

Recommendation WECAFC/17/2019/24 “ON THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF SPAWNING AGGREGATIONS AND AGGREGATING SPECIES”

The Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC):

RECALLING that the objective of the Commission is to promote the effective conservation, management and development of the living marine resources within the area of competence of the Commission, in accordance with the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication and to address common problems of fisheries management and development faced by members of the Commission;

REAFFIRMING its commitment to support management and implementation of regional strategies and regulations to protect spawning aggregations and aggregating species through the establishment of the WECAFC Working Group on Spawning Aggregations (SAWG) at the 14th session of WECAFC in 2012.

NOTING that stocks of many species of groupers and snappers in the Caribbean have declined significantly in the last three decades, some of their fish spawning aggregations (FSAs) have declined or disappeared and that immediate action is required to stop further reductions.

MINDFUL that many fishers' livelihoods are dependent on harvest from spawning aggregations and the fisheries that they support, but also that these fishers have experience and expertise that could be invaluable in the conservation, management, and possible tourism at such sites and that the development of economic alternatives for affected fishers should accompany efforts to halt fishing during spawning periods or close areas where spawning occurs.

REAFFIRMING the recommendations of the Declaration of Miami (2013) issued at the 1st CFMC/WECAFC/OSPESCA/CRFM Working Group on Spawning Aggregations.

REAFFIRMING and supporting the recommendations and the workplan from the 2nd meeting of the CFMC/WECAFC/OSPESCA/CRFM Working Group on Spawning Aggregations.

NOTING members' commitment to the 2018 SAWG workplan, various planned actions and that activities are well underway,

COMMITTED to individually and collectively taking measures and actions to further improve the management and conservation of fish spawning aggregations and species that aggregate to spawn in the Wider Caribbean Region

ADOPTS in conformity with the provision of Article 6 (h) of the Revised Statutes of the WECAFC the **RECOMMENDATION** that:

1. WECAFC members strongly encourage Working group members to identify and determine the status and timing of all known Fish Spawning Aggregation (FSA) sites (particularly for snapper and grouper).
2. WECAFC, CFMC, and as appropriate CRFM, OSPESCA, and CEP-SPAW support the development of a regional Fisheries Management Plan (for national adoption throughout the region) for species forming FSAs, with a focus on Nassau grouper and mutton snapper, in accordance with the best available science, for presentation to the WECAFC Spawning Aggregations Working Group in 2019-2020.
3. WECAFC Secretariat and Members invest resources and support the standardization of existing FSA monitoring programmes ensuring harmonization with the Regional Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF) to share data designed to track the status and trends of aggregations and the species that form them and thus contribute to local, national and regional management efforts.
4. WECAFC members call for international action to protect Fish Spawning Aggregations (FSAs), including strengthening enforcement of closed seasons, closed areas, and species-specific sales bans during the closed season.
5. WECAFC members agree upon and adopt a regional seasonal closure for all commercial and recreational fishing of Nassau grouper (*Epinephelus striatus*), *at least* for the period 1 December – 31 March and that Members will not permit export or commercial sale of Nassau grouper or its products (e.g. roe, fillets) for the duration of the seasonal closure.
6. WECAFC Secretariat support an assessment of the economic value of FSAs and the socio-economic impact of proposed management measures to inform future management decision-making.
7. Members offer training to fishers (displaced due to FSA closures) in monitoring, research, assessment, and suitable economic alternatives. Fishers and other stakeholders to be involved in cooperative research and FSA management.
8. The WECAFC Secretariat support a regional outreach and communication strategy on conservation and management of FSAs.
9. WECAFC members prioritize FSAs by species and areas or monitoring, conservation, and management based on status, vulnerability and Members' institutional capacity.
10. The WECAFC Secretariat, together with the Members of WECAFC, seek to mobilize resources to assist the Members in the implementation of priority research, monitoring, enforcement, management and conservation of FSAs and the species that form them.