

Recommendation WECAFC/17/2019/21 amendment to Recommendation WECAFC/15/2014/2 “ON THE SUSTAINABILITY OF FISHERIES USING MOORED FISH AGGREGATING DEVICES IN THE WECAFC AREA”

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 address common problems of fisheries management and development faced by WECAFC members;

RECALLING the conclusions and proposals of the first and second meetings of the WECAFC ad hoc working group on the development of sustainable moored¹ fish aggregating device (MFAD) fishing in the Lesser Antilles (Martinique, 8-11 October 2001 and Guadeloupe, 5–10 July 2004); as well as with those of the recent ICCAT-IATTC-IOTC joint Tuna-RFMO Fish Aggregating Device (FAD) Working Group meeting (Madrid April 2017) providing new and significant technological and scientific insights regarding the use of FADs in tuna fisheries;

REAFFIRMING its commitments, made at the 14th session of WECAFC, through establishing the IFREMER/WECAFC Working Group on Development of Sustainable MFAD Fishing in the Lesser Antilles. In this respect the 15th session agreed to expand the Working Group into a joint Working Group on (MFADs) in which WECAFC, JICA, IFREMER and CRFM participated;

RECOGNIZING the conclusions and recommendations of the CRFM-JICA CARIFICO/ WECAFC- IFREMER MAGDELESA Workshop on MFAD fishery Management, which was held in St Vincent and the Grenadines, 9-11 December 2013;

RECOGNIZING the important scientific research results pertaining behavior of target and bycatch species associated with FADS and capacity building carried out on FADs by the EU funded MAGDELESA project, as well as the pilot activities on FADs conducted under the CRFM-JICA project on the "Formulation of a Master Plan on sustainable use of fisheries resources for coastal community development in the Caribbean";

RECOGNIZING also the potential contribution that offshore pelagic fisheries may contribute to food and nutrition security, poverty alleviation, income, and employment for present and future generations in the Caribbean;

CONSIDERING that the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) issued at its 23rd regular meeting, held in South Africa, November 18-25, 2013, a recommendation (13-01) amending the recommendation on a multi-annual Conservation and Management Program for

¹ For purposes of this document, moored FAD is the same as anchored FAD.

Bigeye and Yellowfin tunas, which binds a number of WECAFC and CRFM members in terms of FAD fisheries by industrial fleets catching these tunas;

WHILE CONCERNED for the status of significant levels of exploitation of large pelagic resources exerted by several nations and the deficiencies in enforcement and communications recently (April 2017) expressed by Joint ICCAT-IATTC-IOTTC FAD Working Group regarding 21 regulatory protocols on FADs;

NOTING the ongoing effort of the CRFM through its pelagics fisheries Working Group meetings and in collaboration with the CLME, to improve conservation and management of the offshore pelagic resources;

RECOGNIZING the significant contribution of the CRFM 2015 Sub-regional Management Plan for FAD Fisheries in the Eastern Caribbean emphasizing on objectives and works necessary to improve MFAD fisheries management in the Caribbean;

RECOGNIZING the need of implementing CRFM 2015 Sub-regional Management Plan for FAD Fisheries in the Eastern Caribbean with critical considerations on the status of exploitation of the targeted resources as dictated by ICCAT and CFRM resource assessments;

REAFFIRMING the need for further action by all interested parties to ensure the long-term sustainable use and management of the offshore pelagic fisheries resources in the region based on an ecosystem approach to fisheries that considers proper dimension of regional MFAD fisheries development under conditions of fully utilized resources availability in the WECAFC region;

REAFFIRMING also its commitment to promote the use of co-management and other participatory approaches involving all affected parties in the development and implementation of relevant policies and programmes;

NOTING the concerns of the WECAFC/OSPESCA/CRFM/CFMC Working Group on Recreational Fisheries about the billfish stocks in the Caribbean and the untapped value of this resource in terms of catch-and-release fisheries; and considering the noticeable dominance of blue marlin as the most impacted species in MFAD fisheries in the region;

NOTING that the MFAD fishery in the Lesser Antilles has grown substantially in the last ten years, apparently increasing catches of pelagic species but also catches of vulnerable and already overexploited stocks of species; and adding the need to regulate MFAD numbers and MFAD density to avoid adverse economic consequences;

REAFFIRMING its commitment to the application of the precautionary approach, which establishes that lack of scientific evidence should not be used as a reason for not taking management measures for the conservation of fishery resources and securing sustainable fisheries;

ACKNOWLEDGING the good efforts of various WECAFC and CRFM members to license MFADs fishers, prepare legislation for MFAD fishery,

ensure disaggregated data collection and analysis in terms of MFAD fishery, encourage best-practice design and training in MFAD construction and use, promote safety-at-sea when fishing with MFADs, reduce conflicts over the use of MFAD, notify maritime authorities of MFADs locations, establish co-management regimes for MFAD fishery and promoting the proper maintenance of MFADs;

NOTING that the exchange of information between researchers, fisheries managers and fishers on MFADs fishery has improved in recent years and needs to be strengthened;

RECOGNIZING that the ongoing development of MFAD fisheries in the WECAFC area provides new opportunities for income generation, livelihoods and contributes to food security, as well as may reduce the pressure on coastal and reef fish stocks;

FURTHER RECOGNIZING the need to improve data and information to reduce uncertainties to stock assessment methodologies currently used and to monitor the long term impacts of these fisheries on the stocks especially recognizing that MFAD catch rates (CPUE) are indicators of biomass aggregation by MFADs, which may not reflect relative abundance of the wild stocks; *CONSIDERING* the need to conduct more research related to the potential impact of MFADs on the migration patterns, size/age/sex structures and compositions of stocks, change in yields per recruit and other biological effects due to the conspicuous presence of juvenile tuna species in MFADs, as well as on the currently used concept of CPUE for stock assessment and management purposes, co-management options, social and economic aspects, environmental and climate change, fishing techniques and technologies;

NOTING the issues on access to resources via MFADs fisheries, and property rights claims and disagreements on MFAD aggregated resources;

NOTING the economic impact of natural phenomena, such as strong hurricanes, on the destruction of MFADs and the lack of reporting of MFAD numbers, locations, lifespan and replacement;

CONSIDERING IFREMER conclusions that species diversity associated with MFADs varies according with regions within the WECAFC area as well as seasonality of the catch rates of target and bycatch species;

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

1. WECAFC Members prepare (if relevant) national level MFAD fisheries development and MFAD management plans that consider status of exploitation of targeted and bycatch species as determined by ICCAT and CRFM stock assessment results.
2. WECAFC Members adopt appropriate legislation in support of a sustainable MFAD fishery adhering to the FAO Code of Conduct if insufficient technical and scientific data are available for proper management of MFADs at this time.

3. WECAFC Members standardize as far as possible MFAD protocols that could generate compatible MFAD fishery statistics using standard terminology (as determined by the Working Group on MFADs) for the different varieties of MFAD fisheries in the WECAFC area and report in an agreed format on their total catch (i.e. landings and discards) and effort data in FAO Area 31 to the Working Group on MFADs in support of ongoing research, decision making and management processes at national and regional level.
4. WECAFC Members aim to:
 - a) Prevent the unauthorized transshipment at sea of MFAD caught fish in the WECAFC area.
 - b) Collect and analyze biological, ecological, social and economic data and other scientific literature and information to inform decision making processes on MFAD Fisheries.
5. WECAFC secretariat, CRFM, and OSPESCA, support the regional harmonization of national MFAD technologies and fishing protocols that will secure compatible fishery regulations contained in national fishery management plans and related legislation, in accordance with the best available information (including scientific evidence and local and traditional knowledge) and consistent with international best practices, and present the progress made to the respective regular sessions of these RFBs.
6. WECAFC secretariat, CRFM, and OSPESCA, support a regional MFAD characterization of the impacts and impacts mitigation measures of MFAD fishing in the different regions (within the WECAFC area), and building that regional knowledge into the management decision-making.
7. WECAFC members be encouraged to improve MFAD designs, use non-entangling materials, and adhere to minimum standards to increase durability in order to reduce marine debris, the entanglement of marine animals, and the impact on ecosystems.
8. WECAFC Members communicate to the Working Group on MFADs the measures taken to adhere to the above paragraphs.
9. WECAFC support its Members, in the establishment of stakeholder- and public outreach and communication campaigns, in the area including addressing the need to enhance and increase communication of research findings and best practices on MFAD to the fishers and facilitate inputs from stakeholders.