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WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION (WECAFC)

EIGHTEENTH (VIRTUAL) SESSION

Managua, Nicaragua, 26-29 July 2022

**Intersessional activities and progress made by members and working groups in
implementing the 2019-2021 work programme**

This document provides information on the status of implementation by the Commission and FAO of the intersessional activities agreed at the 17th Session. For context, the document should be read in conjunction with (i) WECAFC/XVIII/2022/Ref.1: **Report of the Seventeenth Session of the Commission (Fisheries and Aquaculture Report No. 1311)** and particularly, its Appendix D, (ii) WECAFC/XVIII/2022/2: **Report of the Executive Committee** and (iii) WECAFC/XVIII/2022/6 : **Summary report of the eleventh session of the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG)**.

The approved WECAFC Work Programme 2019-2020 then extended to 2021, was the reference of the work of the Commission.

Technical Focus Area 1:

1. **Under Technical Focus Area 1: “Improve fisheries governance”**, the range of activities undertaken included:
2. Dissemination of the latest information on the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF), the Blue Growth Initiative and Blue Economy Concept and related instruments and guidelines (activity 1.1) took place through the WECAFC secretariat support to the FAO work related to monitoring of the implementation of the CCRF among the WECAFC membership. This is especially for the monitoring of the overall questionnaire on the CCRF and the questionnaire on Article 11, Post-harvest Practices and Trade. The Secretariat promoted the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) in regional fora, such as the 73th and 74th annual conferences of the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI) in 2020 and 2021, the June 2020 Too Big To Ignore regional webinar, which featured a call for a strengthened regional partnership in support of the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA) 2022.
3. Under the Developing Organizational Capacity for Ecosystem Stewardship and Livelihoods in Caribbean Small-Scale Fisheries (StewardFish) project, the Board Members of the CNFO, with input from their membership, developed the Regional Code of Conduct for Caribbean Fisheries (2020–2025). The articles of the CCRF, SSF Guidelines, SSF Guidelines Protocol under the CCCFP and the Sustainable Development Goals. A project development on Blue Economy (a joint Latin America Bank of Development (CAF)-FAO GEF international waters funded project on “Enhancing Blue Economy through Sustainable Fisheries Development in the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystems”) in six WECAFC countries took place and expected to start implementation in the second semester of 2022.
4. As planned, the Promotion of the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) and Aquaculture (EAA) (activity 1.3), took place through implementation of the *Catalysing Implementation of the Strategic Action Programme for the Sustainable Management of shared Living Marine Resources in the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems* (Shrimp & Groundfish sub-project). EAF and EAA incorporated in national policies and strategies of WECAFC members, EAF-based fisheries management and conservation plans were developed in the project countries. This was also supported by the *Sustainable Management of Bycatch in Latin American and Caribbean Shrimp Fisheries, (REBYC-II LAC)*, both GEF-funded project hosted by WECAFC Secretariat. Targeted interventions on integration of EAF methodologies and tools in regional workshops, fisheries planning and legislative framework development exercises at national level were also conducted under the aegis of other hosted trust Fund projects, the StewardFish project, and Climate Change Adaptation in the Eastern Caribbean Fisheries Sector (CC4Fish), and a couple of national FAO Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) projects (e.g. Barbados, Guyana, Saint Lucia,). These interventions also extended to provision of fisheries legal and policy advice in line with the CCRF to WECAFC members (Activity 1.4), together with regular programme funds. In Jamaica, the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Extension Strategy was developed and adopted and is soon to be implemented. In the Mesoamerica region, particularly in Cuba, a New GEF on Sustainable Fisheries in the Gulf of Guacanayabo was approved; formulation of the National Fisheries Management Strategy and the Fisheries Management Strategy for the Moskitia Territory and Institutional Analysis of ARAP (Fisheries and aquaculture authority) to improve its delivery and assistance in the formulation of the fisheries law took place in Panama.

5. Facilitate the regional application of the 2008 International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-Sea Fisheries in the High Seas (Activity 1.5): No specific initiative was undertaken. This has to do with the connected working group, which has not been active during this intersession, as reported in the Technical Focus Area 3.
6. Support at the national level application of the 2010 FAO International Guidelines on Bycatch Management and Reduction of Discards by WECAFC members (Activity 1.6). This was planned to be led by the WECAFC Secretariat-hosted REBYC-II LAC project, which ended in late 2021, with full completion of its objectives and realization of the planned activities in this work programme on promoting the international by-catch guidelines and bycatch reduction technology introductions, participatory approaches and appropriate incentives and ensuring enabling institutional and regulatory frameworks in the region. This USD5.6 million GEF-funded project, in which Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago participated, jointly supported with the CLME+ subproject, the development of the Regional Strategy on the Management of Bycatch and Discards in Latin American and Caribbean bottom trawl fisheries to be tabled for review and endorsement at this 18th Session of the Commission (WECAFC18), as presented in WECAFC/XVIII/2022/12. Its effective implementation of REBYC-II LAC project was instrumental in facilitating the development of the pipeline project to be funded by GEF: “Strategies, technologies and social solutions to manage bycatch in tropical Large Marine Ecosystem Fisheries (REBYC-III CLME+)”, in Barbados, Guyana and Suriname.
7. Promotion of the ratification and implementation of the Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA) among WECAFC members (activity 1.7). Capacity has been built among WECAFC members for implementation of the PSMA in the WECAFC region, essentially under the aegis of the global Trust Fund project “Support for the Implementation of the PSMA and Related Instruments to Combat IUU Fishing”, and the EU-funded project GCP/SLC/016/EC-“Support to implementation of the Regional Plan of Action to deter and eliminate Illegal, Unreported “ USD197,531.80. The latter supported the development and endorsement by WECAFC17 of the 2019-2029 Regional Plan of Action to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU Fishing (RPOA-IUU) in the WECAFC region, delivered knowledge products during the fourth meeting of the WECAFC Regional Working Group on IUU fishing, held virtually on 8-9 September 2020, given the restrictions on travel and ground activities imposed by the COVID-19 global pandemic. A message from the WECAFC Secretariat to members was published (<http://www.fao.org/iuu-fishing/resources/detail/en/c/1403702/>) on 4 June 2021 through the FAO website and social media on the occasion of the International Day of for the fight against IUU.
8. Since the last Session of the Commission, Trinidad and Tobago became party to the PSMA, on 24 October 2019, which is below the minimum of five members, as set targets for the biennium. To date the following 18 WECAFC members ratified or accepted the PSM Agreement: Bahamas, Barbados, Brazil, Cuba, Costa Rica, Dominica, European Union, France, Grenada, Guinea, Guyana, Japan, Korea, Panama, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent & Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and the USA.
9. Support to the application of the international Guidelines on securing sustainable small-scale fisheries (SSF Guidelines) (Activity 1.8), was carried out in close collaboration with partners organizations and academia in the region, fully demonstrating the two indicators of success, i.e. WECAFC members actively participate in planning the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA 2022); WECAFC Members form a coordination group to coordinate regional activities and participate in global planning processes for IYAFA. Within

the framework of the 34th Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI34) held 1-5 February 2021, the Secretariat contributed to papers, on (i) SSF on the preparation of IYAF2022 as a response to a recommendation of WECAFC17. In her presentation at the 8th June 2020 Too Big To Ignore virtual event on “COVID-19 and Small-scale Fisheries in the Caribbean: Impacts, Solutions and Adapting to an Uncertain Future”, the WECAFC Secretary underscored the importance of strengthening existing partnerships (e.g. with CRFM, CANARI, CNFO, CONFEPESCA, UWI-CERMES, GCFL, Fisheries Authorities, NFOs, etc.) and collaborating with key partners/stakeholders in the region to more effectively build a resilient SSF/Fisheries sector to deal with such external shocks. This was instrumental in the establishment of the WECAFC IYAF2022 Coordination Committee to buttress coordinated actions in the celebration of the international year. The Coordination Committee is comprised of representatives from CANARI, CNFO, CRFM, GCFL, OSPESCA, UWI-CERMES, but it remained open to additional members being co-opted, if they signalled their intention to join. This was the first ever regional committee established to support the celebration of IYAF2022. The International Year was launched at the regional level on 19 November 2021 (www.fao.org/americas/eventos/ver/en/c/1450084), with a regional call to action given by The Hon. Saboto Caesar, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Rural Transformation, Industry and Labour, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, one of the SSF Champions. Members have been periodically updated on the activities of this Committee, especially the implementation of the adopted Roadmap, as described in detail in WECAFC/XVIII/2022/24. Moreover, under the Global Small-Scale Fisheries Umbrella programme, the GEF funded projects Stewardfish and CC4Fish took place SSF awareness raising and empowerment of fisherfolk throughout fisheries value chains to engage in resource management, decision-making processes and sustainable livelihoods, strengthening institutional capacity at all levels. A TCP proposal for Venezuela to support artisanal fisheries and aquaculture and fishing communities in the State of Aragua and assistance to Brazil to conduct a survey on small-scale aquaculture for North Brazil are in the pipeline.

10. Improving the coordination and cooperation between national and regional organizations/institutions responsible for fisheries-related Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (MCS) in support of their common efforts to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing (activity 1.9). The organization of the Fourth (virtual) Meeting of the Regional Working Group on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing, held 8-9 September 2020, was made possible through generous financial assistance provided by the European Union’s Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG-MARE), through Trust Fund project GCP/SLC/016/EC: “Support to implementation of the Regional Plan of Action to deter and eliminate Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing in the Western Central Atlantic” and the FAO CLME+ Sub-Project of the UNDP/GEF CLME+ Project. At that meeting, a report of a survey, the “*Assessing WECAFC Member States’ Readiness to Implement the Regional Plan of Action to Deter and Eliminate IUU Fishing*” was presented. This survey aimed to develop an understanding of the readiness of the member states to be able to address and meet the measures outlined in the Regional Plan of Action to prevent, deter and eliminate the illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (RPOA-IUU)-2019-2029 endorsed by WECAFC17. Members consistently indicated that the top two needs were budgetary/financial assistance, and training and capacity development. In assessing sub-regional subgroups, while there was some variation, there were limited significant differences across the regions. For example, assessing sub-regional readiness to develop and adopt a National Plan of Action to combat IUU fishing, there was no significant variation across sub-regions. Seven measures have some connection to the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (PSMA). The results indicate that PSMA Parties on average are readier to accomplish the measures in comparison to the other WECAFC Member States. The study also produced an overview of the recommended

strategic implementation plans for the consideration of the member States. The main impetus behind these strategic recommendations is that they will provide an opportunity to address the identified readiness gaps based on the requirements in the RPOA-IUU. Another key document presented at the fourth meeting was a climate finance community (especially GEF) funding proposal. More information about the meeting can be found at the link <https://www.fao.org/wecafc/publications/detail/en/c/1473201/>.

11. Overview of the efforts in fighting IUU fishing by the Caribbean Regional Fishery Mechanism (CRFM) Member States, Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization (OSPESCA) Member States, and Selected WECAFC Member States (other than CRFM or OSPESCA Member States) were presented in a detailed report of the working group to the 11th Session of SAG (SAGXI).

Technical Focus Area 2: Technical Focus Area 2: “Increase regional information and collaboration in fisheries”

12. Strengthening disaster risk management capacity in the fisheries sector in the Caribbean (Activity 2.1) was undertaken in close collaboration with regional partners. The CC4Fish project implemented interventions in close collaboration with CANARI, CRFM, UWI/CERMES, CNFO and INFOPESCA. Regional Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA) Framework and Methodological toolbox and Technical Report has been developed and published. Training of trainers and VCAs have been carried out to guide adaptation activities in countries. Modelling research has been carried out on projecting sargassum occurrences for the various areas in the Caribbean and impacts of sargassum on key fish species once every two months. The projection modelling has resulted in informative Sargassum outlook bulletins shared digitally via various platforms (<https://www.cavehill.uwi.edu/cermes/projects/sargassum/outlook-bulletin.aspx>) every two months. This is used by the wider public of various sectors to anticipate upcoming sargassum events. To improve Safety-at-Sea for fisherfolk, three levels of Information Communication Technology (ICT) training suited to the various levels of fisherfolk in the project countries have been developed. Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) trainings incorporating Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) and Disaster Risk Management (DRM) have been carried out. New projects (i) on increasing resilience of fisheries communities subject to crime has started in Dominican Republic and (ii) Livelihoods recuperation after hurricane ETA and Iota on the Caribbean in Nicaragua are implemented, while a proposal is being formulated for increased fisheries and aquaculture-dependent communities increased resilience in Honduras.
13. Provision of technical and legal advice for the implementation of the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy (Activity 2.2): the Protocol to Integrate Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management in Fisheries and Aquaculture into the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy which has been endorsed by the CARICOM Ministerial Council in 2018 was disseminated. Fisheries Management Plan, Sargassum Management Plans and national FAD fisheries Management Plans mainstreaming EAF, CCA and DRM approaches have been developed. A Regional Caribbean Management plan of moored Fish Aggregating Devices (mFADs) fisheries and a Guide for improved monitoring of MFADs and improved assessment of impacts of MFADs on stocks, developed by the WECAFC working group on mFADs are set to be reviewed at the 18th Session of WECAFC, as per documents WECAFC/XVIII/2022/15 and WECAFC/XVIII/2022/16 respectively.
14. Improved management of reef fisheries and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) (Activity 2.3): A regional study on parrotfish, the monitoring of the actions being taken to manage Fish

Spawning Aggregations, finalization and promotion of the Draft regional Spawning aggregations management plan were led by the Spawning aggregations working group.

15. Improved fishery and aquaculture data collection, analysis and dissemination at regional and national level and Activity 2.4 Regional resources and fisheries inventories prepared and disseminated. The WECAFC Fisheries Data and Statistics Working Group was among the WECAFC WGs in this intersession with extensive level of activities. The intersession activities further required a high level of collaborations with Members despite the disruptions of the global pandemic. The financial, administrative and in-kind contributions of the EU-DG MARE, NOAA, CRFM and OSPESCA, the WECAFC Secretariat and FAO-FIRMS program have been instrumental in implementing the workplan, as well as the diligent efforts of the members of the WECAFC-FIRMS Task Force in preparation of proposals. The working group conducted the following activities, with outputs such as the Data Collection and Reference Framework which is slated to be tabled at WECAFC18 as document WECAFC/XVIII/2022/9:

- A. Convene the Second meeting of the FDS-WG hereafter referenced as FDS-WG2. Due to covid-19 situation it was necessary to convene the FDS-WG2 via an online (Virtual) environment. Three sessions and a series of preparatory sessions (5) were organized in order to carry out the full complement of FDS-WG2 meeting tasks:
- Preparatory sessions (5) September 2020 - October 2020 (Virtual)
 - FDS-WG2 Session 1 (October 2020) (Virtual)
 - FDS-WG2 Extended Session (May 2021) (Virtual)
 - FDS-WG2 Conclusion Session (March 2022) (Virtual)
 - Regional Data Base (RDB) and FIRMS stocks and fisheries inventories sessions from November 2021-February (2022) (Virtual)

The main objective of the FDS-WG2 meeting was to progress refinement on the Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF) and the WECAFC List of Aquatic Species, proposal for subareas and other appendices, incorporating modifications received from member countries since the FDS-WG1 meeting.

B. Conduct intersession discussions to progress WECAFC proposals for statistical reporting.

C. Main accomplishments on advancing the work on WECAFC-FIRMS inventories of fisheries and stocks, operationalization of RDB, and capacity building initiatives.

Regarding FIRMS inventories: four Members (Dominica, Nicaragua, Suriname and St Vincent and the Grenadines) contributed to 12 additional fisheries description (fact sheets) to the 31 ones already contributed (10 countries, 36 observations). Other Members have started compiling the inventories (Barbados, Costa Rica, Guyana) or updating former data submissions (Jamaica, Saint Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago).

16. In terms of challenges by this WG, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated coordination of a virtual Second Meeting of FDS-WG spanning 2021-2022 as a follow-up to the First Meeting (May 2018). The pandemic also prevented convening one-on-one outreach meetings relating to capacity-building initiatives and in finalizing sub-area draft proposals. Due to the necessity of increasing the number of meetings held virtually in preparation for final FDS-WG2 the WG also was faced issues with funds available for required translation of documents. Additional resources will be needed to 1) further advance Members capacities to report statistics to the Regional Data Base (RDB) and FIRMS products and 2) ensure publishing and dissemination of products from FDS-WG activities.

17. Increase the availability of information on the contribution of fish to food security and the social and economic value of the fisheries sector (activity 2.6) received some attention particularly in the assessments of the fisheries sector value and the fish and fisheries products value chain. The targets of at least four countries was far met, and this was under the aegis of the Secretariat-hosted GEF projects CLME+ (Shrimp and Groundfish subproject, REBYC II LAC project, StewardFish), as well as the Unlocking the potential of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture in Africa-Fish44ACP project, being implemented in Dominican Republic and Guyana. A pilot project for the inclusion of fish in school feeding programmes in Honduras has taken place in Honduras.
17. Participate and provide advice and information to activities of partner agencies (activity 2.7) continued between the WECAFC and CRFM, OSPESCA, CLME+, IFREMER, CFMC, ICCAT, GCFI, CNFO, UNEP-CEP, SPAW-RAC, CITES, and other partners.

Technical Focus Area 3: “Strengthen regional fisheries management and best-practice approaches for fisheries and aquaculture”. Multiple initiatives were developed and activities were carried out.

18. A study was commissioned under the project *“Support to the Secretariat of WECAFC in implementing targeted actions of the 2019-2020 Workplan on improved regional fisheries governance”* on the [Review of the biological data, the stocks spatial distribution and the ecological connectivity between the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction and the Exclusive Economic Zones in the WECAFC region \(ES, FR\)](#) which also aimed to inform the strategic reorientation project. This was presented at SAGXI and can be consulted as WECAFC/XVIII/2022/Ref.42.
19. Strengthen the capacity of the Caribbean Network of Fishers Organizations (CNFO), national and primary fisherfolk organizations (Activity 3.1), received attention through activities of the Stewardfish project, the CC4Fish and the engagement in the global FAO-implemented, Sweden (SIDA)-funded project *“Creating an enabling environment for securing sustainable small-scale fisheries”*. The capacity building enabled the network to champion the promotion of the SSF Guidelines at the national and regional levels and developing related instruments such as the Regional Code of Conduct for Caribbean Fisheries (2020–2025) and seizing the opportunity under StewardFish to pilot and establish the CNFO Leadership Institute. The Institute was launched on 1 April 2020, as a collaborative effort between the CNFO and UWI-CERMES. The CNFO however needs to get more engaged in WECAFC strategic reorientation and working group processes where important governance and fisheries management issues are discussed and priorities are set.
20. Support the establishment of a regional shellfish hatchery for the Wider Caribbean (Activity 3.2) did not receive attention in the intersessional period.
21. Establishment of aquaculture demonstration activities (Activity 3.3) received attention in the WECAFC region from various FAO projects in the Caribbean, Meso- and Southern American subregions, including the CARICOM-FAO-Mexico Initiative *“Cooperation for Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience in the Caribbean”* (or *“Resilient Caribbean Initiative”* or AMEXCID project in short), funded by Mexico, the GEF funded CC4Fish project where

significant aquaponics initiatives took place especially in the Eastern Caribbean countries. A trust fund project in Mexico on Improved management of the shrimp fishery of the Northwest and training of indigenous women to culture marine algae as a means to increase their economic empowerment in Panama were the main activities reported by FAO in the meso-American members of WECAFC.

22. Development of regional aquaculture Better Management Practices (BMPs), guidelines and Codes (activity 3.4): The wider scope initiative was the FAO Regional Consultation on Development of the Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture (GSA) for the Pacific and Caribbean", 23-25 February 2021. It is also worth mentioning the engagement of WECAFC members in the Regional review on status and trends in aquaculture development in South America, Central America and the Caribbean – 2020, which was conducted in early 2020 ahead of the Global Conference on Aquaculture ([Regional review on status and trends in aquaculture development in Latin America and the Caribbean – 2020 \(fao.org\)](#)). Some projects supported the development of this activity at national level.
23. Review of fish supply chain performance and increased application of fish quality and safety measures (Activity 3.5) received some attention from WECAFC and FAO projects in this biennium, through the value chain analysis and opportunities for value addition in targeted fisheries and in aquaculture supply chains (FISH4ACP project), implementation of Comprehensive Fishery Improvement Project, support to improved data collection and product traceability, food safety including FAO virtual workshop for Latin America and the Caribbean on bivalve shellfish production (November 2021) which aims at capacity building to support Responsible Authorities and Official laboratories, in the production of microbiologically safe bivalve shellfish for domestic consumption or for international trade. National level assistance occurred in testing possibilities of ciguatera toxins.
24. Sustainable Brazil-Guianas Shrimp and Groundfish fisheries (Activity 3.6) received significant attention from the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem (CLME) project of the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The earlier work by FAO, in collaboration with CANARI, CERMES and CRFM received follow-up with the CLME+ project “Catalyzing Implementation of the Strategic Action Programme for the Sustainable Management of shared Living Marine Resources in the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems”. The CLME+ sub-project on shrimp and groundfish hosted by WECAFC Secretariat since March 2018 ended in March 2021.
25. The joint WECAFC/IFREMER/CRFM Working Group on shrimp and groundfish had two meetings during this intersession, both organised with support from the FAO CLME+ Sub-project on Shrimp and Groundfish of the North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystem (NBSLME) and the Project on Sustainable Management of Bycatch in Latin America and Caribbean Trawl Fisheries (REBYC-II LAC). At the third meeting in Paramaribo, Suriname 26-27 November 2019, an update on stock status of shrimp and groundfish species for each country in the Northern Brazil-Guianas shelf was presented and showed decreasing trends in apparent abundance. The assessed stocks appeared to be fully exploited or overexploited. Working Group participants reviewed and discussed the draft regional strategy for bycatch management in the WECAFC Area developed by the REBYC II LAC project. Finally, they also discussed the needs and priorities to combat IUU fishing in the Northern Brazil-Guianas-shelf. Further details on this were presented at SAGXI.

26. The fourth virtual meeting Virtual, 18-19 November 2020: The final draft of the Sub-regional EAF Strategy and Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) for the shrimp and groundfish fisheries of the North Brazil-Guianas Shelf was reviewed. Among the issues discussed were options for the institutional mechanisms, including a technical and a decision-making body, required for implementation of the strategy and FMP. Representatives of Brazil, Guyana, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago presented an overview of the current status and outlook of their respective fisheries and national FMPs. While progress has been made toward management of the shrimp and groundfish fisheries, several challenges were encountered and some stocks continued to be overexploited.

27. Improved transboundary management of Caribbean Spiny Lobster (Activity 3.7) receives support from the CLME+ sub-project executed by OSPESCA and from NOAA. The main achievements of the joint OSPESCA/CRFM/WECAFC/CFMC Working Group on spiny lobster during the intersessional period have been the compilation of the most important characteristic aspects of the fishery and management in the countries with lobster fisheries in the whole WECAFC area in the MARPLESCA plan. Thus, allowing the establishment of a systematic process for the management of the Caribbean spiny lobster (*Panulirus argus*) fishery in the countries where it is distributed, within a framework of sustainable use, promoting ecological balance and social and economic benefits for stakeholders.). The group developed its workplan for 2022-2023. The difficulties experienced during the intersessional period were closely linked to the lack of continuous monitoring of the working group activities, due to the departure of the former convenor in early 2020 and the entry of a new convenor in mid-2021. A period of a year and a half was maintained without coordination, in which there is no record of the background and where there was no transition period between one and the other convenor, four years elapsed between the first and second meeting, thus preventing a more constant communication with the members of the group. On the other hand, the termination of the projects that funded the spiny lobster activities implemented by OSPESCA.

28. Improved transboundary management of the Flyingfish in the Eastern Caribbean (activity 3.8). The new FlyingFish-Dolphinfish established at WECAFC17 did not meet as anticipated as it was supposed to have its first meeting in-person, which could not be possible due to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 global pandemic. It is foreseen to have its first meeting in January 2023.

29. Increased knowledge of and experience with offshore moored FADs (activity 3.9). The mFADs working group last met virtually on 14-16 February 2022. The meeting was made possible through generous financial assistance provided by the European Union's Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG-MARE), through Trust Fund project GCP/SLC/217/EC "Support to the Secretariat of WECAFC in implementing targeted actions of the 2019-2020 Workplan on improved regional fisheries governance". Its key objective was the review and discussion of several documents, that included (1) the WECAFC Regional MFAD Fishery management Plan, (2) the Guide for improved monitoring of MFADs and improved assessment of impacts of MFADs on stocks, and (3) the Guide for the development of local MFAD fishery management plans. Another important objective of the meeting was the review and discussion of the Terms of Reference (ToR), Workplan for the 2022-2024 period, and Recommendations of the Joint Working Group. These were approved, in principle, by meeting participants, were presented at SAGXI and are slated to be reviewed for endorsement by WECAFC18. The report is in the preparation process for publication. The manuals on best practices in the fisheries using MFADs prepared in 2015/2016, published and

disseminated by CRFM with support from IFREMER and the Caribbean Billfish Project are expected to be reviewed and updated, then translated and published in the last half of 2022.

30. As challenges, the prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 did have a negative impact on the development of key deliverables of the working groups such as the WECAFC Regional Caribbean Moored FAD fishery management plan and the guide for monitoring of MFADs. The consultant was unable to conduct in-country visits which are generally advantageous in providing context to actual situations on the ground. Additionally, the fourth working group meeting was meant to be held in a face-to-face or hybrid in the Commonwealth of Dominica from 15-16 February 2022 ;however, due to the persistence of the pandemic, a decision was taken to hold the meeting virtually. Additionally, finalization of MFAD manuals on best practices on (1) fishing and business strategies for sustainable MFAD fisheries, (2) safety and working conditions of MFAD fishers, and (3) governance of MFAD fisheries were not achieved and will be addressed in the next intersession. Finally, the exit of IFREMER from a leadership role in coordination of the WG is notable. IFREMER had played a leading role since the inception of the WG in 2001 hence, the absence of the vast experience, technical expertise and resources of this agency has created a void.
31. Strengthened research and management capacity for Queen Conch in the Caribbean (Activity 3.10). Following WECAFC 17, the CFMC/OSPESCA/ WECAFC/CRFM Working Group on Queen Conch held its fourth and fifth meetings in San Juan, Puerto Rico during 16-17 December 2019 and 13-14 December 2021 respectively.
32. Discussions of the fourth meeting focused on strengthening national, regional and international efforts and uplifting responsibilities and commitments for the management and conservation and trade in queen conch and related or interacting species or fisheries in the Western Central Atlantic. Participants also considered how to strengthen the livelihoods of the people depending on these resources by following the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, and in accordance with management goals agreed in the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan, which remains a matter of priority.

The meeting adopted five recommendations on:

1. Improving Data Collection/Transparency;
2. Improving Diver safety;
3. Study on Domestic consumption of queen conch;
4. Updating the Queen Conch Stock Assessment Manual; and
5. Preparation of a CITES Resolution on queen conch for consideration at the next meeting of the CITES Animals Committee and next meeting of WECAFC.

Additionally, the Scientific, Statistical and Technical Advisory Group of the Queen Conch Working Group (QCWG/SSTAG) offered several priority recommendations that were endorsed by the group including:

1. Increasing efforts that would result in better country QC landings reports using the new Conversion Factor (CF) (dirty weight) by processing grades.
2. A proposal to determine the genomic connectivity across the Caribbean using the SNPs technique that will be developed, capitalizing on the significant support already received from University of Rhode Island.
3. Two sub-groups will continue addressing recommendations needed for simplifying the process of generating NDFs, integrating the 2012 QC Working Group recommendations. One will work with the update of the NDF flow chart, while the other group will develop and assess the merits of potential scientific criteria that could be used, with respect to developing simplified NDFs.

4. QC socio-economic and reproductive aspects are among the priority research areas recommended to be developed in the short term.

33. The Fifth meeting of the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES Working Group on Queen Conch (QCWG) was held using a hybrid format in San Juan, Puerto Rico and online during 13-14 December 2021. Discussions focused on the progress made towards implementation of the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan and recommendations adopted at the 17th meeting of the Commission in 2019. Participants learned about collaborative work on queen conch, especially at the regional level, and an overview of the intersessional activities undertaken. These include development of training modules for estimating population densities and annual catch quotas of queen conch, FAO's initiatives towards decent work in the fisheries sector, an FAO study on the health and safety of dive fisheries for key species in the region, a genetic project to identify stocks and design and implement a protocol to trace illegally harvested queen conch in trade, a collaborative Blue BioTrade project, aimed at improving sustainability and traceability for queen conch in several WECAFC member countries, and development of user manual and educational materials for queen conch aquaculture in the Caribbean.

The meeting adopted several recommendations, including the following key recommendations:

1. Genetic Toolkit to Trace Illegal Queen Conch in Trade;
2. Prioritize Genetic Identification of Queen Conch - Establish 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 illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing of queen conch in the region for potential endorsement by the Commission at its 18th meeting.
3. Simplified Guidance for Making Non-Detriment Findings (NDFs)
4. Training on Queen Conch Stock Assessment Modules –
5. Promotion of Decent Work and Health and Safety in the Fisheries Sector

34. The QCWG also endorsed the following recommendations for the Working Group members, QCWG/SSTAG, sub-regional partners, and other organizations, as appropriate:

1. Continue monitoring implementation of the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan and provide advice as needed to address any identified gaps.
2. Report on progress on implementation of relevant CITES and WECAFC decisions and outcomes of the QCWG at relevant CITES and WECAFC meetings.
3. Continue 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.
4. Support fishers and fisheries administrations in addressing the decent work, employment, and safety-at-sea problems in the queen conch fisheries, with the engagement of fisher organizations to the greatest extent possible.
5. Support publication of FAO's study on the health and safety for key species in fisheries using scuba diving in the WECAFC region and its proposed project.
6. Elaborate a series of technical documents on conversion factors that need to be applied and updated when Members report queen conch production and trade data across the region.
7. Conduct two pilot studies for determination of fishery production as the basis for further analysis of the long-term sustainability of queen conch and its associated fisheries.

8. Expand the collection of socio-economic information to analyze the contribution of queen conch fisheries to income, livelihoods, and trade.
 9. Investigate and consider the impacts of climate change on the queen conch resources and the fishery.
 10. Investigate the ecological and biological impacts of pollution on queen conch resources.
 11. Determine priority next steps to implement education and outreach as stated in the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan.
 12. Consult with the Blue BioTrade Project on [joint] activities to improve the sustainability and value chain of queen conch.
35. In terms of challenges, the WG reported a lack of financial resources for fisheries data collection, field research, and enforcement programmes related to queen conch at the national level. The COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters also resulted in a disruption of activities related to the conservation and management of queen conch. Countries also continued to experience difficulties in completing NDFs as required for the export of queen conch under CITES. In terms of mitigation, the QCWG Task Force met a number of times during the 2019-2021 period to support the implementation of activities as set out in 2019-2021 workplan.
36. Improved management and conservation of billfish fisheries in the Caribbean (activity 3.11), Due to late appointment of a convener and COVID-19 hindrances, the WECAFC/CRFM/CFMC/OSPESCA Working Group on Recreational Fisheries did not have any activity during the intersession. The Regional management and conservation plan for billfish could therefore not be reviewed and finalized in involving the mandated and other management organizations, nor could others such as increasing the Data and information availability on recreational fisheries catches and landings and Sustaining the Outputs from the Caribbean Billfish Project be addressed.
37. Improved management and conservation of sharks (Activity 3.12).
- The WECAFC/OSPESCA/CRFM/CITES/CRFM Working Group on Shark Conservation and Management held its second meeting virtually, 20-22 October 2021. The preparation of this meeting, including the agenda items and experts and the review of the key background document, was an extremely valuable interactive process involving the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT).
- The purpose of the second meeting was to contribute to the conservation, responsible management and sustainable use of sharks and rays in the Caribbean region, through the finalization of the Regional Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks and Rays in the WECAFC Area. It is noted that the plan will place particular attention on conservation of those shark and ray species that are listed under CITES Appendix II. During this meeting a Task Force was established. Since October 2021, the Task Force focused all its efforts on the finalization of the Regional Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks, Rays and Chimaeras in the WECAFC area, which was then reviewed by SAGXI and now tabled at WECAFC18 as WECAFC/XVIII/2022/14.
38. Improved management and conservation of spawning aggregations of grouper and snapper (activity 3.14). In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and its disruptive effect on collaborative work, the 2018-2020 workplan confirmed at that meeting was internally updated by the CFMC/WECAFC/OSPESCA/CRFM Working Group on Spawning Aggregations (SAWG) to include new activities to be implemented through 2021 as activity timelines shifted.

39. These new activities largely expanded the ongoing work of the SAWG, incorporating recommendations for activities generated during its third meeting in December 2019. Other line items involved adaptations to facilitate ongoing remote collaboration and consultation with working group member representatives and observers, driving forward the production of a draft regional fisheries management plan and a regional communication strategy. The critically endangered Nassau Grouper and the commercially important Mutton Snapper are commonly targeted and well known aggregating fish species, and were used in these outputs as focal points to promote formal and informal conservation action. The financial and administrative contributions of CFMC to the production of these outputs must be gratefully acknowledged here, as well as the diligent efforts of the members of the SAWG Task Force in preparation of proposals, leading the update of working group documents, coordination of meetings and other stakeholder engagements, and implementation of the communications strategy.
40. The SAWG held two meetings intersessionally, the third and fourth (virtual) meetings respectively held in San Juan, Puerto Rico, 18-19 December 2019, and virtually from 9 to 10 November 2020. A key objective of the third meeting was to advance development of the draft *Regional Fish Spawning Aggregation Draft Fishery Management Plan (FSAMP)*. This document, which focuses primarily on the commercially important Nassau Grouper and Mutton Snapper, is intended to outline guidance for best practices and catalyze improved management of aggregating fish species by member States. The referenced management plan was adopted by the Working Group subject to inclusion of recommendations provided at this meeting. An updated version was then produced by the contractors by the end of March 2020, to continue its formal adoption process. In addition, participants learned about the achievements of the ongoing communications strategy for Fish Spawning Aggregations Conservation “Recovering Big Fish” and its next steps. Generated products became available for broad distribution. Following recommendations from the WECAFC 17th session, the Working Group agreed to conduct a regional survey to assess the potential inclusion of parrotfishes within the Spawning Aggregation Working Group. CFMC supported the parrotfish studies and production of a technical document: <https://www.fao.org/wecafc/publications/detail/en/c/1469227/>. The meeting report was published: <https://www.fao.org/wecafc/publications/detail/en/c/1473198/>
41. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic universally necessitated the adoption of virtual meeting strategies in order for work to continue. Nonetheless, wide and active participation to the fourth meeting was received from a broad assemblage of stakeholders. The meeting provided an opportunity for review of the updated management FSAMP, as well as updates on the regional communication strategy and the implementation of Recommendation WECAFC/XVII/2019/24. Discussion of the outputs of the parrotfish surveys and keen interest during deliberations regarding the mandate of the SAWG with respect to this family of fish resulted in the establishment of a collaborative framework with the SPAW Scientific Technical Advisory Committee (SPAW-STAC). The SAWG resolved only to consider parrotfish species which reproduce solely in spawning aggregations, deciding that the management and conservation of parrotfish in general was more appropriate to the mandate of the SPAW-STAC. The report can be accessed on <https://www.fao.org/wecafc/publications/detail/en/c/1473198/>.
42. [The SAWG prepared](#) a collaborative document, draft Regional Fish Spawning Aggregation Fishery Management Plan: Focus on Nassau Grouper and Mutton Snapper (FSAMP), which has been an extensive intersessional effort by a dedicated team of WG members spanning

multiple years, its content curated with a view to “stop and reverse the declines associated with uncontrolled exploitation of vulnerable fish spawning aggregations”. The adopted FSAMP by the SAWG was presented at the Seminar series of the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Division (NFI-Seminars) on 17 February 2021, and to the 74th Meeting of the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute in November 2021 reaching an even more broad and diverse list of stakeholders. It was reviewed by SAG XI and is slated to be tabled at WECAFC18 as document WECAFC/XVIII/2022/10.

43. The SAWG successfully launched its communications strategy in 2021. Titled “Big Fish” to evoke the size of the Nassau Grouper and Mutton Snapper and their aggregations, the size of the stakeholder group which is financially and dependent on healthy aggregations, and the magnitude of the fisheries crisis associated with their decline, it will involve a trilingual, multifaceted approach targeting the general public, the fishing community and decision makers. Two short films were released in 2021 - “Nassau Grouper Against the Clock” (https://youtu.be/45_OIs2jJ8I) and “F2F Advice: Fish Smart” (<https://youtu.be/M87V4yEBENM>) - and future outputs include a 1 hour film, a digital hub, and radio kits to equip local champions to promote fish spawning aggregation (FSA) conservation.
44. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated coordination of a virtual Fourth Meeting of SAWG in 2020 as a follow-up to the Third Meeting. The pandemic also delayed implementation of multiple elements of the communications strategy which required travel to shoot on location, including the one hour feature film “The Secret Crown”. Filming was delayed by a year, and finally proceeded in February 2022 under a battery of preventative biosafety measures. Production of the film is anticipated to end in Fall 2022.
45. The Working Group was unable to secure funding to support some of its 2018-2021 objectives within the program period (listed below). Multiple grant applications have been submitted in late 2021-early 2022, with a view to financing these activities, which include:
 - a. A regional cooperative monitoring protocol, database and data management system to characterize and monitor FSAs;
 - b. Regional and national status and needs assessment of FSA sites in the WECAFC region; and
 - c. Provision of technical capacity to identify FSAs in regions where FSAs have not been documented or characterized (e.g. Eastern Caribbean).
46. Recently, a draft concept note, prepared in 2021, was approved for funding by the EU DG Mare to support the implementation by members of the FSAMP to be endorsed in July. The proposed estimated USD 230 000 project would run over 14 months, tentatively from the last quarter of 2022.

Technical Focus Area 4:

47. Under Management Focus Area 4 “Create an enabling environment within the WECAFC Secretariat to support the achievement of the goals and objective of the Commission”, the following activities were undertaken.
48. Organization of the 17th session of the Commission and the 11th SAG meetings in 2020 (Activities 4.1 and 4.2): The report of the 17th Session, endorsed following an interactive

review process, was sent to all members. The publication is available as reference document WECAFC/XVIII/2022/Ref.1. The 11th Session of SAG was held virtually on 25-27 April, 2022. Besides five of the seven members of SAG, more than 30 observers and conveners of the 11 ad hoc working groups attended the session. A full report is under preparation, while a summary report is accessible as WECAFC/XVIII/2022/6. Participants developed an updated workplan of the RWG-IUU and elaborated recommendations (appendix 2) for submission to the WECAFC Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) on fisheries governance, transshipment and information sharing.

49. Inception of the preparation of the organization of the 18th session of the Commission in 2021 (Activity 4.3). Given the unprecedented disruptions imposed by the COVID-19 global pandemic, and for deliberations on comprehensive activities of the 2019-2020 Programme of work, the biennial plenary of the Commission had to be rescheduled to 2022, after consultation with the host country and WECAFC members.
50. The Strategic Reorientation of WECAFC (activity 4.4) received follow-up by the Ad hoc Intersessional Working Group (IWG) established by WECAFC17, which is tasked with implementing the Roadmap for progressing towards the development of a model for a regional fisheries management entity or arrangement in the WECAFC area. A full update on the strategic reorientation process, including renewed commitment and processes, prepared by the IWG co-chairs is presented in WECAFC/XVIII/2022/19.
51. Facilitate the organization of (joint) Working Group meetings and workshops (activity 4.5). The WECAFC Secretariat together with FAO colleagues, regional partners and members organized 11 meetings of seven out of the 11 working groups of the Commission. Three out of the four WGs that have not met contributed to at least one intersessional activity, either the preparation of tailored TORs or provision of inputs to the strategic planning process. Detailed intersessional reports, including the recommendations and resolutions, workplan, any management plan or plan of action, strategy, etc. prepared by each of those 10 WGs were presented and reviewed by SAG11 and summarized in WECAFC/XVIII/2022/6.
52. Develop projects and seek funding for long-term effective functioning of the Commission, implementation of its biennial programmes of work and prioritized projects (activity 4.6). The mobilization of resources was a renewed high priority by WECAFC and its secretariat. Despite the global pandemic projects and programmes in support of the core work of the Commission were developed or approved since the last Plenary of the Commission. In terms of new projects in the 2019-2021 period, supported by WG conveners and leads of thematic task forces, the Secretariat prepared proposals and with funding by the Regular Programme funds from the FAO subregional office's allocation. Most of them materialized into active projects now being implemented. The European Union is by far the largest donor of resources in direct support of the Secretariat's coordination efforts for the implementation of the agreed programme of work, as portrayed in the following projects under the oversight of WECAFC Secretariat:.

GCP/SLC/020/EC- *Support to the activities of the transversal WECAFC, CRFM, OSPESCA, IFREMER and CFMC Fisheries Data and Statistics Working Group (FDS-WG):* The USD 180 800 grant has a focus on three main activities: the organization of the second WG meeting, the operationalization of the WECAFC regional database by developing national capacity to upload data in the system, and finally, the reinforcement of national capacities in fisheries data and statistics.

GCP/SLC/217/EC- *"Support to the Secretariat of WECAFC in implementing targeted actions of the 2019-2020 Workplan on improved regional fisheries governance"*: This USD 278,550 project supports two activities within the approved 2019-2020 Programme of Work of WECAFC (Activity 3.9) incorporates "Increased knowledge of and experience with offshore FADs (Fish Aggregating Devices) in the WECAFC region" and "Evidence of the implementation of the Roadmap towards the preparation of the Second Preparatory". It therefore benefits the moored FADs WG and the Commission's strategic reorientation process by establishing the relevant information and scientific knowledge base.

GCP/SLC/219/EC- *"WECAFC - Strengthening the Scientific basis (FAO)- Support to the secretariat of WECAFC for an effective implementation of priority actions of the Programme of Work agreed at the 17th Session of the Commission"*. The overall objective is to strengthen the WECAFC Secretariat's coordinating role of connected undertakings on fisheries governance, with the majority of the USD 185,361.45 grant targeting the Regional Steering Committee for the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA) 2022 and the second component in support of the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES Working Group on Queen Conch to advance data collection efforts for sustainable queen conch fisheries and conservation management.

53. The above projects added to another ongoing core project of WECAFC, the GCP/SLC/016/EC- *"Support to implementation of the Regional Plan of Action to deter and eliminate Illegal, Unreported"* USD197,531.80, which was instrumental in the development and endorsement by WECAFC17 of the 2019-2029 Regional Plan of Action to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU Fishing (RPOA-IUU) in the WECAFC. It also enabled the virtual logistics of the fourth WG meeting held 8-9 September 2020 and the 23rd October 2020 meeting of the IWG as part of its second component on the strategic reorientation of the Commission. This project has been extended several times, given the uncertainty around the dates of the Second Preparatory meeting for the Strategic Reorientation. It is active until 31 December 2022, assuming that the dynamics within the IWG and drafting group would enable a meeting beforehand.
54. The indirect financial and in-kind support to WECAFC Secretariat by the NOAA-Fisheries through CFMC must also be acknowledged. This indeed materialized through the organization of the meetings of the queen conch and spawning aggregations working groups, the funding of studies, generation of information for informed SSTAG discussions and the commitment to support the last established WG of WECAFC, the Flyingfish-Dolphinfish WG which will hold its first meeting in early 2023.
55. Partnerships established with institutions in the environment and other sectors (Activity 4.7). Partnership was addressed throughout the intersessional period, whether with the traditional partners within the CLME+ SAP framework or beyond. Following is a summary of the relevant actions:
56. With CRFM, OSPESCA and other IGOs within the SAP CLME+ framework
 - The Interim Fisheries Coordination Mechanism (IFCM) had three meetings since the last Plenary of WECAFC, with one organized on 19 July 2019 in Miami a day following the end of the Commission meeting. Among the agenda items was the follow-up on outputs from WECAC 17, which featured the deliberations on the way forward regarding the strategic reorientation. The meeting agreed to the consideration of the issue of WECAFC reform for the deliberations of the Second Joint CRFM-OSPESCA Ministerial Meeting, planned for 2 October 2019. In her presentation, the Secretariat of WECAFC provided an update on the

process until WECAFC17, with the landmark achievement at the March 2019 Barbados meeting, and the roadmap towards the Second Preparatory meeting. The meeting ended with a call to CRFM and OSPESCA members to collaborate on the strategic reorientation process.

- The Secretariat has attended other technical and governing bodies meetings of CRFM (Forum, FISHCOM working group, Ministerial Council) and events connected to the Interim Coordination Mechanism (ICM) for the Sustainable Management, Use and Protection of shared Living Marine Resources in the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems, gathering other IGOs in addition to WECAFC, OSPESCA and CRFM, i.e. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO-IOC), The Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), The Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD), and The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat. The development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the permanent coordination mechanism was a sustained intersessional activity, documented in WECAFC/XVIII/2022/27.
- The partnership with CRFM and OSPESCA has been expanded beyond the IFCM or ICM, consistent with the 8 June 2020 Too Big To Ignore virtual event on COVID-19 and Smallscale Fisheries in the Caribbean: Impacts, Solutions and Adapting to an Uncertain Future. In her presentation, WECAFC Secretary underscored the importance of strengthening existing partnerships (e.g. with CRFM, CANARI, CNFO, CONFEPESCA, UWI-CERMES, GCFI, Fisheries Authorities, NFOs, etc.) and collaborating with key partners/stakeholders in the region to more effectively build a resilient SSF/Fisheries sector to deal with such external shocks. This was instrumental in the establishment of the IYAFA 2022 Coordination Committee to buttress coordinated actions in the celebration of the international year. The Coordination Committee is comprised of representatives from CANARI, CNFO, CRFM, GCFI, OSPESCA, UWI-CERMES, but it remained open to additional members being co-opted, if they signalled their intention to join.

57. With RFMOs and other arrangements in the region

This refers mainly to fostering collaboration and regional cooperation with ICCAT, NAFO, COPPESAALC, Sargasso Sea Commission, through mutual participation to thematic, technical and annual meetings. Under this specific point, falls the efforts made in initiating the implementation of the Commission's recommendation regarding the collaboration with ICCAT. The report of the initiatives taken to implement the Recommendation in paragraph 118 of the proceedings of the 17th Session, about a MoU with ICCAT is presented in WECAFC/XVIII/2022/27.

OTHER ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED BASED ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE DELIBERATIONS OF THE 17TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION

58. Facilitation of the activities of the Executive Committee of the Commission

The former Chair of the SAG initiated in October 2019 the review of the terms of reference (TORs) of SAG, as an effort to address the need expressed by the Commission at its 17th session, to revise them, to improve the SAG's methodology of work, and to reinforce its composition and its coordination with the ad hoc working groups, other subsidiary bodies and stakeholders. The process subsequently headed by the Chairperson of the Commission engaged WECAFC members in the review from June 2020 to February 2021, before an electronic endorsement of the interim

terms of reference and a new group of seven members was formed following a call for expression of interest launched in March 2021.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Paragraph 40 “.....*In addition, the Commission requested the Secretariat to ensure that all adopted recommendations and resolutions be made available in a dedicated space on the WECAFC website to facilitate tracking, as well as Members’ efforts to implement them and identify follow up actions*”

Para

Paragraph 97: “...It was suggested to publish a list of planned events and working group focal points on the WECAFC website and ensure a timely update of the calendar”

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

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

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

- Reporting on the status of implementation of resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly (specifically resolution 73/229 entitled, “Towards the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea for present and future generations”), mainstreaming WECAFC-related information into the Briefs on Line for the FAO Director General,
- Corporate newsletters (RSN/Regional Fishery Body Secretariats’ Network, Technical network on Small-scale Fisheries, and FAN/FAO Aquaculture Newsletter),
- The Western Tropical Atlantic Region Scientific Priorities for the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030 and engage and identify new and expanded stakeholders and partnerships and annual meetings of the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute.