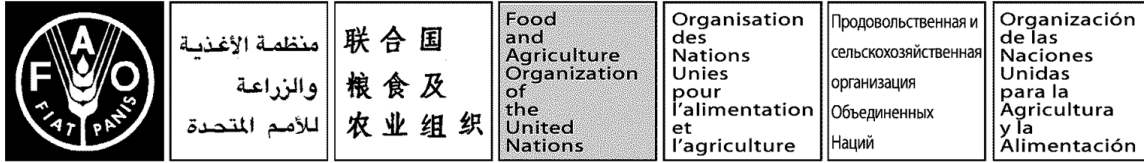


April 2022

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WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION (WECAFC)
ELEVENTH (VIRTUAL) SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY GROUP (SAG)
25-27 April 2022
Recommendations to the 18th session of WECAFC for SAG review

The Scientific Advisory Group is invited to review and discuss the following draft recommendations and propose actions for WECAFC and its membership to follow up at the 18th plenary session of the Commission:

1. **(DRAFT) RECOMMENDATION WECAFC/XVIII/2022/XX AMENDMENT TO RECOMMENDATION WECAFC/17/2019/21 “ON THE SUSTAINABILITY OF FISHERIES USING MOORED FISH AGGREGATING DEVICES (MFADS) IN THE WECAFC AREA”**
2. **(DRAFT) RECOMMENDATION WECAFC/XVIII/2022/XX ON “FISHERIES GOVERNANCE, TRANSSHIPMENT AND INFORMATION-SHARING”**
3. **(DRAFT) RECOMMENDATION WECAFC/XVIII/2022/XX ON “INCREASED EFFORTS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REGIONAL QUEEN CONCH FISHERY MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION PLAN IN THE WECAFC REGION”**
4. **(DRAFT) RECOMMENDATION WECAFC/XVIII/2022/XX CFMC/WECAFC/OSPESCA/CRFM-WORKING GROUP ON SPAWNING AGGREGATIONS (SAWG)**
5. **(DRAFT) RECOMMENDATION WECAFC/XVIII/2022/XX ON WECAFC FISHERIES DATA, STATISTICS, AND INFORMATION**

1. (DRAFT) RECOMMENDATION WECAFC/XVIII/2022/XX AMENDMENT TO RECOMMENDATION WECAFC/17/2019/21 “ON THE SUSTAINABILITY OF FISHERIES USING MOORED FISH AGGREGATING DEVICES (MFADS) IN THE WECAFC AREA”

Abbreviations and acronyms

CARIFICO	Caribbean Fisheries Co-management Project
CFCM	Caribbean Fisheries Council Mechanism
CLME+	Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems project
CPUE	Cath Per Unit Effort
CRFM	Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism
FAD	Fish Aggregating Device
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
ICCAT	The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas
IATTC	Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IFREMER	French National Institute for Ocean Science
IOTC	Indian Ocean Tuna Commission
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
MAGDELESA	Moored fish Aggregating Devices in the Lesser Antilles project
MCS	Monitoring, Control and Surveillance
MFAD	Moored Fish Aggregating Device
OSPESCA	Central America Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization
RFB	Regional Fisheries Body
RFMO	Regional Fisheries Management Organization
WECAFC	Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission

Cover note

The use of Moored Fish Aggregating Devices (MFADs) by small-scale commercial and subsistence fishers has rapidly grown over the last thirty years in the insular Caribbean, contributing to improve fisher livelihoods and incomes and food security by facilitating the capture of large oceanic and coastal pelagic species. However, the development of the MFAD fishery has also brought important challenges at the governance, socio-economic, biological, and ecosystem levels, which threaten the long-term profitability of the fishery and the sustainable exploitation of regionally shared stocks.

The proposed action draws largely from previous recommendations from the Joint Working Group on MFADs¹ and from the recent findings of the draft Regional MFAD Fishery Management Plan and the 2015 CRFM Subregional FAD Fishery Management Plan for the Eastern Caribbean. It seeks to help address some of the most urgent challenges. In particular, it seeks to strengthen the current (formal and informal) national and regional governance frameworks as it recognizes that effective progress on this ground will also facilitate addressing many of the challenges affecting the other dimensions (socio-economic, biological, ecosystem). It also seeks to strengthen national fishery data collection systems and to increase harmonization and integration of data across the region to facilitate assessment of the stock status at the appropriate (regional) scales to better guide management. Finally, it recognizes the need for increased research collaboration across the region to address some of the most pressing issues on MFADs, including developing better MFAD designs to minimize losses, rigorously testing the rarely challenged assumption that MFAD fishing leads to a reduction in coastal fishing pressure, and obtaining fishery-independent data on MFADs that could help supplement fishery-dependent data to generate more reliable estimates of stock abundance for management. Relative to previous actions, this action will likely require an increase in resources and workload allocated to the research component by both WECAFC members and the WECAFC secretariat. Failing to approve this three-pronged action will contribute to promote the *status quo*, which is in practice a largely unregulated MFAD fishery across the region. The *status quo* could lead to an excessive multiplication of MFADs across the region, resulting in increases in marine debris, dilution of economic benefits of MFADs in the race for fish, increases in conflicts among MFAD users, lack of adequate data to help assess stock status, and unsustainable levels of fishing pressure on several species that are already considered to be overexploited.

¹ WECAFC (2019) 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”

(Draft) Recommendation WECAFC/XVIII/2022/XX Amendment to Recommendation WECAFC/17/2019/21 “on the Sustainability of Fisheries using moored Fish Aggregating Devices (MFADS) in the WECAFC Area”

The use of Moored Fish Aggregating Devices (MFADs) to facilitate the capture of large oceanic and coastal pelagics in the WECAFC region has increased over the last three decades. This has been particularly the case in the insular Caribbean, where MFADs are being primarily used to improve the revenue and livelihoods of small-scale fishers and food security. Recent estimates point to 3,600+ MFAD units deployed across the region, mainly privately owned by fishers, which are being used by 6,200+ fishers and 2,700+ fishing vessels for commercial, subsistence and recreational purposes². However, the use of MFADs remains largely unregulated across the region, raising challenges in governance and prompting concerns about their impacts on fish stocks and the ecosystem². Challenges in governance include lack of adequate MFAD regulatory frameworks and management plans, potentially leading to conflicts among MFAD users and to the dilution of economic benefits through excessive multiplication of MFADs. Concerns about MFAD impacts on stocks include lack of catch and effort and biological data, disproportionate catches of juvenile tuna and target species considered overexploited (e.g. blue marlin), and the fact that catch per unit effort on MFADs is not a reliable index of stock abundance. Concerns about MFAD impacts on ecosystems include potential accumulation of non-biodegradable marine debris due to MFAD losses and potential incidental entanglement of marine animals. In response to such concerns, the WECAFC ad hoc Working Group on the Development of Sustainable Development of MFAD fishing in the Lesser Antilles was established in Martinique in 8-10 October 2001 with the main goal of increasing the exchange of information, practices and experiences across the region in the management and exploitation of large pelagics using MFADs.

The second Working Group meeting took place in Guadeloupe on 5-10 July 2004, during which IFREMER shared the results of the DOLPHIN project that described fish aggregations around MFADs in the French Antilles. This meeting led to the later execution of the MAGDELESA project by IFREMER between 2011 and 2014, which generated considerable new knowledge on the MFAD fishery.

Around that same period (2010-2012), JICA and CRFM collaborated to execute a pilot project "*Formulation of a Master Plan on sustainable use of fisheries resources for coastal community development in the Caribbean*" in St Lucia and Dominica. This project sought to build capacity to manage large pelagics fished on MFADs and increase MFAD productivity by focusing on technical aspects of MFAD design, construction, deployment and maintenance. It also promoted a co-management approach to fisheries in which fishers were expected to increase their participation and responsibility in decision making and provision of fisheries data.

In 2012, during the 14th WECAFC Session Commission in Panama, the decision was made to continue with the Working Group as a Joint Working Group with IFREMER. In 2013, the experience of the JICA-CRFM pilot project led to the execution of the JICA-CRFM Caribbean Fisheries Co-Management (CARIFICO) Project, which over a five-year period sought to further support the development of a co-management approach to MFAD fisheries in Dominica, St Lucia, Antigua and Barbuda, St Kitts and Nevis, St Vincent and the Grenadines, and Grenada. This project contributed to the CRFM-JICA CARIFICO/WECAFC-IFREMER MAGDELESA Workshop on FAD Fishery Management in St Vincent in 9-11 December 2013, where it was proposed that the Working Group expand to a Joint Working Group with possible participation of JICA, IFREMER, CRFM and WECAFC.

In 2015, recognizing the need for increased coordination, harmonization, and cooperation across the insular Caribbean on MFAD use, the CRFM led the development of a Sub-regional Management Plan for the FAD fishery for the Eastern Caribbean.

² Draft Caribbean Regional Management Plan for the Moored Fish Aggregating Device (MFAD) Fishery

Between April 30th -May 2nd 2019, the Joint JICA, IFREMER, CRFM and WECAFC Working Group on MFADs met for the third time in Puerto Rico; its Terms of Reference (ToR), which were formalized during the Seventeenth Session of WECAFC in July 15-18 2019, included the review of the CRFM Sub-Regional Management Plan to adapt it to the broader WECAFC region. As such, in 2021, with the support of the GCP/SLC/217/EC project “*Support to the Secretariat of WECAFC in implementing targeted actions of the 2019-2020 Workplan on improved regional fisheries governance*”, the WECAFC Secretariat coordinated the drafting of the Regional MFAD Fishery Management Plan.

Of further relevance, in April 2017, the ICCAT-IATTC-IOTC Joint Tuna-RFMO FAD Working Group met in Madrid and provided significant technological and scientific insights on the use of FADs in tuna fisheries. In June 2020 ICCAT’s 19-02 recommendation entered into force, which amended the Recommendation on a Multi-annual Conservation and Management Program for Bigeye and Yellowfin tunas, and which binds a number of WECAFC and CRFM members in terms of FAD fisheries by industrial fleets catching these tunas.

WECAFC Members recognize that the implementation of adequate MFAD regulation is necessary for sustainable management of the fish stocks and that this should lead to increased employment opportunities and income for their fishing industry and local communities and to better social outcomes by reducing conflicts, improving equity in access to pelagic resources, and safety at sea.

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, and

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, the following guidance is provided to the Commission.

1. Fisheries governance

RECOGNIZING that sustainable development of MFAD fisheries in the WECAFC area provides new opportunities for income generation, livelihoods, and contributes to food security;

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

FURTHER 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; and adding the need to regulate MFAD numbers and MFAD density to avoid adverse economic consequences;

ACKNOWLEDGING the good efforts of various WECAFC members to license MFADs fishers, prepare legislation for MFAD fishery, aim for improved and refined 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 MFADs, notify maritime authorities of MFADs locations, establish co-management regimes for MFAD fishery and promoting the proper maintenance of MFADs;

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;

RECOGNIZING the significant contribution of the CRFM 2015 Sub-regional Management Plan for FAD Fisheries in the Eastern Caribbean and its integration into WECAFC Caribbean Regional Management Plan for the Moored Fish Aggregating Device (MFAD) Fishery, emphasizing on objectives and works necessary to improve MFAD fisheries management in the Caribbean;

FURTHER RECOGNIZING the need of implementing WECAFC Regional management plan for FAD fisheries with critical considerations on the status of exploitation of the targeted resources as dictated by ICCAT and CFRM resource assessments;

NOTING the economic and environmental 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;

ALSO NOTING the potential of low-cost Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to improve Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) in the MFAD fishery

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

- WECAFC Members prepare national level MFAD fisheries development and MFAD management plans where relevant that consider the status of exploitation of targeted and bycatch species as determined by ICCAT, and other regional stock assessment results.
- 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.
- 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.

2. Data collection and information-sharing

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

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;

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

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;

ACKNOWLEDGING the potential of low-cost Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to improve fishery data collection and Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) in the MFAD fishery and the good efforts of various WECAFC members to integrate ICT in their MFAD fisheries

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

- WECAFC Members aim to collect and analyze biological, ecological, social and economic data and other scientific literature and information to inform decision making processes on MFAD fisheries;
- 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;
- WECAFC members explore integrating the use of ICT systems in their fishery statistic systems to facilitate collection and standardization of catch and effort and biological data;
- WECAFC Secretariat, CRFM, and OSPESCA, support a regional MFAD characterization of the impacts and impact mitigation measures of MFAD fishing in the different regions (within the WECAFC area), and build that regional knowledge into management decision-making.
- WECAFC supports 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.

3. Research

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 species of tunas, dolphinfish, wahoo, as well as blue marlin and silky sharks, 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;

CONSIDERING 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 species³;

NOTING research efforts on FADs in other regions to generate fishery-independent data to help provide a more reliable picture of the abundance and composition of stocks;

CONSIDERING that high rates of losses of current MFAD designs likely constitute a significant source of marine debris;

NOTING the increasing uncertainty surrounding the question of whether MFADs help reduce fishing pressure on coastal resources;

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

- WECAFC members be encouraged to participate in regional research programs to help generate fishery-independent data on key species of interest associated with MFADs;

³ Reviewed in CRFM (2015) 2015 Draft Sub-Regional Management Plan for FAD Fisheries in the Eastern Caribbean (Stakeholder Working Document). CRFM Technical & Advisory Document 2015/ 05

- WECAFC members be encouraged to partake in research seeking to develop fishing techniques and technologies minimizing impacts on vulnerable and overexploited fish groups;
- WECAFC members be encouraged to partake in research seeking to improve MFAD designs to reduce marine debris, while adhering to minimum standards to reduce entanglement of marine animals;
- WECAFC members be encouraged to partake in research seeking to assess potential links between MFAD fishing and fishing pressure on nearshore/coastal resources.

2. (DRAFT) RECOMMENDATION WECAFC/XVIII/2022/XX ON “FISHERIES GOVERNANCE, TRANSSHIPMENT AND INFORMATION-SHARING”

Cover note

IUU fishing is considered a major threat to sustainable fisheries management in the Wider Caribbean Region, undermining regional efforts to conserve and manage fish stocks. In 2009, It was estimated that 20–30 percent of total reported catches in the WECAFC area originate from illegal and unreported catches, representing a value of 450 to 750 million USD annually.⁴

Overall, there has been a general decline in reported fish capture production in the Western Central Atlantic region from the 1980s fisheries production of 2.4 million tonnes to around 1.5 million tonnes in 2016 to date, with the 2015 to 2018 showing an average production of 1.47 million tonnes, live weight⁵. It has been reported that, in this region, the stocks of many shared and highly migratory species continue to be heavily exploited and increasingly targeted for harvest even though they are already depleted well below biomasses that could achieve maximum sustainable yields.

The Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) Ministerial Council, at its 14th Meeting held virtually on 25 June 2020, has expressed concern that depletion of tuna stocks in the other parts of the world can cause the affected fishing fleets to shift their operations to the Western Central Atlantic Ocean, whether legally or illegally.

Given this potential for increased fishing effort by distant water fishing fleets, WECAFC Members need to strengthen their cooperation to promote the effective conservation, management and development of the living marine resources of the area of competence of the Commission, which is the final objective of the organization..

WECAFC Members recognize that the sustainable management of the fish stocks should lead to increased employment opportunities and income for their fishing industry and local communities. WECAFC Members are also cognizant of the positive effects that sound administrative, legal and scientific frameworks bring to the fisheries together with enhanced cooperation between and among Regional Fishery Management Organizations/Regional Fishery Bodies. WECAFC Members note that national administrations need to strike the right balance the resources allocated for access to the fisheries with the resources allocated to fulfil Monitoring Control and Surveillance obligations as part of their flag states' responsibilities as they are two sides of the same coin.

WECAFC Members should give the due consideration to the possibility of a situation where their fisheries development policies can become stifled and thus lead to IUU fishing by some distant water fishing nations. In this regard, WECAFC is called to play a key role to promote the necessary coordination to address the conservation of the fishery resources.

⁴ From Draft Recommendation WECAF/17/2018/1 „on the marking and identification of fishing vessels in the WECAFC area“ – as these only available estimates are based on the Agnew et al. 2009 estimates, these estimates could be outdated.

⁵ FAO (2018). Report of the first meeting of the regional working group on illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Bridgetown, Barbados. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Report. No. 1190.

Noting that the WECAFC Members are called to promote the effective conservation, management and development of the living marine resources of the area of competence, the CRFM Ministerial Council has opined that WECAFC Member should do what was necessary, including putting in place the requisite legislation and regulation to adequately manage, protect and use the resources available in a sustainable manner.

Following the CRFM Ministerial meeting, the WECAFC Regional Working Group on IUU Fishing (RWG-IUU) met virtually on September 8-9, 2020. Members shared information on progress toward implementation of the WECAFC17 recommendations and discussed WECAFC members' States of readiness to implement the Regional Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU Fishing (RPOA-IUU). In light of these discussions and the updated workplan of the RWG-IUU, and mindful that IUU fishing and the often attendant organised crime harms legitimate fishing activities and livelihoods, jeopardizes food and economic security, benefits transnational crime, distorts markets, contributes to human trafficking, and undermines ongoing efforts to implement sustainable fisheries policies, the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC),

1. Fisheries governance

NOTING the current situation with regard to fish stocks status and related management concerns;

NOTING the concern expressed by the CRFM Ministerial Council that depletion of global fish stocks and accompanying fishing effort reductions can cause the affected fishing fleets to shift to the WECAFC region, whether legally or otherwise;

RECALLING the obligations of Member States under:

- a. the CRFM-OSPESCA Joint declaration and action plan (y2012, revised in 2019);
- b. the Castries, St Lucia, Declaration on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (2010);
- c. the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy (2010);
- d. Resolution WECAFC/15/2014/6 on region-wide support to the implementation of the CRFM “Castries, St Lucia, (2010) Declaration on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing”;
- e. Resolution WECAFC/15/2014/9 “on the implementation of the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA) and the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on Flag State Performance in the region”;
- f. WECAFC 17 recommendation WECAFC/17/2019/15 “on the monitoring and control of transshipment at sea”;
- g. WECAFC 17 recommendation WECAFC/17/2019/17 “on the marking of fishing gear”; and
- h. the Regional Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing in WECAFC Member Countries (2019-2029) endorsed at WECAFC 17.

REITERATING the importance of strengthening national legislation for effective conservation, management and sustainable utilization of the fisheries resources and related ecosystems, including combatting IUU fishing, to optimize benefits and to effectively discharge responsibilities and obligations under international fisheries management instruments;

ADOPTS in conformity with Article 6 of the WECAFC Revised Statutes this RECOMMENDATION that:

Member States should make the necessary investments in administrative, legal and scientific frameworks in support of meeting international fisheries conservation and management obligations (including RFMO initiatives) as well as implementation of related RFB initiatives;

Member States should develop a strengthened evidence base for fisheries management decision-making, and to develop the capacity to use it skillfully to balance resources allocated for access to new fishing opportunities with their capacity to effectively implement their flag State responsibilities;

The WECAFC Secretariat and the RWG-IUU should develop a report format and process that will allow WECAFC to monitor the progress of implementation of this and all other RWG-IUU recommendations that have been endorsed by WECAFC.

2. Transshipment

RECALLING the Recommendation WECAFC/17/2019/15 supporting developments towards arrangements for an effective system for enhanced surveillance of transshipment operations at sea and enforcement of relevant legislation, including effective information-sharing among WECAFC Members and with other States and international organizations, aimed at strengthening the monitoring, control and surveillance network for fisheries-related activities;

NOTING with concern, that while some countries have transshipment regulations in place, the limited implementation of the regulatory framework addressing transshipment and landing activities in port and at sea can increase the risk of fish and fish products derived from IUU fishing entering the supply chain;

NOTING that the 33rd Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI33) in 2018 expressed concern about transshipment activities and called for an in-depth study to support the development of guidelines on best practices for regulating, monitoring and controlling transshipment which will be presented at COFI 34 (postponed to February 2021);

CONCERNED about evidence that transshipment activities in the Caribbean also support other criminal activities such as smuggling of narcotics and weapons as well as violations of labor laws and human rights;

ADOPTS in conformity with Article 6 of the WECAFC Revised Statutes the **RECOMMENDATION** that:

WECAFC Members should support the process towards development and implementation of international guidelines on the management (regulation, monitoring and control) of transshipment;

WECAFC Members should seek to develop and effectively implement measures in the WECAFC region consistent with the adopted international guidelines for the effective management (regulation, monitoring and control) of transshipment so as to minimize the risk of fish and fish products derived from IUU fishing entering national and international markets and that this is without prejudice to the existing international obligations applicable to individual WECAFC Members as flag, port, coastal and market States to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing.

3. Information-sharing

NOTING the existing obligation by flag States to exercise effective jurisdiction and control over their vessels;

RECALLING the importance of regional information-sharing and cooperation, especially on the identities and operations of fishing and fishing support vessels operating in the WECAFC region, to support countries in effectively meeting their international responsibilities as flag, port, coastal and market States to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing;

NOTING that the Second Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on Port State Measures (MOP2) requested that: (1) the PSMA Global Information Exchange System (GIES) be operationalized as soon as possible for an effective implementation of the PSMA; (2) that a prototype be prepared for the Third Meeting of the Technical Working Group on Information Exchange (TWG-IE), and that the meeting participants agreed that active participation by States in this initiative can be an important element to maximize the potential of the Global Record of Fishing Vessels, Refrigerated Transport Vessels and Supply Vessels (Global Record) to support the functioning of the GIES;

NOTING that several WECAFC Members are Parties to the PSMA and the second meeting of the Parties to the PSMA noted that the effective implementation of the PSMA requires further uptake of the Agreement and called on those that have not yet adhered to the PSMA to do so;

NOTING that WECAFC Members who are already Party to the PSMA should submit to FAO information on their designated ports and national contact points, as per Article 7 and Article 16 (3) of PSMA, while those who are not Party may choose to designate a national contact point and communicate it to FAO for the purposes of exchange of information under the PSMA;

FURTHER NOTING that WECAFC Members that are Parties to the PSMA are to start exchanging daily inspection reports in 2021 with other Parties of the PSMA, and that inspection reports include identity of the vessels inspected (under a foreign flag) and that this identity has to be verified, to the greatest extent possible;

NOTING ALSO that a significant portion of the fishing vessels in the region are small-scale fishing vessels with a length overall of less than 12 meters and most catches are taken by a variety of these small-scale vessels;

MINDFUL that IUU fishing and fishing related activities can be carried out by both industrial-scale vessels and the large number of small-scale vessels throughout the region;

NOTING the new developments on the Global Record in order to facilitate multi-tenancy functionality allowing national and regional records to be built from the basis of the Global Record system, adapted to fit the specific requirements of the region at reduced cost and maintenance in comparison to the development of a new system;

FURTHER RECALLING the importance of IMO numbers for the identification of fishing vessels and for identifying IUU fishing activities and for implementing appropriate measures, and that WECAFC Members should ensure that its flagged motorized fishing vessels, refrigerated transport vessels and supply vessels down to a size limit of 12 meters Length Overall (LOA) and authorized to operate outside waters under national jurisdiction, obtain an IMO number and use it as a mark for identification. The IMO number should be marked either on the stern or stern quarter, with the name and port of registry, or on the side of the hull or superstructure.

ADOPTS in conformity with Article 6 of the WECAFC Revised Statutes this RECOMMENDATION that Member States develop effective mechanisms for information-sharing, consistent with existing approaches, to include fishing vessel related information, such as their beneficial owners, vessel identifiers operations, authorizations, histories, and compliance to improve monitoring, control and surveillance operations, verification of information and risk assessment to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing in the region and beyond; to complement individual WECAFC Members activities such mechanisms should also be built at the regional level.

3. (DRAFT) RECOMMENDATION WECAFC/XVIII/2022/XX ON INCREASED EFFORTS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REGIONAL QUEEN CONCH FISHERY MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION PLAN IN THE WECAFC REGION

“Managing queen conch fisheries presents a broad range of challenges, including the complex biology of the species, uncertainty of catch and effort data, illegal trade, weak surveillance and enforcement mechanisms, unsustainable fishing practices, and even the frequency of severe dive accidents impacting on the quality of life and living conditions of entire towns. Problems in the fishery are dynamic, adding to the complexity of the issues which fishery sector managers have to face and for which they typically do not have enough human, technical and/or financial resources.”⁶ “Queen conch fisheries are believed to be fully developed in most areas, and that the alleged increase in levels of illegal fishing often occurs due to a lack of knowledge, awareness and enforcement.”⁷

The need for coordinated management of the queen conch has long been recognized by fisheries scientists and managers in the Wider Caribbean region. The Regional Queen Conch Fishery Management and Conservation Plan provides a set of management measures that can be applied at the regional or sub-regional level for the sustainability of queen conch populations, the maintenance of a healthy fishery and the sustenance of fishers and fishers’ communities. As the Plan is progressively implemented, improvement in the long-term governance of queen conch fisheries across the Caribbean is expected, as stated in strategy 4B of the Strategic Action Plan (SAP) of the “Sustainable Management of the Shared Marine Resources of the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem (CLME) and Adjacent Regions.”

The 14 management measures recommended in this Regional Queen Conch Fishery Management and Conservation Plan were analyzed by experts participating in the Second Meeting of the WECAFC/CFMC/OSPESCA/CRFM Working Group, held in Panama from 18 to 20 November 2014. Implementation status of the 14 management measures have been discussed at the Third and Fourth meetings of the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES Working Group on Queen respectively held in 2018 and 2019. In general, Member States have made improvements in the management of their fisheries at the national levels through implementation of the measures. However, given the differences in scales, gears, products, markets and geographic locations of Member States, harmonization of management measures at the regional level has not occurred yet. The degree of implementation of the Regional Queen Conch Regional Management and Conservation Plan was preliminarily evaluated using quantitative values collected in 2019-2020, and the Working Group found that some progress was made.

To help address the issue of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, it is important to note the management measure for traceability of queen conch throughout the value chain identified in the Regional Queen Conch Management and Conservation Plan. Traceability can be advantageous by helping to ensure that seafood caught by legal versus illegal fishing practices can be distinguished, allowing legally harvested

⁶ Prada, M. C.; Appeldoorn, R. S.; Van Eijs, S. & Pérez, M. M. 2017. Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper No. 610. Rome, FAO. 70 pp.

⁷ Theile, S. 2005. Status of the queen conch, *Strombus gigas* stocks, management and trade in the Caribbean: A CITES review. Proc. Annu. Gulf Caribb. Fish. Inst., 56: 675–694.

products to fetch higher prices⁸. This management measure is also aligned with the objectives of the Regional Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU Fishing in WECAFC Member Countries (RPOA-IUU) (2019-2029) which are to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing in the area of competence of the WECAFC through effective information-sharing and regional cooperation; and contribute to promoting the effective conservation, management and development of the living marine resources in the WECAFC area, in accordance with the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

The Fifth meeting of the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES Working Group on Queen Conch was held during 13-14 December 2021 in Puerto Rico and online. The purposes of the meeting were to continue monitoring implementation of the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan, and to discuss implementation of the Recommendations developed by the Working Group and the Scientific, Statistical and Technical Advisory Group (SSTAG), as well as other items for collaboration called for in the Terms of Reference for the Working Group. Meeting participants also discussed the progress of activities as called for in the Work Plan for 2019 – 2021 and the implementation of Recommendation WECAFC/XVII/2019/12 on Improved Compliance with Trade Measures for Queen Conch and Recommendation WECAFC/XVII/2019/13 on Queen Conch Conversion Factor adopted at WECAFC17. An updated Work Plan for 2021-2024 was also developed. The Fifth Meeting of the Working Group agreed that any gaps in implementation of the management measures in the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan should be addressed and continued monitoring of the implementation status was required. There was also discussion about the ongoing issue of IUU fishing and the possibility of using genetic techniques to determine the origin of queen conch products. The Fifth meeting agreed that the QCWG should liaise with the IUU Working Group to develop a joint recommendation to address IUU fishing in queen conch fisheries in the region.

It is expected that additional human, technical and financial resources will be required by the Member States and the WECAFC Secretariat in order to continue supporting the implementation of the management measures outlined in the Regional Queen Conch Fishery Management and Conservation Plan.

Failing to approve this recommendation will undermine the sustainable management and conservation of the queen conch resource and hinder the development of genetic tools to help combat IUU fishing in the queen conch fishery.

1. Continued support for implementation of the QC regional management and conservation plan

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;

⁸ Prada, M. C.; Appeldoorn, R. S.; Van Eijs, S. & Pérez, M. M. 2017. Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper No. 610. Rome, FAO. 70 pp.

RECALLING the establishment of the WECAFC Working Group on Queen Conch by WECAFC 14 in 2012;

REAFFIRMING the commitments made by Queen Conch range States at the sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP16, Bangkok, 3–14 March 2013) to implement the Decisions on “Regional cooperation on the management of and trade in the Queen Conch (*Strombus gigas*)” agreed at CoP16;

FURTHER REAFFIRMING Recommendation WECAFC/16/2016/1 and the Decisions 17.285–17.290 related to queen conch adopted at 17th Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP17, Johannesburg, 24 September–4 October 2016) (see FAO Technical Paper No. 610), calling upon WECAFC members to implement the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan;

COGNIZANT of the fact that National CITES Management Authorities are required to make a “Legal Acquisition Finding” before issuing an export permit for queen conch and noting that a resolution on guidance to CITES Parties for making Legal Acquisition Findings was adopted at CoP18 (Geneva, Switzerland 17–28 August 2019);

RECALLING the outcomes of the Third and Fourth meetings of the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES Working Group on Queen Conch, respectively held in Panama, 30th October- 1st November 2018 with support from the European Union, NOAA Fisheries and FAO; and in San Juan, Puerto Rico, from 16 to 17 December 2019 with support from NOAA Fisheries and FAO;

RECALLING that the Commission adopted Recommendation WECAFC/16/2016/1 “on the regional plan for the management and conservation of Queen conch in the WECAFC area – addendum to recommendation WECAFC/15/2014/3 on the management and conservation of queen conch in the WECAFC area; and Recommendations WECAFC/17/2019/12 on improved compliance with trade measures for Queen Conch and WECAFC/17/2019/13 on Queen Conch conversion factor;

NOTING the Regional Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing in WECAFC Member Countries (2019-2029) which was developed by the Joint WECAFC/CRFM/OSPESCA Regional Working Group on IUU (RWG-IUU) Fishing and endorsed at the 17th Session of the Commission;

RECALLING that the RPOA-IUU Fishing sets out 28 measures and actions to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing in the Wider Caribbean Region and to fulfill the WECAFC Member States’ obligations in the capacities as port, flag, coastal and market State under the aspects of Policy and legal framework, MCS and operations, Regional information-sharing and cooperation Capacity development;

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

Given the importance of evaluating the degree of implementation of the Regional Queen Conch Management and Conservation Plan, the quantitative values collected in 2019-2020 should be updated with additional data from all countries in the Wider Caribbean participating in the queen conch fishery using the information presented at the 2021 Working Group meeting.

Monitoring the plan’s implementation should be done to increase communication, coordination, and planning towards the application of ecosystem-based approaches to fisheries of this valuable resource.

Genetic work utilizing the Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms (SNPs) technique or other similarly advanced genetic techniques should be considered in order to develop appropriate and validated genetic markers. This technique has the potential to identify spatial distribution of the species, and thus would provide useful information for queen conch connectivity and traceability. This would also support the development of Legal Acquisition Findings. The SNPs technique also has the potential to map the genes and provide information about population genetic structure and thus allow for identification of spatial variability (or distribution) of the species as required under CITES.

Member States will participate in the development of this genetic work and in order to be statistically robust, at least 15 countries would be required to provide genetic samples of queen conch.

The QC Scientific, Statistical and Technical and Advisory Sub-group (SSTAG) should liaise with the Regional Working Group on IUU Fishing to further strengthen activities to counteract IUU fishing of queen conch and advance implementation of the 28 measures and actions identified in the RPOA-IUU fishing.

4. (DRAFT) RECOMMENDATION WECAFC/XVIII/2022/XX CFMC/WECAFC/OSPESCA/CRFM-WORKING GROUP ON SPAWNING AGGREGATIONS (SAWG)

Cover Note

The SAWG has held two meetings since the adoption of the Recommendation WECAFC/17/2019/14 “*On the Sustainable Management of Spawning Aggregations and Aggregating Species*” at the 17th Session of the Commission (WECAFC17) held from 15-18 July 2019. This document enshrined 10 recommendations which emerged from commitments made to an associated 2018-2020 work plan at the second meeting of the SAWG in March 2018. These recommendations were subject to review at the third meeting of SAWG in December 2019, during which many of these recommendations were found to have been accomplished through diligent intersessional efforts.

The advancement of the formal adoption process for the *Regional Fish Spawning Aggregation Draft Fishery Management Plan (FSAMP)* and completion of the “*Big Fish*” Regional Communications Strategy now demand high levels of commitment for their most needed implementation. Annual calls for regional harmonization of closed seasons and strengthened enforcement have been issued, along with short films for stakeholder engagement. Many activities have also been implemented at the member State level, including status assessments, passing of legislation and the creation of protected areas.

It is recognized that at the regional level, many of the data-dependent recommendations have not been achieved, impeded by data scarcity and resource limitations for implementation of associated high level tasks. Fundraising efforts are ongoing to support the development of projects to determine the status of all known FSA sites, and to produce a set of standard monitoring protocols and sustain an associated regional monitoring database.

Another gap is the lack of national implementation of a seasonal closure for Nassau grouper and mutton snapper as called for in FSAMP. Recognizing the need for this measure, the Chair of the WECAFC Executive Committee sent a letter to the WECAFC membership in August 2020 strongly encouraging member States to establish synchronized regional closed seasons for Nassau grouper and mutton snapper to safeguard their spawning aggregations, and promote their effective conservation, management and development.

The transition from the 2018-2020 workplan to the 2021-2025 workplan reaffirms the commitment of the SAWG to procure funding to pursue its data dependent objectives, and to establish a framework to facilitate regional monitoring of FSA management trends by WECAFC. The Fifth meeting of the SAWG had to be re-scheduled given Covid-19 travel restrictions, and as such, opportunities to achieve concrete results toward conservation and recovery of the FSAs continue to be postponed. The need for strong education and communication should be highlighted.

In the meantime, existing recommendations have been modified to reflect the status of deliverables. These recommendations call for adoption and implementation of the FSAMP, and actions to advance improved data collection, assessment, communication, and outreach for the conservation of FSAs. They also promote capacity building and the mobilization of resources to assist WECAFC members conduct priority research, monitoring, management, and enforcement activities.

The ramifications of not adopting these recommendations include the perpetuation of gaps in knowledge and critical information necessary to guide decision makers, inadequate protection and management of FSAs, and overexploitation of FSAs that [further] threatens their sustainability.

Preamble

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.

Action Items

The CFMC/WECAFC/OSPESCA-/CRFM-Working Group on Spawning Aggregations, at its Third and Fourth Meetings on 18-19 December 2019 and 9-10 November 2020, ADOPTS in conformity with the provision of Article 6 (h) of the Revised Statutes of the WECAFC the RECOMMENDATION that:

1. WECAFC, CFMC, and as appropriate CRFM, OSPESCA, and CEP-SPAW support the national adoption and strategic implementation of a Regional Fish Spawning Aggregation Fisheries Management Plan by all Member States.
2. WECAFC Secretariat and Members invest resources and support the standardization of existing monitoring programs, or introduction where these do not exist, to coalesce them into a unified regional monitoring program utilizing standard protocols 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.

3. Members of WECAFC identify and determine the status of all known Fish Spawning Aggregation (FSA) sites (particularly for mutton snapper and Nassau grouper), confirm the timing of spawning seasons, and inform the SAWG and WECAFC Scientific Advisory Group (SAG).

4. Members of WECAFC call for standardized measures to protect Fish Spawning Aggregations (FSAs) at the national, regional and international scale, including strengthening enforcement of closed seasons, closed areas, sales bans during the closed season, and international collaboration and communication around law enforcement.

5. Members of WECAFC 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 supports 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 and Members support and promote a regional outreach and communication strategy on conservation and management of FSAs.

9. Members of WECAFC prioritize FSAs for 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, with particular focus on mutton snapper and Nassau Grouper.

5. (DRAFT) RECOMMENDATION WECAFC/XVIII/2022/XX ON WECAFC FISHERIES DATA, STATISTICS, AND INFORMATION

Cover note

Fisheries for States of the Western Central Atlantic Fisheries region, in particular for African, Caribbean, Pacific (ACP) countries and the Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) from the Caribbean are important for food security and nutrition, as source of livelihoods, income earnings, and also source of foreign exchange for national governments.

For many years, the Caribbean regional data deficiencies and limited statistical information have been impeding national policy-making and fishery management in a regional context of shared marine resources.

The “Review of fisheries management performance and conservation in the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) area” in 2015 identified a number of challenges in data and statistics in support to fisheries management, including: inadequate legislation; challenges for cooperation with stakeholders with regard to acquisition of data and information on a routine basis; a weak data and information base for supporting fisheries management. The need to strengthen and maintain a quality statistical monitoring system was considered key to the success of immediate fisheries management needs⁹.^[1]

Despite some regional European Union (EU) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) programmes aiming at improving statistics in the Caribbean region, a lack of capacity to collect and exchange data and information, and to analyze the status and trends of fishery resources and regional data policies remains. In the meantime, environmental trends as well as extreme weather events suggest that climate change and variability are already impacting the region’s fisheries, in some cases severely.

During WECAFC 14 (6–9 February 2012, Panama) and 15 (26–28 March 2014, Trinidad and Tobago), the EU expressed the need for increased attention to improved fisheries data and information collection as the basis of better fisheries management in the region. The identified data gaps continue to undermine any significant effort to improve fishery management. This need was considered so pressing that one of the four technical Focus Areas in the WECAFC Strategic Plan 2014–2020 was dedicated to this topic and the current Programme of Work includes activity 2.4, “Improved fishery and aquaculture data collection, analysis and dissemination at regional and national level,” in support of this subject.

WECAFC 16 (Guadeloupe, France, 20–24 June 2016) agreed to establish a working group for fisheries data and statistics matters (FDS-WG), based on the ongoing work of the WECAFC-FIRMS (Fisheries and Resource Monitoring System) Partnership and supported by the development of a regional database (RDB) in collaboration with the WECAFC Members and partners in the region.

The most recent Commission session (17th) (Miami, July 2019) adopted 11 regional fisheries management recommendations, including among others for the conservation and management of sharks

⁹ Singh-Renton, Susan & McIvor, Ian. (2015). Review of Current Fisheries Management Performance and Conservation Measures in the WECAFC Area.

and rays, the management of Caribbean spiny lobster, the management of shrimp and groundfish resources of the North Brazil-Guianas Shelf, improved compliance with trade measures for Queen conch, the sustainability of fisheries using moored fish aggregating devices, the sustainable management of spawning aggregations and aggregating species. In order to support these conservation and management measures, the Commission also adopted the WECAFC interim Data Collection Reference Framework (iDCRF), and an interim List of Main Species for data collection in the WECAFC area. The proposed actions if supported will contribute towards continued improvement in the quality of statistics and data available for monitoring and management in the region, building on the initiatives undertaken through the WECAFC-FIRMS and FDS-WG activities.

Following this 17th WECAFC Commission, the second session of the FDS-WG2 met virtually three times between October 2020 and March 2022 to address the requested improvements of the iDCRF, the operationalization of the regional database, and the steps for increasing Members capacities. In its Concluding meeting (10 March 2022), the FDS-WG2 adopted draft recommendations as laid out in this document.

The Commission is asked to:

NOTE that reliable and timely fisheries data, statistics and information are instrumental to supporting national science-based policy-making and management, and development and monitoring of Regional Fisheries Management Plans;

RECALL that WECAFC 17 urged WECAFC Members to provide national data and statistics to the Regional Database in line with the interim DCRF and to support and promote the WECAFC-FIRMS partnership as a collaborative platform for collating and sharing scientific information throughout the region and leveraging of ongoing regional projects.

1. Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF)

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;

MINDFUL that qualitative and quantitative improvement of regional data and statistics requires harmonization and standardization at national and regional level with the definition of minimum data requirements in support of evidence-based decision-making;

MINDFUL of the global Reference Harmonization standard being developed by the FAO's Coordinating Working Party on Fishery Statistics under which WECAFC, ICCAT, FAO and other RFBs collaborate for harmonizing and streamlining data collection and reporting frameworks including consideration of multiple reporting burdens;

REAFFIRMING the commitment of CARICOM States to improving evidence-based decision-making through regional cooperation as expressed in multiple regional policy documents including the “Strategic Action Programme for the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystem”, the CARICOM Strategic Plan, 2015 -2019, the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy (CCCFP) and the CRFM Strategic Plan, 2013-2021;

RECOGNIZING the continued efforts by the WECAFC members to increase their capacities to collect, analyze and report fisheries data and statistics;

RECALLING the endorsement of the WECAFC-FIRMS partnership by WECAFC 15 in 2014;

FURTHER RECALLING Recommendation WECAFC/17/2019/22 “ON WECAFC INTERIM DATA COLLECTION REFERENCE FRAMEWORK;”

FURTHER RECALLING Recommendation WECAFC/XVII/2019/5+6+7 “ON THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF SHARKS AND RAYS IN THE WECAFC AREA” related to reporting data and information on sharks and rays including for non-contracting parties to ICCAT;

FURTHER RECALLING Recommendation WECAFC/XVII/2019/9 “ON THE MANAGEMENT OF CARIBBEAN SPINY LOBSTER IN THE WECAFC AREA” section 4 related to Catch Documentation Schemes;

ADOPTS in conformity with Article 6 of the WECAFC Revised Statutes the RECOMMENDATIONS that:

1(a) Recognize the DCRF serves a minimum of two purposes, including i) a capacity building tool, which can be used by Members as a reference standard to set-up national data collection and information systems for all aquatic marine species, and ii) an instrument to support the scientific mandate and priorities of WECAFC-CRFM-OSPESCA ICM.

1(b) Recognize the DCRF, its appendices, and associated documents titled, “Data sharing and access policies” and “Lists of fisheries and stocks within the WECAFC competence area,” are living documents based on a modular task-oriented structure articulated around clear supporting bases for reference list of species, with parts more mature than others, and as such conducive to a staged and incremental approach to implementation of the DCRF for some Members.

1(c) Endorse version v.8 of the Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF) and its appendices, including in particular Appendix 2, "WECAFC subareas" and Appendix 3, “WECAFC Reference list of main species.”

1(d) Recommend the following general principles for the delineation of WECAFC sub-areas and divisions:

- That the WECAFC subareas and divisions are identified, as far as possible, consistently with the major ecosystems in the region as the starting point for defining their delineations, and as the overarching principle.

- That in defining the subareas and divisions, established maritime boundaries and 200 nautical mile EEZ limits are utilized (where they are established and are not disputed) and other default limits as the prevailing principle, in combination with, where required or preferred, simple longitudinal, latitudinal or oblique straight lines in the cases where:

(a.) there are no established maritime boundaries, to avoid issues of undefined/disputed maritime spaces; and

(b.) there are locally recognized and important ecosystem boundaries, together with other considerations, such as WECAFC Member countries' data collection capacities, that would limit adequate reporting.

- That some of these subareas and divisions remain to be finalized and are subject to further discussion and modification. This document and any proposal for, or final delineation of, any subarea or division is without prejudice to the WECAFC Member States' maritime claims and boundaries.

- That these delimitations do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of FAO or WECAFC or its Member States concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers and boundaries.

1(e) Further recommend regarding statistical delineations:

- That the above general principles should be followed for further proposals on the final statistical limits, subject to approval by the WECAFC Members directly involved.

- The adoption of a provisional list of subareas and divisions, that include correspondence to the Large Marine Ecosystems, or marine ecoregions, as identified in DCRF Appendix 2, and promotes the use by all WECAFC Members in their national data collection of the newly established WECAFC geographic subareas and divisions as per DCRF Appendix 2.

- That, to the extent possible, reporting is done at the finest possible division level to ensure the availability of spatial granular data required for scientific purposes.

1(f) Recommend the use by all WECAFC Members in their national data collection on the evolved categorization of WECAFC Reference list of aquatic species developed by the FDS-WG as DCRF Appendix 3, which consists of three groups and several subgroups with defined bases for selection:

- Group 1, “Main Reference Species,” are key species to the region, other than those included in Group 3, and of specific interest to the WECAFC mandate for which States are strongly encouraged to statistical reporting:
 - Subgroup Basis 1: Species with fisheries management plans endorsed.
- Group 2, “Other Reference Species,” other than those included in Group 3, are Species of interest for WECAFC that could be elevated to the Group 1, with three Subgroups:
 - Subgroup Basis 2: Species of interest to historical WGs of regional bodies (WECAFC, CRFM, OSPESCA, including through their Interim Coordination Mechanisms)
 - Subgroup Basis 3: Species in high seas (areas beyond national jurisdiction)/straddling / shared and not under mandate of another RFMO

- Subgroup Basis 4: Species for WECAFC region originating from 1978 working party on fishery statistics and/or of interest for other reasons (e.g., of local interest including high commercial value, for biodiversity reasons, or for importance of impacts from/due to climate changes)
- Group 3, “Other species of interest for WECAFC Members,” are...
 - Subgroup Basis 5 - Species under the mandate of other RFMOs, including for mandatory reporting (e.g., ICCAT), such as tuna and tuna-like species and pelagic sharks.

1 (g) Strongly encourage WECAFC Members to proceed with the use of DCRF for monitoring and reporting, with prioritization for provision of data for Tasks III (Fleet), II (Catch by species and Effort), and IV (Biological data), with high priority on Group1 species.

1 (h) Recommend continued participation in the FDS-WG and specifically to support the intersessional work plan as related to interactions with thematic working groups relating to:

- national vessel mappings to regional fleet segment classifications, promotion of species and associated subareas for priority reporting, species biological parameters.
- further tailor the DCRF and associated data sharing policies in consideration of the use of relevant data sets by those working groups.

2. WECAFC Regional Database

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;

NOTING that the 16th session of WECAFC held in Guadeloupe, France, 20-24 June 2016, agreed to establish the Regional Fisheries Data and Statistics Working Group (FDS-WG);

FURTHER NOTING that FDS-WG acts as a steering committee for the Regional Database as per its Terms of Reference;

MINDFUL that sharing of information in support to management and monitoring of Regional Fisheries Management Plans requires an instrument for data dissemination and sharing;

NOTING that data access and sharing in the region is to “facilitate regional fisheries data and information exchange to support evidence-based fisheries policy-making at national and regional levels, while ensuring non-disclosure and/or careful handling of sensitive fisheries data and information;”

RECOGNIZING the important role of WECAFC, CRFM, and OSPESCA to validate regional inventories and to support and facilitate consistency and harmonization with national inventories and their publishing through FIRMS as a contribution to the global monitoring framework requested under SDG14.4.1;

RECALLING Recommendation WECAFC/17/2019/22 “ON WECAFC INTERIM DATA COLLECTION REFERENCE FRAMEWORK” section 4 related to the Regional Database;

FURTHER RECALLING Recommendation WECAFC/XVII/2019/11 “ON THE MANAGEMENT OF SHRIMP AND GROUND FISH RESOURCES OF THE NORTH BRAZIL-GUIANAS SHELF IN THE WECAFC AREA” section 1 related to the Regional Database;

RECALLING Resolution WECAFC/XVII/2019/8 “ON THE WECAFC-FIRMS PARTNERSHIP;”

ACKNOWLEDGING that WECAFC Regional Database is a fully functional information system;

REITERATES the promotion to WECAFC MEMBERS of provisioning of national data and statistics to the WECAFC-CRFM-OSPESCA Regional DataBase (RDB) according to Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF);

ADOPTS in conformity with Article 6 of the WECAFC Revised Statutes the RECOMMENDATIONS that:

2(a) The Western Central Atlantic Fisheries Information System (“WECAFIS”) has the mandate to disseminate data and statistics covered by DCRF with due consideration of DCRF data access and sharing rules, as well as FIRMS information on status and trends of fisheries and stocks under the WECAFC competence area.

2(b) The WECAFIS be published in the Data section of the new WECAFC website.

2(c) Members publish DCRF data in WECAFIS for Task I, and for Task II.1 and Task II.2, Task III.1 and Task IV.1 with high priority for Groups 1 species to reinforce management of shared stocks, and promote proceeding with related tasks including:

- carrying out mappings of national vessel types to regional fleet segment classifications

2(d) Members recognize the important role of WECAFC, CRFM, and OSPESCA to validate regional inventories and to support and facilitate consistency and harmonization with national inventories and their publishing through FIRMS as contribution to the global monitoring framework requested under/SDG14.4.1.

2(e) WECAFC Members are therefore encouraged to:

- Update or further develop their inventories of fisheries and develop status reports on national fisheries and publish in FIRMS
- Update or further develop new List of Stocks and stock status reports be updated and published in FIRMS
- Engage in training opportunities towards completion of WECAFIS-DCRF data templates towards progressing operationalization of the DCRF and WECAFC-FIRMS data templates to enrich FIRMS content

2(f) SAG is encouraged to review and provide recommendations in light of other processes as regards the information/content on list of stocks and stock status

3. WECAFC Capacity Building for collection and production of data, statistics, and information

RECALLING that WECAFC's mandate covers all living marine resources, without prejudice to the management responsibilities and authority of other competent fisheries bodies and other living marine resources management organizations or arrangements in the area

CONCERNED about the challenges that WECAFC members still face to collect data and produce statistics on all living marine resources

ACKNOWLEDGING continuing technical support from FAO and financial support from donors, including the EU and the USA, to develop WECAFC Members' capacities for production and collection of data, statistics, and information;

RECALLING the important steps taken by the WECAFC, OSPESCA, and CRFM members in the recent years in terms of increasing their capacities to collect, analyze and report reliable and timely fisheries data and statistics

RECALLING Recommendation WECAFC/XVII/2019/11 "ON THE MANAGEMENT OF SHRIMP AND GROUND FISH RESOURCES OF THE NORTH BRAZIL-GUIANAS SHELF IN THE WECAFC AREA section 2 related to capacity building on stock assessment and bioeconomic analysis of priority fisheries

FURTHER RECALLING Recommendation WECAFC/17/2019/22 "ON WECAFC INTERIM DATA COLLECTION REFERENCE FRAMEWORK" section 7 related to strengthening of national capacity

ADOPTS in conformity with Article 6 of the WECAFC Revised Statutes the RECOMMENDATIONS that:

3(a) Members reiterate recognition that the WECAFC-FIRMS project provides a collaborative platform for collation and sharing of scientific information, leveraging ongoing regional projects, and prioritizing national data needs.

3(b) Members are encouraged to acknowledge the development by the FDS-WG of criteria and related scoring to support the identification and prioritization of capacity-building investments and projects that improve science-based decision-making and support the further development of these criteria as a dashboard for monitoring needs and mobilizing resources for the benefit of WECAFC and its Members.

3(c) Members recognize that further investments should be made to build national capacities of WECAFC Members for data collection, analysis, and reporting with priorities on implementing DCRF and feeding the WECAFIS through the SAG process.