many Queen conch fisheries require improvements to statistically valid landings estimates to be used in conjunction with stock specific CF.

78. After the presentation Mr Rolón directed a question to the WECAFC Secretariat on the possibilities of WECAFC publishing the modules that were presented by Dr Ehrhardt. He expressed the belief that they have already been peer reviewed and discussed thoroughly by scientists. He believed that they are ready to distribute the information and it is available to anybody who wants it. He questioned whether there is a possibility for it to be published as an FAO document.

79. Ms Diei Ouadi stated that the publication should not be an issue as this would be useful guidance for member countries. The timeframe for their publication needs to be determined, otherwise the dissemination as they are now can be done. Publishing as an FAO series can be considered in the medium term, not the short term due to budgetary issues. However, if funding is eventually mobilized this year, it can be considered for publication.

80. Mr Rolón stated that CFMC believed that publishing the modules is a key by which countries can contribute to the statistics needed for Queen conch and as such, has offered to have further dialogue to assist in publishing a few copies.

81. Mr Perez posed the questions of Central American countries being a part of such programmes and what is the possibility of the expansion of the programmes beyond Jamaica.

82. Ms Diei Ouadi responded that for the time being the focus is on Jamaica at least for this project which will end in August and the outputs will be made available to all the countries with translations being made later for Spanish-speaking countries. When the project was being prepared participation from other countries was considered, however responses from countries was low and funding for translation was limited. The requirement for having the additional countries is what made the focus on Jamaica. Another phase of the project with possible additional funding to expand to another country upon completion this project will need to be explored.

Overview and status of study to determine Queen conch genetic connectivity

83. Ms Diana Beltrán (University of Rhode Island) presented a proposal on Developing a Toolkit to trace Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Queen Conch fishing trade across the Caribbean. The presentation focused on the genetic work proposed in 2019 to implement in the Caribbean region.

84. The presentation looked at genetic variation to identify IUU with steps geared towards:

- Identifying genetic discontinuities across populations/stocks in different Islands or nations - pilot project;
- Finding the molecular markers that allow distinction of the different populations/ stocks - pilot project; and
- Developing a molecular assay that uses the molecular markers to identify product caught by IUU fishing, so that any molecular lab can later analyze - next phase.

85. The objective of this work would be to use the new genetic approaches (RadSeq) to understand and quantify genetic variation across the Caribbean using samples collected by the fifteen collaborating nations/Islands. It will identify and clarify the geographic and genetic limits of the various stocks distributed across the Caribbean and then genetic markers associated with differences among the different stocks will be selected and validated and a protocol designed to identify and trace illegal Queen conch.

86. Genetic tissues and morphometric data will be collected around 6-10 locations (6 to 10 countries – Pilot phase) throughout the Caribbean, including: (e.g. Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Colombia, Cuba, Dominica, Florida (lower and upper), Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Trinidad, and Tobago, Turks and Caicos). From each location, 30-35 adult individuals per location (max 300 total individual – Pilot project) will be sampled and the project will include population from the extremes of the species distribution.

87. For all samples, the protocol will be followed specifically: shell lengths, lip thickness, sex, and maturity status. Tissue samples (piece size = 2 cm x 1.5 cm per individual) will be stored in an RNA/DNA shield [URI], preserved long-term at -80 ºC -DNA extraction and genomic library generation (dd-RAD) -Alele frequency variation, ADMIXTURE, FST -SNP chip design.

88. Contact was made with some of the Fisheries Managers in different countries along the Caribbean Region (first meeting was held on February 2023). Most are excited to collaborate and expressed the urgent need to accomplish this project, but they are waiting for our official communication.

89. Additional contacts were made with researchers around the Region to inquire about other ways that help in the collection of the samples. Various aspects of the project still need to be addressed including limited funding to achieve a pilot project, permits requirements in each country, how long can the permits take, what types of permits would the country need for the collection of the samples, is there a need for CITES research permit, national research permit or other permits (genetic) etc.

90. Deadline to receive the tissue samples at URI (30 June 2023) and will be dependent on when this project can get started.

91. After the presentation, Ms Prada noted that they need complementary funds to involve OSPESCA and that she would like their participation in this pilot project. Also, countries such as Belize, Jamaica, Honduras, Nicaragua, and others have expressed interest in participating in the project. She also stressed the need for information from other countries and requested sample collection in countries and assistance in the acquisition of the necessary permits.

92. Mr Mauro Gongora in response to Ms Prada's question on collection of conch samples in Belize agreed that it is possible. He stated that it is feasible with their own resources, they would need the collection protocol on how to preserve the sample, they could also find the resources to send the samples abroad to the University of Rhode Island and that they can provide that support to the project. Mr Allan Gutierrez (Nicaragua) reaffirmed and supported the statement of Mr Gongora.

Overview of Blue Biotrade project

93. Mr Mauro Gongora (Belize) stated that he would not be able to present on this project as he has not received authorization to speak on behalf of the project.

94. Ms Gaynor recalled that she had already addressed the project in her earlier presentation and that she mentioned that Mr Gongora was involved in the Grenada stock assessment. She noted that Grenada has ownership of the report and that they do not have authorization to present the results. The report is not publicly available now but if they do submit it to CITES in response to the review of significant trade then it will become publicly available on the CITES website with the Animals Committee documents. Rather than have Mr Gongora provide a separate discussion on the subject, she incorporated it into her presentation.

Discussion on regional project needs to improve species sustainability

95. Ms Martha Prada (CFMC-WECAFC) facilitated a guided discussion on the priority regional research projects to improve species sustainability. The group analyzed a sub-set of priority research that have been recommended by the Queen conch SSTAG.

96. Participants recognized the importance of continuing to work on the following aspects:

- improve the reporting of landings not just by processing grades but also by applying the new CF (dirty meat or total weight without shell, and the number of animals/unit weight);
- improve statistical design to estimate multi-indicator population assessments and integrating per-review protocols, which may require inclusion of training protocols / manuals;
- with better quality data explore the use of data-limited assessments (i.e. FishPath) for determination of total extraction and export quotas and other NDF criteria; and
- expand coverage of the genetic work (using SNPs); and e) improve data on socioeconomics referring to local consumption and trade at national level to be included in the quota setting.

97. Based on the discussion Mr Tzadik stated that the list as a United States threatened species utilized research that was recently completed as the basis for the status review with many of the recommendations highlighted. He inquired as to whether there is more research on morphometrics on Queen conch for management targets.

98. In response Ms Prada stated that morphometrics is a concern for many countries as well as there are several regulations based on the width of the shell. With genetic projects it was proposed to collect data on morphometrics, however, that would require field surveys and the cost associated with the

field survey, not all countries are interesting to pursue in the short term. The resource may be able to collect the genetic information, but if pursuit of the genetic study plus the need to improve the use of our CF are combined, it will help generate some additional initiatives with focus on certain pilot countries to start working on those assessments of the diversity of the morphology of the conch shell. There are many issues related to morphometrics, but this has not been addressed as it requires funding to pursue.

99. Mr Ehrhardt indicated that one main priority is how to estimate a quota that is a real quota, a quota which would have an effect on the stock. The points seen bring in information on the data that you need to estimate the quota but the question is how do you do that and attention need to be paid to module 3 that was developed for the CFMC, where you have a list of potential ways on how to estimate the annual quotas that should be the ones that once harmonized are supposed to be the ones should be submitted to CITES for acceptance as annual quotas.

100. Ms Prada stated that it is indeed an essential aspect of the NDF and perhaps given the limitation that many countries have expressed on the funding and on technical aspects maybe they need to consider a stepwise approach. That starting with collecting proper information for estimation of total Queen conch landing/production will perhaps give opportunity to estimate the national production quota in different situations. The complexity of Queen conch fishery throughout the region requires specialized strategies to estimate the quota depending on the level of production, for those areas like in the USVI with minimal production or other areas such as Nicaragua, Jamaica and the Bahamas with significant production with combination between artisanal, industrial and illegal fishing which is a big issue in this Queen conch fishery. Everything is combined and she invited the participants to consider to really start thinking on the need to report better specifically using the CF when reporting and apply the recommendation the experts produce to express dirty meat weight and the number of individuals per kilogramme. Those two variables relate to the fishery production and the number of animals being impacted which is a key issue in this fishery.

101. Ms Gaynor mentioned that CITES refers to export quotas, but what is really being discussed is harvest quota and determining what is a sustainable take so that the species can survive in the wild. She also stated that quotas are adaptive, and the impact of the quota is supposed to be monitored. It can be reduced if too high or potentially increased if you have more of the resource. One gap she noted is further research into how to establish quotas. The NDF workshop will provide some guidance, and there is some research on monitoring the impact of a quota. She asserted that deciding whether a quota is sustainable and can be maintained, reduced or increased warrants more attention.

102. Ms Prada stated that within the expert groups there have been discussions on several methodologies on how to assess the sustainability of the conch population or at least the application of the precautionary when determining harvest quota and making NDFs. Some countries equate the harvest with the export quota which is probably why there is some confusion and perhaps a need for clarification from time to time so that everybody is aware that there is always important national consumption. The national consumption may be increasing in some areas and they are not having much information on sectors of production. This is why it is important to combine different kind of information and apply special methodologies, particularly, under poor data scenarios.

103. Mr Perez stated that one cannot know the export without the fishing quota.

104. Ms Prada invited the participants to share their thoughts about what would be important priority research to address socioeconomic aspects and updated the participants that in connection with this, better identification of users, trade value across the value chain, and issues on diver health have been looked at.

105. Ms Headley stated that getting a good estimate of local consumption would be useful and could be an additional priority area for research as we may be missing a big portion of landings for local consumption.

106. Mr Gongora expressed his agreement with Mr Perez that before the export quota can be determined it is important to establish as clearly as possible what is the catch quota. One of the things that occur in many of the countries is IUU fishing which is not being considered in many cases and this could influence the sustainability of the fishery. An extra effort should be made to gather as much information as possible on IUU fishing and incorporate that into the whole calculation such that the export quota can be determined taking into consideration IUU fishing and the domestic consumption.

Review of 2022–2024 Queen conch working group workplan and identification of priority activities

107. Ms Headley from CRFM Secretariat shared the workplan with the group and summarized the activities for group response.

108. Activity 1: Address any gaps in implementation of the management measures in the *Regional Queen conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan* (endorsed by WECAFC 17, CRFM, OSPESCA and CFMC), and continue to monitor implementation of the plan.

- Ms Gaynor inquired if the budget was sufficient for the planned activity. Ms Headley stated that the estimation was preliminary from WECAFC with opportunity to raise and is dependent on the availability of funds.
- Ms Diei Ouadi expressed that the estimate would depend on the duration of the activity and that USD 2 000 is acceptable but is dependent on the length of the (virtual) workshop.
- Ms Gaynor noted that in their planning of a workshop it could be about USD 30 000 per workshop when taking into account documents to translate.
- Ms Diei Ouadi stated that she is correct that if translation cost is added then it can be very costly.
- Ms Gaynor stated it should be USD 20 000–USD 30 000 if translation cost is included as its important to not underestimate how much things cost.

109. Activity 2: Finalize, publish and disseminate the report of the hybrid WG meeting hosted in Puerto Rico (in hard copies and on-line on http://www.strombusgigas.com/index.htm and at https://www.fao.org/wecafc/en/; including the national summary reports).

- Ms Diei Ouadi stated the approach now has been to get the summary of the presentation from the speakers because it has been a long process in getting the publication on track. In terms of what has changed is the translation and that given the high cost, lack of project that supports the translation of any document, the publication will be in English only.

110. Activity 3: Provide technical and scientific advice to national governments, and support national consultations as needed in the region, to advance implementation of the Regional Queen conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan and relevant decisions and recommendations adopted by CITES and WECAFC.

- Ms Gaynor questioned whether the fee is for one expert to assist all parties in the region and that she didn't think it is feasible. She questioned what is intended by regional analysis.
- Ms Headley stated the idea would have been to cover what was determined in the analysis by Intersessional Task Force and SSTAG.

111. Activity 4: Report on progress with the implementation of relevant CITES and WECAFC decisions, and the outcomes of the working group.

- Ms Gaynor agrees that the activities for the 18th session of WECAFC and CoP 19 of CITES are done but it is important to stress that the new CoP decision emphasizes the need for Parties to report on the implementation of the activities that are relevant to CITES to this working group and that is how it will feed up into the AC and subsequently be shared at the CoP. She did not think it needs a budget but that it needs the range states to provide the information.
- Ms Cimo expressed that the CITES CoP should be updated and the item should be kept as it is important to have communication between CITES and the working group as the reporting of the activities helps inform decision making in both fora.
- Ms Prada stated that she would like to suggest training to provide countries the guidance on how to make the reports as expected. The reporting need proper CF which perhaps need education and production of training materials. The expert group can support the countries in improving the quality of their reports.
- Ms Headley stated that there would not be budget for the countries to report to the working group as part of the new CITES decisions.
- Ms Gaynor also inquired if it would be useful to establish a report template for them and they just report to the working group, which would be helpful. Then we would have a clear comparative analysis as at the moment reporting is being pulled from different avenues but if there was a standard template that would help. Stating that CITES could help with the template at no cost and that the training could cost about USD 20 000–USD30 000.

112. Activity 5: Support fishers and fisheries administrations in addressing the decent work, employment, and safety-at-sea problems in the Queen conch fisheries, in particular; fisher organizations should be engaged as much as possible for these activities.

- Ms Headley stated it would be left as an in-kind contribution of the various entities.
- Ms Prada inquired if it was included in the project where FAO is trying to get funding.
- Ms Diei Ouadi stated they were still exploring the aspect of a multilateral or bilateral donor and at the time a figure is not known.

113. Activity 6: Prepare a recommendation on the promotion of decent work, health, and safety in the fisheries sector for potential endorsement by the Commission at WECAFC18.

- Ms Headley and Ms Diei Ouadi noted that this is completed.

114. Activity 7: Support publication of the health and safety study and proposed project.

- Ms Headley noted that this has been completed.

115. Activity 8: Continue the review and consideration of options for the development of a transparent "chain of custody" procedure to track catches from their harvest location to their eventual destination.

- Ms Diei Ouadi inquired whether traceability was included in the phase 2 of Blue Biotrade project.
- Ms Gaynor stated that she did not think that traceability was a strong element in the Blue Biotrade project, they did look at the value chain but did not think a strong traceability system in place is doubtful and may be what they need to implement in phase 2. There is no guarantee there would be funding and if there was it would only be for those countries. She stated that the Blue Biotrade project will not fulfill traceability systems as a whole.
- Ms Prada inquired of OSPESCA as to whether they could speak to the the iniative they have that looks at the traceability system where Queen conch is a species.

- Mr Perez shared that the OSPESCA has implemented traceability system. However, lobster is the most advanced in this system and not conch. He also highlighted that authorities that manage traceability are not fisheries authorities and communication is limited. This affects the progress of traceability for conch in OSPESCA along with limited funding.

116. Activity 9: Advance research to determine genetic connectivity of Queen conch across the Caribbean, identify stocks, and design/implement a protocol to trace illegally harvested Queen conch in trade. Engage countries to identify points of contact to assist with sample collection and participation in this research.

- Ms Gaynor stated that the figure can be left at USD 200 000–USD 250 000 for the entire project. A note can be made about the figure for the pilot project because the figure would not be USD 200 000–USD 250 000 at that stage. She also stated that the donor was approached and a positive response is hoped for within the next week, but the commitment cannot be made at the moment.
- Ms Beltrán stated that a budget was submitted with the pilot project budget proposed at probably USD 50 000. She also stated that they are eager to find another source of funding, if anyone knows, to please inform them so that they can apply and try to get the funding.
- Ms Prada stated that the figure was more than like around USD 80 000.

117. Activity 10: Create a Task Force – comprised of members from the QCWG and Regional working group on IUU fishing – to intersessionally draft a recommendation prioritizing genetic identification of Queen conch to improve traceability and combat IUU fishing in the region for the QCWG to consider for potential endorsement by the Commission at WECAFC 18.

- Ms Headley updated the timeline from January 2022 to January 2024 as it has not occurred yet.

118. Activity 11: Expand the collection of socioeconomic information to analyze contribution of Queen conch fisheries to income, livelihoods, and trade.

- Ms Gaynor indicated that the Blue Biotrade Project had accomplished this activity for the three countries, collected information on incomes and value chain from the fishers to the traders.
- Ms Prada inquired whether representatives from Jamaica and the Bahamas could confirm the provision of some socioeconomic data from the countries.
- Ms Headley stated that the information is available and a note would be made to indicate that. The presentation may not have time to present but they would be included in the report.

119. Activity 12: Provide training on the use of modules for the assessment of Queen conch stocks through a regional conference.

- Ms Headley stated that the activity estimate is being addressed by the Jamaica pilot programme, but it is noted that additional funding is required for scaling up of the training which has been discussed by Mr Rolón and Mr Ehrhardt.
- Mr Perez requested as to whether this activity could be applied to OSPESCA.

120. Activity 13: (i) Conduct two pilot studies for determination of fishery production as the basis for further analysis of the long-term sustainability of the species and its associated fisheries. (ii) Conduct a similar pilot to 13. (i) in an OSPESCA country.

- Ms Headley noted Mr Perez's previous request would be added to this activity. OSPESCA requested to have a pilot similar to Jamaica for one of their countries and additional funding is required.

121. Activity 14: Investigate and consider the impacts of climate change on the Queen conch resources and the fishery.

- Ms Headley made note that funding would be required for this activity.
- Ms Prada expressed that this is very relevant research that goes to the heart of the sustainability given the factors that some experts and researchers are recently reporting which is a reduction in the reproduction rate of the species. The expert group recommended to conduct research on these subjects but there is no funding and no strategy to obtain funding has been explored.
- Ms Headley noted the statement and made changes to the dates. The timeline was amended from January 2022 to 2023. Funding is required.
- Ms Cimo stated that from their prospective climate change is an extremely critical and important issue that they would like to see addressed. In Ms Prada's request for research areas she does not recall the inclusion of this but they would certainly welcome the inclusion of consideration of climate change impacts and they will continue to look for funding opportunities so the work can be conducted.

122. Activity 15: Investigate the ecological and biological impacts of pollution on Queen conch resources.

- Ms Headley noted that for this activity funding is required and the timeline updated as no further work has been done.
- Ms Prada suggested research looking at beyond microplastic pilots as well as the degradation of habitat quality in the coastal areas which would impact the recruitment areas of the species.

123. Activity 16: Continue/expand the scientific support to apply updated conversion factors by all countries with a Queen conch fishery. For this purpose, the Scientific and Statistical Sub-Group (SST Sub-group) has:

- Elaborated a series of technical documents on conversion factors that need to be applied and updated when reporting conch production/trade data across the region.
- Ms Prada suggested that after the SSTAG meeting more specifics can be applied to this recommendation.

124. Activity 17: 17. Continue review of existing Queen conch NDFs and guidance to develop a simplified template for making non-detriment findings for Queen conch, in consultation with the CITES Animals Committee, dissemination of the template to the working group membership for their consideration and supporting selected countries in applying the templates and sharing the results at the regional level.

- Ms Gaynor mentioned with the GCFI there will be some work preparing this case study for the NDF workshop and if there are countries who want to participate in the expert working groups preparing for the technical workshop, they are invited to come forward so that they can participate in the development of the NDF guidance for marine and aquatic species. CITES is looking for additional parties to take part and if anyone is interested, they can reach out and she will put them in touch with the organizers.

125. Activity 18: Determine priority next steps to implement education and outreach as stated in the Regional Queen conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan.

- Ms Headley noted that this activity will be left as is.

126. Activity 19: Consult with the PROCARIBE+ project to identify potential areas for improving the sustainability of the Queen conch fishery including contributions to the State of the Marine

Environment and Associated Economies (SOMEE) reporting mechanism, habitat impacts/ restoration and an updated Strategic Action Programme Monitoring and Evaluation framework.

- Ms Diei Ouadi mentioned that Mr Perez can respond as OSPESCA is responsible for implementation of a component on Queen conch and Spiny Lobster..
- There was agreement that Queen conch should be addressed under the PROCARIBE+ project, however it was not clear which institution would have the lead for this and it was also agreed that this should be discussed moving forward.

127. Activity 20: Collaborate with the Blue BioTrade Project regarding improved trade and value-chain activities.

- Ms Gaynor stated that some funding for the Blue Biotrade project is there for Phase 2 but it is not sufficient to implement the programme fully and activities will up until 2026.

128. Activity 21: Continue support to the development of the WECAFC Strategic Plan 2021–2027

- Ms Headley noted the completion of the activity.

129. Activity 22: Review and finalize the new TORs for the QCWG

- Ms Headley noted the completion of the activity.

130. Ms Diei Ouadi noted and expressed thanks to countries (Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama and Saint Lucia) that provided their presentations and summaries. Presentations were not made given the limited time; however, it was agreed that they would be included in the report.

Development of recommendations for the 19th session of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission

131. Ms Headley led the discussion mentioning the fact it was uncertain if this meeting would have any pressing recommendation to the upcoming WECAFC meeting which is in September. Proceeding she shared the recommendation endorsed last year at the 18th Commission and indicated that, if necessary, amendments can be made.

132. Ms Gaynor questioned whether it was worth making an addition which addressed reporting to CITES on the implementation of the first recommendation.

133. Ms Headley noted that feedback from only six countries was received on the implementation status and may be the deadline can be extended to get more updates to April 2023.

134. Ms Gaynor responded that there are two options, to feed into this Animals Committee it would have to be by April but if we wanted to wait, give it a little more time, and then feed into the Animals Committee for next year then by the end of this year will be fine. The template could then be provided and help the parties to report on the implementation. The preference would be for December 2023, but it is unknown how that fits into WECAFC's reporting.

135. Ms Prada preferred April indicating that it would be ready by the time for the expert group meeting, so that they can look as they have been awaiting that update from the countries for a while.

136. Ms Diei Ouadi indicated based on Ms Headley's inquiry about amending the recommendation that the updated recommendation would have to go through the SAG again which is tentatively in June and then WECAFC 19 in September 2023.

Adoption of the meeting report and recommendations for the 19th session of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission

137. Ms Headley stated that for the summary report the rapporteurs have been taking notes but unfortunately the summary report would not be ready. She then provided a summary of the day's proceedings.

Queen conch fisheries management plan implementation status in selected Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission member states

138. Based on the time, Ms Headley opened the floor to countries willing to present until the time of the next agenda item.

Jamaica

139. Ms Karlisa Black (Jamaica - National Fisheries Authority/NFA) presented the Queen conch FMP implementation status. Jamaica has established five (5) simple categories of CF since 1997 ranging from unprocessed conch (dirty) to 100 percent clean processed meat. The processing grades used were based on the then industry standards related to international trade.

140. To improve catch and effort monitoring the NFA has established: vessel Catch and Effort Logbook, Boat side inspections of catches upon landing, biological Sampling at Processing Plants and an annual report on CPUE of the fishery. Full implementation for the Industrial Fishery (the Artisanal Fishery Monitoring Programme) is being improved.

141. There is an annual close season (1 August to 28 February) unless changed by the Minister. Fishery was reopened in 2021 after a two-year closure was completed as a precautionary measure. The reopening of the fishery was informed by research surveys and assessment which showed adequate recovery of the stock.

142. In relation to Non-Detrimental Findings, a rigorous individual quota-based licensing system is in place for industrial and artisanal fishers in accordance with the Queen conch management plan. All Industrial Conch Fishers are licensed to fish conch once they have been successful in their application for a conch licence. They each receive a portion of the National Total Allowable Catch (NTAC) - Non-transferable Individual Quota. This is calculated based on: Number of Years in Fishery, Investments, Performance and Boat Ownership. Artisanal Conch Fishers are licensed to fish conch on Pedro Bank once they have been successful in their application for a conch license however, they are not able to process and export.

143. The type of gear used for fishing is regulated however, there are no local regulations governing safety protocols and how autonomous diving gears are used. However, the NFA encourages international best practices. Diving techniques such as hookah and SCUBA are used to fish Queen conch. NFA has created a new compliance department that organizes enforcement activities with marine police and coast guard during the open and close season. Additionally, there is VHF radio system to communicate in real time with the coast guard and marine police to facilitate rapid response. IUU fishing still impacts the QC fishery and is still of paramount concern for the sustainability of the stock and the economic viability of the fishery.

144. The National Fisheries Authority (NFA) has a tracking system in place to monitor both industrial and artisanal fishers in addition to the Veterinary Services Division who also have such a system of their own. The extension department of the NFA has been strengthened with the intension of improving communication with stakeholders regarding the disclosure of research findings, CPUE reports, environmental reports etc.

145. The first Queen conch Management Plan for Jamaica was developed in 1992 and revised in 1995 to include a quota management system. A new Queen conch Fishery Management Plan was developed and adopted in 2017 to address changes in the legislation and to include harvest control rules.

146. VMS tracking for fishing vessels and the issue of: catch certificate for exports, National Fisheries Authority (catch certificate), Veterinary Services Division (Health and Transport Certificate) are of critical importance. Satellite imagery is required to determine bathometry and habitat maps over which conch distributions could be overlayed and are all part of a traceability system.

147. Jamaica's Fishery Management Programme was developed in collaboration with stakeholders. Jamaica estimated its own conversion factor through its biological sampling programme in 1997 however, Jamaica intends to refine the existing processing grades and corresponding conversion factors. The country has improved compliance with trade measures: The issue of EU Catch Certificates (NFA), Health Certificate (VSD), CITES Export Permit (National Resource Conservation Authority).

148. In relation to the implementation of Regional Fishery Management and Conservation Plan Jamaica's QC Management was designed based on the Regional Plan since 1992 and since 1995 the Annual National Catch Quota and Individual Non-transferable Catch Quota has been established.

149. Jamaica needs to Improve traceability through genetic studies. Resources are still inadequate to facilitate further research (biological and ecological), enforcement and management measures required for the fishery and trade of conch.

Honduras

150. Mr Gustavo Adolfo Betancourt (Honduras) presented.

151. Ms Prada acknowledged the presentation from Ms Black and Mr Betancourt commenting that between there and the next couple of weeks, she will make contact through separate emails to get the most precise information in preparation for the expert group meeting.

152. Ms Cimo also expressed appreciation for the presentations, the time taken, participation and information provided.

Saint Lucia

They could not present, but below is an extract of their report:

153. They provided their country report prepared by Ms Patricia Hubert-Medar. In Saint Lucia, fishing is artisanal in nature and is carried out on fishing platforms, consisting of open vessels ranging in length between 3.66 m (12 ft) and 20.13 m (66 ft) (Department of Fisheries, 2023).

154. The Queen conch, *Strombus gigas* is one of the single most valuable nearshore species in Saint Lucia. For the most part, the use of autonomous diving using SCUBA gear is used for harvesting of Queen conch. However, conch is still harvested with gill nets and by free diving in areas along the west and southwest coasts (Rambally, 1999). Although this species is thought to be distributed around the island, only two significant populations have been identified, one to the north and the other to the south of the island (Nicholas and Jennings-Clark, 1994). Conch is exploited commercially all year by over 40 fishers in depths ranging from 11 m to 43 m. They operate out of open fiberglass pirogues powered by outboard engines of 115–250 hp.

155. In terms of conservation measures, the Fisheries Regulation Cap 7.17, prohibits: harvests of conch of less than 180 mm total shell length, less than 1 kg total weight and less than 280 g meat weight not including digestive glands. In addition, these regulations restrict harvesting of immature conch defined as individuals without a flared lip. The Fisheries Regulations also make provisions for a closed season but to date; this management measure has not been implemented. The legislation states:

- No person shall -
  - take from the fishery waters, sell, purchase, or at any time have in his possession any immature conch; or
  - take from the fishery waters, expose for sale, purchase or at any time have in his possession any conch during the closed season for conch as specified by the Minister by notice published in the Gazette and in a newspaper which is printed or circulated in the State.

- In this Regulation -
  - "conch" includes the whole or any part of any conch;
  - "immature conch" means a conch with:
    - a total weight of less than one kilogramme;
    - meat weight of less than 280 grammes after removal of the digestive gland;
    - a shell which is smaller than 18 centimetres in length; or
    - a shell which does not have a flared lip.

156. The current fisheries legislation allows a maximum fine of EC$5 000 for each offence and/or incarceration.

157. Saint Lucia is party to the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Queen conch (*Strombus Gigas*) is listed in Appendix II of the CITES Convention. Queen conch is also listed in Annex III of the SPAW Protocol (Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife) for the Cartagena Convention, of which Saint Lucia is also a party, calls for Parties to "adopt adequate measures to ensure the protection and recovery of species", "to regulate the use of the species" and to "formulate, adopt and Implement plans for their management and use.

158. Currently, the major market for conch meat is the local market, which serves both the tourism sector and nationals. Sale of conch shells especially in the tourism sector and small quantities of pearls is another area for economic benefits. Shells are polished and sold as souvenirs.

159. Conch meat is imported from neighboring countries; mostly Saint Vincent and the Grenadines mainly to fulfill the demands of the tourism sector. Saint Lucia does not generally export conch meat, however in 2022 a small quantity (7.425 tonnes) was exported to the United Kingdom for personal use. Very small quantities of pearls are also known to be exported.

160. The main aim of the data collection system is to monitor the status of the stocks that are being exploited. Although the Department of Fisheries is generally satisfied with the current sampling plan in terms of the quantity, quality and regularity of the data collected, the plan needs to be further refined to include gathering information at non-sampled sites on a regular basis, thus taking into account changes in the fishery and activities at these sites. It also requires the integration of social, economic and biological data into the sampling plan.

161. Two major components of the Readiness project to Improving the capacity of the Fisheries Sector in Saint Lucia to enhance resilience to Climate Change was: Conduct a valuation of the existing fisheries data collection programme as well as design a data collection system that incorporates

identified institutional needs, resource capacities and facilities, improved analysis of fish stock population structures and responses to fishing efforts and climate change impacts.

162. A Queen conch morphology assessment was carried out along the North and West coasts of Saint Lucia's. The main aim of this assessment was to: Develop baseline morphometric data with respect to conch in Saint Lucia; Determine if there were spatial variability in regard to conch morphology; Examine length-weight relationships for various maturity stages (juvenile, sub adult, adult and old adult); Develop national-derived conversion factors for different levels of processed conch meat; and Appraise current management regimes (e.g. minimum size / weight).

163. The results from this assessment revealed that there is a significant difference between the various process grade to nominal weight among the different stages of conch maturity ($p<0.005$) (Horsford et al, 2016). It highlighted the need to strengthen the current management approach, and consider one that is multifaceted, and based on participation and cooperation to ensure that the conch fishery is sustainable.

164. Generally, conch meat is removed from the shell (tissue weight) and sold without further processing to the local market, however some level of processing maybe required for the tourism sector where further processing to the level of Dirty meat (weight after removal of shell and digestive glad (visceral mass) or Clean meat (weight after removal of shell, digestive gland (visceral mass), mantel collar, operculum, radula and digestive tract) is undertaken.

165. The overall management objectives for the Conch fishery in Saint Lucia are to: Rebuild Queen conch stocks, particularly in the near shore and to ensure sustainable use of the Queen conch resource, however there are notable constrains that hinders the realization of these objectives.

- In general, there are major data and information limitations including habitat maps for both fished and non-fished areas.
- There is a lack of sustained independent Queen conch data collection on species location and abundance, partially due to the lack of resources but also due to the difficulties associated with diving in Saint Lucian deep turbid waters.
- Catch data and some biological data have been collected in the past (Last collected in 2008) but the collection of such data has not been sustained after the termination of externally funded projects.
- Recent reports suggest that the depths at which the conch are now found is becoming an even greater limiting factor on the number of dives that are being conducted.
- In general, fisheries management and enforcement agencies have limited surveillance and enforcement capacities.
- The existing legislation needs to be strengthen to allow for stronger management measures to include a combination of minimum size restriction (shell length, meat weight and lip thickness) as well as other measures such as protected areas, closed season and "limited entry" through the use of special permits.
- Assistance and training is needed to establish policies and procedures to undertake Non-Detrimental Finding for the export of Queen conch products.
- There is no mandatory requirement that fishers should undergo professional training for use of dive equipment to conduct fishing for Queen conch.
- A general management need is to assess the capacity of the Department to determine human resource gaps and make proposal to support enhancement which will enable greater capacity to undertake fisheries management in general.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

They could not present, but the below paragraphs are an extract of their report:

166. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines provided their country report. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is a multi-island state comprised of the mainland (Saint Vincent) and seven (7) inhabited islands of the Grenadines: Bequia, Mustique, Union Island, Canouan, Petit Saint Vincent, Palm Island and Mayreau. As an archipelagic state in the Caribbean, with an Economic Exclusive Zone (EEZ) seventy-nine (79) times larger than its land area, its economy has strong connections and reliance on ocean products and industries.

167. Within the Eastern Caribbean, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has arguably the fastest growing Queen conch industry of the past five years in terms of production, driven by improved access to external markets through construction of the Argyle International Airport in 2017.

168. The Queen conch fishery is currently one of the island's most important fisheries, accounting for 33.6 percent of the total landings for 2022, realizing earnings of $6.7 million East Caribbean dollars. Conch and Conch products are also the main species of export and represented 63.3 percent of the weight and 69.5 percent of the value of the total fish and fish products exported in 2022. A total of 343.03 tonnes of conch of which approximately 73 percent were exported to the USA, provided revenues for Saint Vincent and the Grenadines exceeding $EC 7.5 million dollars.

169. While these increases in Queen conch production have had notable and positive socioeconomic impacts in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, they bring potential challenges in the areas of stock sustainability, the equity of socioeconomic impacts and potential opportunities in terms of value addition and improving access to high value export markets.

170. The principal legislation that governs the management and conservation of the Queen conch are enshrined in the laws of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Fisheries (1986). The Fisheries Regulations (1987) under Part VI Section 4 establish the main management regulations for the Queen conch fishery, which are as follows:

- No person shall take, sell or purchase or have in his possession any immature conch;
- The Minister may by notice published in the Gazette declare any period as closed season for conch
- No person shall fish for conch during the closed season of conch
- In this regulation immature conch means:
  - a conch shell of which is smaller than 7 inches /18 cm in length
  - a conch shell which does not have a "flared lip"
  - a conch with a total meat weight of less than 8 oz / 225 g after removal of the digestive gland

171. Catch and Effort Monitoring programmes continue where catch landing data is collected at landing sites, not only by data collectors, but also by the processing establishments themselves (who possess a license to operate). There is of course room for improvement especially in the collection of fishing effort data to determine trends in catch per unit effort over time.

172. The Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) has a new fisheries assessment scientist on its technical team based at the CRFM Office located in St Vincent and the Grenadines. Dr Pranaya Kumar Parida, who holds a PhD in Fisheries Resource Management, was recruited to assume a three-year tenure with the CRFM through the longstanding Cooperation Programme between the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Government of India. The Fisheries Division will be engaging the services of Dr Parida to assist the Division with building institutional capacity in fisheries assessment studies, statistical analyses, as well as the formulation of fisheries management plans and advice for decision-making.

173. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Rural Transformation, Industry and Labour, requested a scientific analysis of the status of its fisheries through the Saint Vincent and Grenadines Environment Fund (SVGEF). SVGEF invited Blue Marine Foundation (Blue Marine) to conduct the assessment using baseline dive surveys, examination of fisheries landings data, a scientific literature review and stakeholder meetings (including Fisheries Division, local fishers, dive tourism operators and local NGOs). During February and March 2022, Blue Marine experts conducted 93 conch dive surveys (51 at Union Island, 36 at Bequia, six at mainland St Vincent).

174. The draft report indicates that there was a reduction in conch abundance in 2022 compared to 2013, indicating that there is a need to introduce management measures to ensure the long-term viability of the industry. Abundance would have reduced by 37 percent in depths 0–10 m and by 31 percent in depths 10–20 m. Follow up assessments will be made in 2023, 2024 and 2025.

175. As with all Fisheries within our Small Island Developing States, gaps and management needs remain within the management structure for sustainable use of the Queen conch. SCUBA certification through professional training on the proper use of SCUBA gear and best practices should be done for all divers to avoid accidents and even deaths. There is also a need to strengthen coastal patrolling and enforcement of conch fishing areas to reduce Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. Due to the limited resources, this may have to be considered at the sub-regional level. There is also currently a simple, low-cost system in place to allow supply chain traceability up to the place of collection and to a limited extent the place of harvest. The current system however does not include a sustainability verification/certification component. Options should be explored for this, including within the marketing of the products.

Date and place of the next meeting

176. Ms Diei Ouadi explained that the meeting for the 7th Queen conch working group will be held in 2024 and will be a year before the 20th session of the Commission. The meeting will be a hybrid (virtual and in person for selected participants), the venue is not known yet and since NOAA Fisheries as well as CFMC have been supportive of the working group their thoughts are welcomed.

177. Mr Rolón in response to the Ms Diei Ouadi stated as it regards to 2024 Spawning Aggregation and Queen conch working groups, that as long as the meeting is held in Puerto Rico or another area in the United States (like Miami) CFMC can contribute because for recording and translation with the budget that they have it can be done for this area, so that the appropriate decision can be made when the time comes.

178. Ms Diei Ouadi stated that the sustained support from CFMC is important, so having the meeting in Miami or Puerto Rico is okay. So far everything has been done very effectively and efficiently, there is no issue in this regard. In 2024 the WECAFC budget will be flexible to support other countries which may not be eligible for support under the federal sponsoring rules. She inquired whether this time of the year or later around December is preferred. There is a plan for the Flying Fish/Dolphin Fish working group for mid-2024, so the timing of the two other working groups needs to be clarified.

179. Mr Rolón stated they preferred December since 2024 will be very busy for CFMC as they are hosting other meetings. The week of 11–15 December is close to when meetings occurred before, so having the two meetings following one another saves time and money. One caveat is that some delegates are requesting at least 60 days to seek approval, noting that some participants had to participate virtually because they could not get their visas on time. Noting the benefits of having

the capacity for virtual participation, he highlighted Wi-Fi problems and encouraged delegates to participate in person as much as possible. He asserted that if we want Nicaragua and Cuba to participate, then the 60 days is needed for documents to be processed.

180. Ms Headley noted that the next meeting is scheduled tentatively for the second week in December 2024 in a United States territory.

Closing session

181. The meeting concluded on Thursday, 16 March 2023, with the remarks from the convener and WECAFC Secretary.

182. Ms Headley thanked the participants for their attendance and contribution to meeting, and engagement throughout the agenda with great inputs.

183. Ms Diei Ouadi thanked WECAFC members' participants, partners, and FAO colleagues, for their hard work. She expressed gratitude for everyone's inputs in their respective areas. She expressed immense appreciation to the Convener for her preparations and effective, efficient work. She noted that the QCWG cannot do all this preparatory work and all post-actions without partners, including CITES. Finally, she expressed appreciation for the excellent interpretation at the meeting.

184. The meeting closed at 17.21 hours Atlantic Standard Time.

APPENDIX A – AGENDA

16 March 2023

Morning session

09.30 1. Opening of the session

Welcome words by:
- Maren Headley, CRFM
- Yvette Diei Ouadi, WECAFC
- Miguel A. Rolón, Executive Director of CFMC

09.45 2. Introduction of delegates and other attendees

10.00 3. Introduction of the CITES Secretariat

4. Election of the Chairperson and rapporteurs

5. Adoption of the agenda and arrangements for the Working Group

10.30 Break

10.45 6. Update of WECAFC work on Queen conch and Overview of inter-sessional activities

11.00 7. Update of CITES work on Queen conch by CITES Secretariat

11.30 8. Overview of Queen conch WG Recommendations and implementation status of the recommendations WECAFC/XVII/2019/12, WECAFC/XVII/2019/13 and WECAFC/XVIII/2022/3

12.00 Lunch Break

Afternoon session

13.00 9. Queen conch FMP implementation status in CRFM member states

13.15 10. Queen conch FMP implementation status in OSPESCA member states

13.30 11. Queen conch FMP implementation status in WECAFC member States which are not members of CRFM/OSPESCA

13.45 12. Update of the EU project to advancing data collection efforts for sustainable Queen conch fisheries and conservation management in the WECAFC region

14.15 13. Overview and status of the study to determine Queen conch genetic connectivity

14.30 14. Overview of Blue Biotrade project

14.45 15. Discussion on regional project needs to improve species sustainability

15.00 16. Review of 2022-2024 QCWG Workplan and identification of priority activities

16.00 Coffee Break

16.15 17. Development of Recommendations for WECAFC 19

16.45 18. Adoption of the summary report and recommendations for WECAFC 19

17.15 19. Time and location of next meeting

17.30 20. Closure of the meeting

APPENDIX B – LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Bahamas

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BioTrade project

Diana Beltrán
QC SST expert Group

EHRHARDT, Nelson
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GENEVE, Lucas
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Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM)

HEADLEY, Maren
Convener, Queen Conch Working Group/ Chair of the Meeting

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DE LOS A. IRIZARRY, María

APPENDIX C – IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF THE FOURTEEN MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR CRFM MEMBER STATES

Regional measure	CRFM Region										
	Ant. and Barbados	Bahamas	Barbados	Belize	Haiti	Jamaica	Saint Lucia	Saint Vincent and Grenadines	Saint Kitts and Nevis	Trinidad and Tobago	Turk and Caicos
Harmonized and simplified categories of Queen conch meat conversion factors.	2	2	0	3	0	3	2	0	0	0	2
Improvement of catch and effort monitoring programmes.	3	2	0	3	1	2	3	1	0	0	1
A harmonized regional closed season (Jun 1- Sep 30)	n/a	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	3	n/a	0	n/a	0	n/a
Non-Detriment Finding for all export of Queen conch meat and its by-products.	2	2	0	2	1	3	0	0	0	0	2
Licensing of all Queen conch fishers, processors and exporters.	3	2	1	3	2	3	1	2	1	0	3
Adoption of stricter regulations on autonomous diving techniques.	3	3	0	3	1	1	2	0	0	0	3
Coordination in patrolling.	3	2	0	2	0	3	0	1	0	0	2
Extended use of satellite based-VMS systems (boats exceeding 10m-long).	2	1	0	2	0	3	0	0	1	0	1
Continuous education and outreach programmes for stakeholders.	3	3	0	3	2	2	3	2	1	0	1
National level Queen conch conservation and management plans.	2	2	0	3	1	3	0	1	0	0	2
Traceability throughout the value chain.	3	2	0	2	1	3	1	2	1	0	2
Collaborative arrangements to habitat maps at proper scale.		2	0	3	1	2	2	2	0	0	3
Sub-regional mechanisms to evaluate the fishery potential.	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Progressive inclusion of co-management strategies.	3	2	0	3	2	2	2	2	0	0	2

The sixth meeting of the WECAFC Working Group on Queen conch (QCWG) was held in a hybrid format. The meeting was hosted in San Juan, Puerto Rico on the 16 March 2023, but most attendees participated in the meeting remotely.

Discussions focused on monitoring the implementation of the Regional Queen conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan, various Queen conch recommendations and resolutions along with recommendations adopted at the 18th meeting of the Commission in 2022. Participants reviewed the CITES CoP19 decisions and recommendations and discussed the progress of activities in the Work Plan for 2022–2024.

Various updates were given on projects, including an update on advancing data collection efforts for sustainable Queen conch fisheries being conducted under the EU-funded project. Participants learned about collaborative work on Queen conch, especially at the regional level, and an overview of the inter-sessional activities undertaken. These included a genetic proposal to identify stocks for the purpose of determining connectivity and enhancing traceability, and a collaborative Blue BioTrade project aimed at improving sustainability and traceability for Queen conch in three WECAFC member countries.

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