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<b>Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC)</b>
<b>Twelfth Session of the Scientific Advisory Group</b>
<b>19-20 June 2023 (virtual)</b>
<b>Intersessional report by Working Groups, to include draft Recommendations to WECAFC19, tailored TORs and updated 2023-2024 Workplan</b>

# CFMC/WECAFC/OSPESCA/CRFM Working Group on Spawning Aggregations (SAWG)

Convener: Mr. Myles Phillips, WCS Belize Program

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## 1. Introduction and Background

The CFMC/WECAFC/OSPESCA/CRFM Working Group on Spawning Aggregations (SAWG) was established in February 2012 by the 14th Session of WECAFC. This document outlines intersessional activities accomplished by the SAWG since the 18th Session of WECAFC (WECAFC18) held 26-29 July 2022 in Nicaragua, Central America. Several key documents were endorsed at WECAFC18, including (i) Recommendation WECAFC/XVIII/2022/4, (ii) a tailored Terms of Reference (TOR) for the SAWG, (iii) a 2021-2025 workplan, (iv) a Regional Fish Spawning Aggregation Fishery Management Plan (RFSAMP) with a focus on Nassau grouper (*Epinephelus striatus*) and mutton snapper (*Lutjanus analis*), and (v) an accompanying Communications Strategy titled “Big Fish”.

The 2022-2025 work plan has come into operation during the intersessional period, with notable achievements including the Fifth Meeting of the SAWG in Puerto Rico in March 2023, and funding secured from the European Union Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (EU DG MARE) for pilot implementation of the RFSAMP and Communications Strategy. An associated pilot project is due to be launched in three Member States within the coming weeks. The working group’s task force has continued to work assiduously to lay the groundwork for accomplishment of multiple work plan line items and to propose new recommendations to the Commission in pursuit of its mandate for conservation and management of fish spawning aggregations.

## 2. Objectives

This document summarizes achievements, challenges and lessons learned by the SAWG during the period July 2022-June 2023. Implementation of activities was within the context of its functions, as described in its 2022 TOR:

- Identify issues (e.g., gaps, deficiencies), challenges, and best practices in data collection at the national level in the region and provide recommendations on how to address issues and challenges, and implementation of best practices.

- Collect, review, and share the past and present data and information on spawning aggregations and their associated fisheries in the WECAFC area, involving both the fishers and the private sector.
- Analyze data and information collected from capture fisheries and make recommendations for the sustainability of the fisheries of aggregating species in the WECAFC region.
- Monitor changes in distribution and abundance of all living aquatic species and resources of relevance to the mandate of the SAWG in the WECAFC region.
- Develop common methodologies for data collection, assessment, and monitoring of focal fish aggregations and stocks.
- Seek partnerships with other institutions that could aid in the monitoring, evaluation, and effective implementation of management recommendations for the protection and conservation of fish spawning aggregations.
- Monitor and provide advice on the management and implementation of regional strategies, regulations, and management plans to protect fish spawning aggregations.
- Establish communication between members of the SAWG, other WGs, and relevant parties on issues of common interest in order to strengthen regional collaboration in the conservation, assessment and management of fish spawning aggregations.
- Ensure development of education and outreach programs that articulate the message/s of the SAWG and facilitate the achievement of the goals and objectives of the SAWG work plan.
- Report to the Commission and contribute to communication and visibility of the deliverables of the SAWG as may be needed.

### **3. Main Accomplishments during the Intersessional Period**

- Fifth meeting of the CFMC/WECAFC/OSPESCA-/CRFM-Working Group on Spawning Aggregations (SAWG-V)

SAWG-V was hosted in a hybrid format in San Juan, Puerto Rico from 14-15<sup>th</sup> March 2023. Following on from successful endorsement of key working group deliverables at WECAFC18 in 2022, this meeting's objectives included, inter alia, (i) To discuss and mainstream the RFSAMP, (ii) To discuss and mainstream the new TOR, (iii) To update/consolidate the 2022-2024 SAWG Work Plan, (iv) Mainstreaming the Recommendation WECAFC/XVIII/2022/4 and (v) To present and discuss the implementation modalities of the new EU-funded project. Member states and partners from non-governmental organizations provided updates regarding the status of FSA resources and research, and the plenary discussions facilitated the revision and update of the workplan and recommendations through 2025. New recommendations arose for (i) the formation of a new Fish Aggregation Management Plan Coordination Committee, which would function to facilitate broad implementation of the newly endorsed RFSAMP, and (ii) the elevation of Nassau grouper and mutton snapper as WECAFC Group 1 species to emphasize their institutional priority under the RFSAMP. Finally, discussions were held to outline the best approaches to operationalize incumbent communications products and emerging collaborations with the WECAFC Fisheries Data and Statistics Working Group (FDS-WG) under the auspices of the EU DG MARE funded project.

- EU DG MARE Funded Project "*Improving ecosystem approach to fisheries by advancing fish spawning aggregation information gathering and increase of public engagement in the WECAFC region*".

This project was approved by the EU DG MARE at the end of 2022 and will be implemented by FAO over the course of a 14-month period through a letter of agreement with a service provider agency. It will serve as a three-country pilot of many aspects of the RFSAMP, Communications Strategy, and facilitate modification of the WECAFC Information System (WECAFIS) & Data Collection Reference Framework

(DCRF) to accept FSA related data and information. The mode of implementation involves three interrelated components, loosely interpreted as the following: (1) Compilation of fishery-dependent, fishery independent, socio-economic and trade information related to fish spawning aggregations to assess species ecological and management status, (2a) Regional harmonization of data collection and archival protocols, (2b) incorporation of compiled information into long term databases (i.e. the DCRF & WECAFIS), and (3) the launch of a digital communications hub as a multimedia repository for education and capacity building resources.

The project will be piloted in Belize, Cuba, and the Bahamas, and should be completed in 2024. The letter of agreement is in its final phases of approval, and the project is due to be initiated imminently.

- Educational “BigFish” Communication Campaign

The multimedia BigFish Campaign has advanced several of its deliverables, including the production of films, educational materials, and media components such as radio spots, podcasts, and public service announcements. These communications products are designed to target specific key stakeholder groups, and will cover topics including management, science, and alternative livelihoods for resource users. These products will be hosted on the “BigFish Communications Hub”, a website which will serve as a point of open access to these resources for the public, provide a platform for coordination and communication between stakeholders, and serve as the online presence of the WECAFC-SAWG.

An hour-long documentary called “Treasure of the Caribbean”, referred to as “The Secret Crown” during its development, was released in April 2023 on PBS Nature. A major item on the SAWG Workplan, it serves as a highly engaging communications tool on the management, ecology, and threats to spawning aggregations of Nassau Grouper. More information can be found on PBS’ website: <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/about-treasure-caribbean/28747/>

#### **4. Challenges and Mitigating Steps**

The signature of the letter of agreement between FAO and the service provider for the EU DG MARE project has been delayed by several months by administrative deliberations. This will, no doubt, necessitate seeking of a no-cost extension to the project, shifting its end date into the third quarter of 2024.

#### **5. Conclusions**

The last intersessional period built upon the monumental successes achieved at WECAFC18 with the endorsement of the RFSAMP and other guiding documents. The WECAFC-SAWG has turned its attention to implementation, with a view to capitalize on the existing inertia by promoting widespread adoption, expanding its portfolio of educational and capacity building tools, and creating open access protocols to enable and harmonize collection of data on FSAs across the region.

## **Appendix 1: Recommendations WECAFC/ XVIII/2022/4 – Updated 15th March, 2023 at the Fifth Meeting of the CFMC/WECAFC/OSPESCA/CRFM-Working Group on Spawning Aggregations (SAWG)**

### **Cover Note**

The SAWG has held three 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 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 elevated 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 the 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 need for strong education and communication should be highlighted. 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. Existing recommendations were modified to reflect the status of deliverables, and new recommendations were added regarding the creation of a Fish Aggregation Management Plan Coordination Committee within the SAWG, and the elevation of Nassau grouper and mutton snapper to WECAFC Group 1 species.

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 14<sup>th</sup> 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 (either directly from adults taken or indirectly from the young produced) 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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**

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 call for **standardized and appropriate 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.

4. Members of WECAFC agree upon and adopt, as a precautionary measure, **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.
5. Members of WECAFC **determine the status and timing of spawning seasons** known Fish Spawning Aggregation (FSA) sites with emphasis on FSAs of mutton snapper and Nassau grouper.
6. WECAFC Secretariat supports an **assessment of the direct and indirect economic value of FSA fisheries and FSA-associated species** and the **socio-economic impact of proposed management measures** to inform future management decision-making.
7. **Members are encouraged to offer training and/or resources to fishers** (displaced due to FSA closures) **in monitoring, research, assessment, best practice for fish release (e.g. descending devices) 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, Nassau grouper, mutton snapper and other fishes that aggregate to spawn for monitoring, conservation, and management based on status, vulnerability, time interval since last assessment and Members' institutional capacity.** Member states should provide information to the SAWG and WECAFC Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) to facilitate prioritization of FSAs for allocation of regional support.
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.
11. Recommends the establishment of a **Fish Aggregation Management Plan Coordination Committee** within the SAWG as recommended in the FSA regional management plan that could be comprised of no more than 10 members with broad regional representation (1 from the 6 WECAFC marine ecoregions, 1 from Cartagena Convention/SPAW-RAC, 1 from English speaking fisher organization, 1 from Spanish speaking fisher organisation, and a general coordinator). This is considered a priority to support mainstreaming of the implementation of the Regional FSA Management Plan.
12. The SAWG recommends that Nassau grouper and mutton snapper be elevated to WECAFC Group 1 species for the implementation of the FSAMP.

## Appendix 2: Terms of Reference (2023)

### TERMS OF REFERENCE CFMC/WECAFC/OSPESCA/CRFM-Working Group on Spawning Aggregations Endorsed June 2022

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#### **I. Background and justification**

Fishery management advice and recommendations, based on the best available scientific information, are provided to WECAFC member countries for their implementation by dedicated Working Groups, established by the Commission.

The Working Groups that were established or confirmed in the subsequent sessions since the 14th session of the Commission in 2012 are the following:

1. [OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CFMC Working Group on Caribbean Spiny Lobster](#)
2. [CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES Working Group on Queen Conch](#)
3. [WECAFC Working Group on the Management of Deep-Sea Fisheries](#)
4. [WECAFC/OSPESCA/CRFM/CFMC Working Group on Recreational Fisheries](#)
5. [CRFM/WECAFC/JICA/IFREMER Working Group on Fisheries Using fish aggregating devices \(FADS\)](#)
6. [CRFM/WECAFC Working Group on Flyingfish in the Eastern Caribbean](#) (established since the 17<sup>th</sup> Session of WECAFC as the flyingfish- Dolphinfish WG)
7. [WECAFC/CRFM/IFREMER Working Group on Shrimp and Groundfish in the Northern Brazil-Guianas Shelf](#)
8. [CFMC/WECAFC/OSPESCA/CRFM Working Group on Spawning Aggregations](#)
9. [Regional Working Group on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing \(RWG-IUU\)](#)
10. [WECAFC Working Group for the Conservation And Management of Sharks in the Wider Caribbean Region](#)
11. [WECAFC/CRFM/OSPESCA Fisheries Data and Statistics Working Group \(FDS-WG\)](#)

Most Working Groups (WGs) are joint groups with other regional partner institutions, such as the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM), the Organization of Fisheries for the Central



American Isthmus (OSPESCA), the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC), the French Research Institute for Exploration of the Sea (IFREMER), etc. Fishery scientists, experts, managers, and decision-makers of member countries as well as regional partner organizations, including academia and NGOs, participating in the WGs, which have specific, time-bound terms of reference. The data used by the Working Groups to assess the status of fish stocks, to conduct fishery assessments and to generate fishery management advice and recommendations to the Commission are collected by the participating countries and NGOs.

The key drivers behind the establishment of these WGs are the need to:

- collaborate and cooperate in the assessment and management of shared resources;
- standardize data collection and reporting systems to enable assessment of stock status using data and information from various countries targeting the stock/species/resources throughout their distribution range;
- standardize the conservation and management measures for effective management;
- provide training and capacity-building to improve data collection and assessment of fisheries/fish stocks;
- harmonize regulations across the region, and countries, for effective fishery management; and
- cooperate to implement and enforce actions for effective fishery management.

Each WG will pay due attention to the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and its related guidelines, including the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries, as well as any other agreed international or regional instruments for the conservation and management of fisheries. Also, the principles of precautionary, participatory and ecosystem approaches to fisheries management will be considered. The activities of the WGs are also guided by any specific regional or international fisheries management, or related obligations and initiatives or instruments of relevance, to the respective resources associated with the specific WG – e.g. any FMPs, Declarations, agreed CMMs, regional strategies, regulations etc.

## **II. Role of the Working Group**

### **a. Scope of the Work**

The scope of each WG is to provide scientific and management advice for the sustainable management, conservation, and development of living marine resources in the area of competence of WECAFC. This scope also includes the development and support to national and regional plans of action, and fishery management plans, to regulate target and bycatch fisheries, as well as manage existing populations in the region. Using a multidisciplinary approach, the WG will contribute to sustainable management by providing advice to the Members of WECAFC based on the best available scientific knowledge/evidence and traditional/local ecological knowledge. In pursuing this goal, the WG will contribute to the fulfillment of national and regional responsibilities for the marine environment and for the management of fish spawning aggregations, and related or interacting species or fisheries in the WECAFC Region, with special emphasis on the mutton snapper and Nassau Grouper.

### **b. Goal**

The goal of each WG is to inform and provide guidance for the management of living marine resources to the WECAFC members in such a manner as to promote responsible fisheries, provide economic opportunities, and secure social wellbeing while ensuring the conservation of living marine resources and the protection of marine biodiversity.

### **c. Tasks/ functions**

The WG will:

- Identify issues (gaps, deficiencies), challenges, and best practices in data collection at the national level in the region and provide recommendations on how to address issues and challenges, and implementation of best practices.

- Collect, review and share the past and present data and information on spawning aggregations and their associated fisheries in the WECAFC area, involving the fishers and private sector.
- Analyze the data and information collected from capture fisheries and aquaculture production and make recommendations for the sustainability of the fisheries of aggregating species in the WECAFC region.
- Monitor changes in distribution and abundance of all living aquatic species and resources of relevance to the mandate of the WG in the WECAFC region.
- Develop common methodologies for data collection, assessment, and monitoring of fish aggregations and stocks.
- Seek partnerships with other institutions that could provide assistance in the monitoring, evaluation, and effective implementation of management recommendations for the protection and conservation of fish spawning aggregations.
- Monitor and provide advice on the management and implementation of regional strategies, regulations, and management plans to protect fish spawning aggregations.
- Establish communication between the members of the WG, other WGs and relevant parties on issues of common interest in order to strengthen regional collaboration in the conservation, assessment and management of fish spawning aggregations.
- Ensure development of education and outreach programs that articulate the message/s of the WG and facilitate the achievement of the goals and objectives of the SAWG work plan.
- Report to the Commission and contribute to communication and visibility of the deliverables of the Working Group as may be needed.

#### **d. Membership**

Membership in the WG shall consist of representatives from all those Member States of CRFM and WECAFC, OSPESCA, including overseas territories and Departments. Specifically, Member representatives will be national Officers responsible for fisheries management with activities related to the following domains: statistical analyses of fisheries data, data collection, designing data collection systems, analyzing statistics for statistical bulletins, report preparation, organizing and managing data collection, storage and dissemination according to a variety of needs (e.g., RFMO reporting, departmental, scientific meetings, etc.).

### **III. Mode of Operation:**

#### **a. Role of Countries**

The members of the WG will play a leading role through the following activities and commitments:

- Participate in agreed activities and ensure the participation of appropriate experts;
- Implement, at the national level, the work identified in the WECAFC endorsed work plan (as appropriate);
- Identify and report on country-specific challenges and opportunities related to implementation of agreed conservation and management measures;
- Assist with mobilization of resources and outreach materials;
- Facilitate the organization of meetings in the languages of the Commission;
- Host meetings on a rotational basis;
- Facilitate the identification of the Convener.

#### **b. Role of Convener**

The Convener of the WG will play a leading role during the organization of the meetings and subsequent follow up with the Secretariat of WECAFC by coordinating the inputs of the members of the WG. The Convener should:

- Seek experts from the WECAFC Members, contact potential partner organizations, and solicit their interest to join the WG;
- Call for meetings as appropriate;
- Ensure that technical contributions are received in a timely manner and in the appropriate format;
- Ensure that outputs are delivered as agreed during each meeting
- Collaborate closely with FAO-WECAFC and other sub-regional and regional organizations as appropriate;
- Assist in the preparation and publication process of the proceedings of the WG meeting;
- Participate (in person or virtually) at the meetings to present the draft working documents and provide any clarifications as required;
- Facilitate the review by the WG membership within a reasonable period of time (max. 15 days) on suggested edits or modifications as considered necessary to address comments and the return of the revised document to the WECAFC Secretariat for distribution and consideration by the Commission;
- Participate in the Commission's sessions (physically or virtually) if required, to support the Secretariat in clarifying or substantiating some points of the draft working documents;
- Assist in the relevant processes to gather information in support of seeking funds to implement priority activities of the WG;
- Identify, participate in and share information on inter-sessional activities.

**c. Election and role of Convener**

- The WG shall elect a Convener from among its Members to serve over a two-year period. The term of office of the Convener may be extended as determined appropriate. In the case where another qualified Convener is not available, the Convener's term may be renewed for an additional two-year term until another Convener is selected.

**d. Roles of the FAO/WECAFC Secretariat**

The FAO/WECAFC Secretariat will play a supporting role in the activities of the Working Group by assisting in:

- Coordinating activities of the WG, among WECAFC and Non-WECAFC Members, at the wider regional level (including facilitating procurement of funding);
- Assisting with logistical arrangements for the convening of meetings;
- Providing technical assistance, such as a technical secretary or research support, if needed and as resources permit;
- Liaising with other Regional Fishery Bodies (RFBs) active in the Wider Caribbean Region and neighboring areas for their engagement and collaboration as much as possible in the work of the WG; these RFBs include amongst others OSPESCA, CRFM, CFMC, ICCAT, NAFO, NEAFC, CECAF, COPPESAALC, etc.;
- Liaising with other relevant regional and international organizations as appropriate, such as the Sargasso Sea Commission, SPAW Protocol, etc.;
- Coordinating the formulation and adoption of recommendations and/or resolutions and reports/documents by the WG so as to facilitate the decision-making process by the Commission;
- Ensuring the strategic linkage between the work of the WG and programmes and projects hosted to support the fisheries and healthy ecosystems framework of the CLME+ and any future phase of this project;
- Facilitating training and collaboration of WECAFC Member States and sub-regional training institutions as appropriate and based on available resources.

**e. Roles of other Subregional organizations (e.g. CFMC, CRFM, ICCAT, OSPESCA, UNEP-CEP, IFREMER, NOAA, CARICOM, OECS, etc.)**

Sub-regional organizations have an important role to play in assisting their member countries to participate fully in the activities of the Working Group. Therefore, they may be invited to:

- Provide expertise, technical assistance and support;
- Facilitate procurement of funding when possible;
- Collaborate in implementing the activities of the Working Group;
- Collaborate with the WECAFC Secretariat and sub-regional organizations in coordinating the activities of the WG
- Facilitate the decision-making process at the Sub-regional level.

### **Regional Activity Centre for the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife for the Wider Caribbean Region (CAR-SPAW-RAC)**

Pursuant to mutual aims and objectives with the WG:

- The convener of this working group will contribute as a technical representative to the SPAW STAC Ad Hoc Working Group on Parrotfish.
- CAR-SPAW-RAC will provide expertise technical assistance and support with respect to management of species of parrotfish which form spawning aggregations.

#### **IV. Outputs**

In discharging its duties, the WG will deliver the following outputs:

- Biennial Work Plans including providing performance of projects on a routine schedule;
- Reports on assessment and monitoring of the status of spawning aggregations;
- Draft Fisheries Management Plans;
- Draft Regional Plans of Action;
- Proposed Recommendations and Resolutions to the Commission;
- Revised TORs as needed.

#### **V. Communication**

A mechanism for on-going communication among WG members (video conference, Skype, zoom meeting and email), is essential to ensure that the work of the group is sustained between meetings. It must include all members and the communication tools must be accessible to all members.

The successful functioning of the WG also requires that each member country and organization/ agency identify a national node or focal point who will be contacted through the WECAFC National Focal Point and technically coordinate at national level all matters pertinent to the WG. The outputs of the WG will be communicated through reports to WECAFC, OSPESCA, CFMC, CRFM, CITES, UNEP-CEP, ICCAT, IFREMER, and national fishery administrations via the WECAFC Secretariat.

#### **VI. Working Group meetings and cost**

The WG should meet physically or virtually on a regular basis, the timing of which is decided by the members, but at a minimum once every two years. The meetings should be of 2-5 days and use cost effective accommodations and institutional facilities and, where possible, take advantage of other meetings in the region. Meetings shall be chaired by the Convener of the WG. The reports of the meetings will be formally submitted to OSPESCA, WECAFC, CFMC and CRFM, ICCAT, CITES, UNEP-CEP, IFREMER, Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute Network, etc.

#### **VII. Amendments to the Terms of Reference**

Amendment of these terms of reference may be done at each biennial meeting of the Commission for implementation by the working groups in the subsequent intersessional period.

## VIII. **Templates for Recommendations and Resolutions**

Standardized templates will ensure a common understanding of what should be included in draft recommendations and resolutions, ease the reporting of deliverables as well as facilitate their review by other WECAFC bodies, as appropriate. Working Groups should include the following elements when preparing draft recommendations and resolutions to be presented to the WECAFC membership or other WECAFC bodies (e.g. the Scientific Advisory Group or other WECAFC Working Groups).

### **Recommendations and Resolutions**

Draft recommendations and resolutions for review by other WECAFC bodies and the WECAFC membership should include the following elements:

- **Cover Note**: A brief cover note for draft recommendations and/or resolutions should be provided to assist reviewers. The cover note should include a clear, candid, and transparent explanation of:
  - a. why the action was developed,
  - b. at which WG meeting it was discussed,
  - c. a brief overview of how the WG arrived at its decision to put the action forward;
  - d. how the action will impact future WECAFC activities, including, where relevant any possible changes in resource or workload requirements for Members or the WECAFC Secretariat;
  - e. the ramifications of \*not\* approving the recommended action;
  - f. the full picture of the context for the recommended action.
- **Preambular Text**: This should provide essential elements to highlight the context and intent of the proposed action in a concise bulleted format. The preambular text should include only the core historical elements and should include references to related decisions or measures.
- **Action Text**: This should indicate clearly what action(s) the WG is taking, or is asking the WECAFC Membership to take, at a national, subregional, and/or regional level, including specific timelines to which the action(s) will adhere.

Considering that each WG can have more than one meeting, and more than one issue to address during each intersessional period, the WGs can produce several reports/documents or draft resolutions/recommendations. In order to facilitate analysis by the Commission, each WG shall prepare a single set of recommendations and/or resolutions organized by fishery or by theme, including all the topics addressed in the intersessional meetings. In this regard, the Commission would consider a single set of draft recommendations and/or resolutions for spiny lobster, queen conch, flying fish and dolphinfish, FADs, FDS, etc.

The WGs shall refer relevant recommendations and resolutions of a scientific nature to the SAG for scientific review at least one month before the meeting of SAG, in order to provide adequate time to the Secretariat and SAG members to review them before the meeting. This will improve the efficiency of the reviews during the SAG sessions.

### Appendix 3: Work Plan 2023-2024

The WECAFC-SAWG will carry out the following activities in 2023–2024 period:

Activity	Proposed Activity Timetable	Responsible Entity	Status	Group/ Theme	Link to Commission Strategic Objective	Priority (low, medium, high)	Estimated cost	Notes
Convene the 5 <sup>th</sup> meeting of the SAWG (Panama)	Jan-23	WECAFC + CFMC as coordinator; meeting supported by NOAA Fisheries	COMPLETE	Coordination/ Collaboration	1,2,3	HIGH	TBD	Organization of a meeting/ meeting report
Publish and distribute Report of 5 <sup>th</sup> SAWG meeting (2023)	Fall 2023	WECAFC + CFMC supported by NOAA Fisheries	IN PROGRESS	Technical/ Scientific Advisory	1,2,3	MEDIUM	No cost	Dissemination of the meeting report (mail and WECAFC website)
Maintain the SAWG network intersessional communications by regularly posting FSA news and events to the GCFI, CAMPAM, and other lists	2021 – 2025	GCFI(Acost a) Ongoing – ListServe established; postings ongoing	IN PROGRESS	Education/ Outreach	2	MEDIUM	No cost	Regularly posting FSA news and events to the GCFI, CAMPAM, and other lists( monthly/ bi-monthly etc.)

Final cooperative monitoring program and database (AFTER PILOT PROJECT)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2024	WECAFC, CFMC, NOAA Fisheries, SAWG members and researchers, and others  <i>Requires funding</i>	PENDING	Coordination/ Collaboration	2,3	MEDIUM	USD\$ USD\$70,000	Final Database set
Develop a FSA Protocol to: 1) report on the status of spawning aggregations and associated environmental factors, and 2) evaluate local management initiatives. Identify lessons learned and apply positive outcomes.	Present draft at 6 <sup>th</sup> SAWG meeting; adopt at 7 <sup>th</sup> SAWG meeting  2023-2024	WECAFC/- FDS/SAWG, CFMC, SAWG members and researchers, and others, WCS <i>EU DG MARE Funded</i>	PENDING	Technical/ Scientific Advisory	1,2	HIGH	USD\$25,000	Effective implementation of FSA protocol
Conduct a regional and national status and needs assessment of FSA sites in the WECAFC region (will continue beyond EU DG MARE)	2023-ONWARDS	WECAFC, CFMC, SAWG members and researchers, and others, WCS <i>Funding available for</i>	PENDING	Technical/ Scientific Advisory	1,2	MEDIUM	USD\$100,960	Mainstreaming the results of the status and need assessment of the FSA sites

		<i>pilot; requires funding beyond pilot</i>						
Establish clear and simple guidance to: 1) update and/or verify the status (timing and location, fish numbers, catches) of known spawning aggregations at the national level, and 2) facilitate prioritization of those spawning aggregations most urgently needing protective action.	2023 – 2024	WECAFC/- FDS/SAWG , CFMC, SAWG members and researchers, and others, WCS <i>EU DG MARE Funded</i>	PENDING	Technical/ Scientific Advisory	1,2	HIGH	USD\$87,300	Guidance adopted and disseminated
Mobilize resources from bilateral and international agencies to assist with Activities called for in SAWG Work Plan	2021 - 2025	WECAFC, CFMC, NOAA Fisheries, SAWG members, and others <i>Initiated summer 2021</i>	IN PROGRESS	Coordination/ Collaboration	4	HIGH		Funding mobilized and available/ project start up



Secure financial support to develop Digital Hub in support of Communication Plan with downloadable resources and resource library	2023- 2024	SAWG, CFMC (support to A. Salceda, BelugaSmile ) <i>EU DG MARE partial funding, Requires additional funding \$100,000</i>	IN PROGRESS	Education/ Outreach	4	MEDIUM		Operationalization of the Digital hub
Production of one-hour film for International Broadcast	2023	Ana Salceda, BelugaSmile Productions, supported by The Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI), Terra Mater and PBS	COMPLETE	Education/ Outreach	4	MEDIUM		International Broadcasting of the film

<p>Develop materials for Citizen Science Program aimed at fishers and enforcement officials: 1) Produce &amp; distribute radio kits in Spanish and French; 2) Produce &amp; distribute two short films: a) a 30-minute “call to action” film aimed at fishing communities to stop decline of mutton snapper; and b) a film that calls on the general public to protect FSAs by not consuming grouper and snapper during spawning periods</p>	<p>2022- 2024</p>	<p>CFMC (support to A. Salceda, BelugaSmile )  <i>Funding Required for French translation of radio kit</i></p>	<p>IN PROGRESS</p>	<p>Education/ Outreach</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>HIGH</p>		<p>The material developed and disseminated helps in raising awareness around the mutton snapper to avoid catches during spawning season</p>
<p>Share resources to identify FSAs in regions where FSAs have not been documented or characterized (e.g. Eastern Caribbean)</p>	<p>2021- 2025</p>	<p>WECAFC  Requires funding</p>	<p>PENDING</p>	<p>Technical/ Scientific Advisory</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>LOW</p>		<p>New FSA identified through technical capacity</p>

Create resource channel for member states to build capacity to manage aggregating species, especially where FSAs have not been documented or characterized (e.g. Eastern Caribbean)	2021- 2025	<i>WECAFC – task for FSAMP Coordination group under their TOR Requires funding</i>	IN PROGRESS	Technical/ Scientific Advisory		LOW		
Implementation of 1) Public Broadcasting Service’s Outreach plan and 2) The Howard Hughes Medical Institute’s (HHMI) Science Outreach Plan.	2023 - 2025	<i>Beluga Smile Productions will continue its coordination with HHMI &amp; PBS.</i>	IN PROGRESS	Education/ Outreach	4	LOW		The stakeholders are effectively educated through the 02 outreach plans
Secure support to assist WECAFC members with FSAMP Implementation for most urgent actions needed	2022 – 2023	<i>WECAFC, CFMC, SAWG members and researchers, and others, WCS, NOAA Fisheries Funding available for pilot;</i>	IN PROGRESS	Coordination/ Collaboration	1,2,3,4	HIGH		Effective implementation of the FSAMP in most urgent actions

		<i>requires funding beyond pilot</i>						
Charter of a 10-person FSAMP Coordination Committee (FSAMP-CC)	2023-2025	CFMC, WECAFC	PENDING	Coordination/ Collaboration		HIGH		a) Design of TOR b) First Meeting of FSAMP-CC
6 <sup>th</sup> Meeting of the WECAFC-SAWG (in Miami?)	Tentative Q3 2024	WECAFC, NOAA Fisheries, CFMC  <i>Requires Funding; CFMC can host if in MIA or PR</i>	PENDING	Coordination/ Collaboration		LOW	TBD	

Workshop at GCFI 2024 – Involve fishers and scientists – Mobilise around FSAMP	Q4 2024	WECAFC, CFMC, GCFI  <i>Requires Funding</i>	PENDING					
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## Fishery Data and Statistics Working Group (FDS-WG)

Convener: Nancie Cummings

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#### 1. Introduction and Background

As the FDS-WG is a relatively new, WG some background context is provided. 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. 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) established the Fishery Data and Statistics Working Group (FDS-WG) based on the ongoing work of the WECAFC-FIRMS (Fisheries and Resource Monitoring System) Partnership, a partnership initiative initiated at Corpus Christi (TX) in 2015. WECAFC 16 also supported the development of a regional database (RDB) in collaboration with the Members and partners in the region.

WECAFC 17 (Miami, July 2019) adopted the WECAFC interim Data Collection Reference Framework (iDCRF), and an interim List of Main Species for data collection in the WECAFC area. Following the WECAFC 17th 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 on the revised iDCRF and its appendices.

At the most recent Commission session (WECAFC 18<sup>th</sup>) (Managua, Nicaragua, July 2022), the FDS-WG presented recommendations relating to the iDCRF, the regional data base, and on capacity building needs. At that session, the ‘Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF) and its appendices (WECAFC/XVIII/2022/9)’ including in particular Appendix 2, “WECAFC subareas” and Appendix 3, “WECAFC Reference list of main species” were adopted as presented. Part 2 of the recommendation addressed the regional database- the Western Central Atlantic Fisheries Information System (“WECAFIS”, formerly referred to as RDB) and was fully endorsed. Briefly, the 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. Part 3 of the FDS-WG recommendation address the continued need for capacity building and collaborative interactions recognizing 1) 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, 2) identification and prioritization of capacity-building investments and projects is key to improving science-based decision-making, and 3) further investments are vital to build national capacities of WECAFC Members for data collection, analysis, and reporting with priorities on the DCRF and feeding the WECAFIS through the SAG process.

## **2. Functions of the FDS-WG**

A primary objective of the FDS-WG is to strengthen collaboration on fisheries data and statistics matters among the three regional fisheries bodies (WECAFC, CRFM and OSPESCA) and to reinforce national capacities to improve data collection, processing and dissemination for support to evidence based fisheries policy making. In carrying out the core work of the FDS-WG focus will be on three areas will be necessary:

- a. Data collection at national level** - Provide recommendations to address national data collection and sharing challenges in the WECAFC region through:
  - Identifying issues (gaps, deficiencies), challenges and best practices in data collection at national level in the region, and provide recommendations on how to address issues and challenges
  - Identifying and recommending best practices for the region including how to involve private interests in data collection (i.e., industry, intergovernmental groups)
  - Developing standard data collection formats for use at national level and related minimum guidelines for collection
  - Reviewing and making recommendations on coordination opportunities for new data statistics projects coming into the region.
  
- b. Data sharing and harmonization at regional level** - Provide recommendations to address open data sharing challenges at international level for the benefit of fisheries communities, research and management communities and to improve the ability to manage fisheries resources:
  - Identifying and recommending lists of data to be shared among WECAFC countries in a RDB, including regional standards and classifications
  - Define formats, metadata, policies and best practices to exchange data
  - Provide recommendations on data harmonization to allow data collation at regional level including the mapping between national and regional classification
  
- c. IT management and maintenance of the Regional DataBase (RDB) –**
  - Provide recommendations for cost efficient and sustainable management and maintenance of the Regional DataBase
  - Provide high level recommendations on technology and policy issues related to development, hosting and maintenance for the RDB
  - Provide RDB specifications, priorities, governance, policy mechanisms
  - Formulate project development phases and participation mechanisms
  - Provide recommendations for cost efficient and sustainable management and maintenance of the Regional DataBase



### 3. Objectives of this report

This document summarizes achievements, challenges and lessons learned by the FDS-WG during the period 2022-2023. Implementation of activities was within the context of its TORs as contained in the report of the First and Second Meetings of the FDS-WG (May 2018, April 2022), and the Conclusion meeting of the FDS-WG2 in March 2022:

- a. Publish the v1.0 of the Data Collection Framework as an FAO Circular
- b. Finalize WECAFC List of Aquatic Species, proposal for subareas and other appendices
- c. Progress intersession discussions of WECAFC proposals for statistical reporting
- d. Advance the work on WECAFC-FIRMS inventories of fisheries and stocks and initial steps towards operationalization of the Regional DataBase (“WECAFIS”) :
  - i. Through regional data calls and data preparatory workshops
  - ii. Through supporting initial training to WECAFC Members in completion of DCRF task inputs towards implementation of the DCRF

### 4. Main Accomplishments during the Intersession Period (2022-2023)

Continued activities initiated in the prior intersession period online meetings towards refinements of data collection standards:

Work continued through the FDS-WG and WECAFC-FIRMS partnership on revisions of:

- a. Interim Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF)- v0.7 endorsed at FDS2 Conclusion Meeting (March 2022), v0.8 endorsed by SAG XI (April 2022) and WECAFC 18 (July 2022) and v1.0 under final preparation as an FAO Circular (February 2023) and available here [DCRF](#)
- b. WECAFC List of Species, fisheries and stocks finalized at FDS2 Conclusion meeting (March 2022), in v0.7; v0.8 endorsed by SAG XI (April 2022) and WECAFC 18 (July 2022); and v1.0 under final preparation as an FAO Circular (February 2023)
- c. List of Species updated to include elevation of Group 1 (Main reference species) species to include mutton snapper and Nassau grouper (May 2023) in accordance with rules specified in the DCRF (v0.8) as endorsed by WECAFC 18 (July 2022)
- d. Work ongoing on the preliminary DCRF Appendix 6 “Biological references” (length measurement standards, maturity classifications, standard growth models, relevant length and weight conversion factors)
- e. Endorsement of the WECAFC subareas by SAG XI (April 2022) and WECAFC 18 (July 2022), including the general principles for delineating statistical limits. Intersessional discussions are on-going with USA/Bahamas, and Venezuela to finalize the small number of limits which remain pending finalization.
- f. WECAFIS regional database endorsed at the FDS-WG2 Conclusion meeting [(March 2022), v0.7; v0.8 endorsed by SAG XI (April 2022) and WECAFC 18 (July 2022); and v1.0 under final preparation as an FAO Circular (February 2023)]; data from 8 countries contributed to FIRMS data preparatory sessions and FDS-WG2 Conclusion session; WECAFIS regional database re-endorsed at June 2023 platform demonstration meeting delivered to FDS-WG members
- g. FDS-WG convener reviewed draft document prepared by FIRMS Secretariat for FIRMS 8th eTWG meeting on definitions and standards (March 2023) also input to Secretariat Survey relating to use of and benefits of FIRMS to partners (February 2023)
- h. FDS-WG convener provided input at various WG meetings as relates aligning data collection in context of DCRF guidelines:
  - o SAWG WG meeting (March 2023)

- Conch WG meeting (March 2023), developed presentation for meeting
- 5th mFADS WG meeting (April 2023)
- 4th mFADS WG meeting (February 2022)
- i. WECAFIS regional database platform presentation session for FDS-WG members, for preparation and submission of data calls according to DCRF for WECAFC regional statistics, convened (June 2023); WECAFIS regional database re-endorsed at this session
- j. Information on DCRF and Appendices available at: [DCRF and Appendices](#)

Developments on inventories of [FIRMS](#) marine resources and fisheries enhancing contributions to the WECAFIS through the WECAFC-FIRMS partnership:

Fishery sheets updated for:

- a. Dominica (Reporting year 2022)
  - [Large pelagic handline and trolling fishery](#) - 1 update pending final validation by country
- b. Suriname (Reporting year 2022) - draft fact sheets pending final validation by country
  - Artisanal gillnet groundfish fishery
  - Bottom longline groundfish fishery
  - Bottom trawl seabob fishery
  - Bottom trawl shrimp fishery
  - Demersal trawl finfish fishery

New fishery fact sheets developed for:

- a. Dominica (Reporting year 2022) - draft fact sheets pending final validation by country
  - Beach seine fourwing flyingfish fishery
  - Net fourwing flyingfish fishery
  - Pot slipper lobster fishery
  - Pot spiny lobster fishery
  - Pot spotted spiny lobster fishery
- c. Nicaragua (Reporting year 2019)
  - [Artisanal cannonball jellyfish fishery](#)
  - [Artisanal sea cucumber fishery](#)
  - [Industrial sea cucumber fishery](#)
- d. Saint Vincent and Grenadines (Rep. year 2022) - draft fact sheets pending final validation by country
  - Demersal fishery
  - Small coastal pelagics fishery

The full list of stocks and fisheries fact sheets reported for the WECAFC region is available at [FIRMS](#) and at [WECAFC](#). The partnership between FAO-FIRMS and WECAFC arose out of a need for better data and information on WECAFC fisheries and stocks as reiterated at [WECAFC 14](#) (February 2012) and [WECAFC](#)

[15](#) (March 2014); the WECAFC-FIRMS partnership proposal and arrangement was formulated during the WECAFC-FIRMS Workshop on Marine Resources and Fisheries Inventories (November 2013). More information is found at: [WECAFC-FIRMS partnership](#).

Development of Applications (e.g. new module at Secretariat level, or enhancements in streamlining workflow at Partner level):

- WECAFC FIRMS Partnership with support from FAO Headquarters (NFIS) continued development of infrastructure for populating the WECAFIS regional database including hosting the training session on WECAFIS (June 2023)

Development of case studies/prototypes initiated collaborating with two other WGs (spiny lobster and IUU) towards improving regional statistics:

- FDS-WG convener initiated development of pilot projects between WECAFC IUU and Spiny lobster (SL) working groups; with input from WECAFC Secretariat, FIRMS Secretariat and SL and IUU WG conveners. The aim of proposal is to develop 1) minimum data collection standards for artisanal lobster fisheries in alignment with the DCRF objectives, 2) modify and develop new DCRF modules where necessary for small scale artisanal fishing activities, and 3) identify practical and cost-effective data collection methods for IUU fishing in spiny lobster fisheries.

Training or capacity development:

- a. WECAFC-FRMS partnership participated in FAO workshop on Indicator 14.4.1 (Proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels) for Sustainable Development Goal 14.4.1, covering framework, overview of data needs and assumptions of classical assessment models, and application of the models (February 2022)
- b. Support provided to Guyana initiated under TCP/GUY/3901 project and with collaboration from the FISH4ACP project, with deployment of the FAO Calipseo platform and development of capacity of staff in data collection, statistics methodologies and tools; more information on this new tool is at [Calipseo](#)
- c. Support provided to Saint Lucia with the deployment of Calipseo under the GCP/STL/001/GCR - Deployment is completed - Migration of data is completed - training was done in April and final roll-out of the system will be complete at end of June for 6 months piloting
- d. Calipseo for Dominica is being completed (initiated under the GCP/SLC/020/EC project)
- e. Providing on-going support to Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago under the Japanese trust fund (limited resources); in both cases, the larger project EAF4SG will start in 2024 with one key component on data and statistics

Planned activities during the coming intersession period (2023-2025):

WECAFC-FIRMS focal points to continue outreach to national scientists towards:

- a. Increasing awareness of need and importance of updating fisheries marine resource and fact sheets,
- b. Increasing capacity of national scientists to update fact sheets in a timely manner- through implementation of scheduled data calls,
- c. Initiating more formal discussions with CRFM and OSPESCA focal points toward identifying bottlenecks and barriers to updating inventories
- d. Identifying outreach activities with national scientists towards producing required inputs for operationalization of the DCRF

- e. Data preparatory training workshops for DCRF and FIRMS data submissions

## **5. Challenges**

The FDS-WG did not meet during the intersession. The WECAFC-FIRMS taskforce and the WG Convener met several times (on an irregular basis) and through these virtual sessions the core work of the FDS-WG progressed. Additional resources will be needed to 1) further advance Members capacities to report statistics to the WECAFIS and update and develop new FIRMS products and 2) ensure publishing and dissemination of products from FDS-WG activities.

## **6. Conclusions**

The intersession period since FDS-WG2 (March 2022) was characterized by medium level of activity necessary to carry out the work plan. The intersession activities required a high level of collaborations with the WECAFC-FIRMS taskforce members. The continued work to publish the DCRF, updating existing fact sheets, developing new fact sheets, initiating capacity initiatives presenting the operational characteristics of the WECAFIS, initiating new efforts involving collaborations with the FDS-WG and species working groups towards aligning the data collection with the DCRF- all marked good progress towards the aim of progressing Members capacities to collect and report statistics to better inform regional data and statistics. If these basic core activities are continued, expected improvements in regional information available for management and stock assessment will follow.

The financial, administrative and in-kind contributions of the EU-DG MARE, NOAA, CRFM and OSPESCA, the WECAFC Secretariat and FAO-FIRMS program are gratefully acknowledged here, as well as the diligent efforts of the members of the WECAFC-FIRMS 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. Finally, the interest and willingness to participate in supporting the FDS-WG by the Members is greatly appreciated.

## 7. Appendix 1 Draft Work Plan 2023-2024 Intersession Period for WECAFC/SAG/XII

The Working Group will carry out the following activities in 2023-2024 period.

Activity	Proposed Activity Timeframe	Responsible Entity	Status	Group/ Theme	Link to Commission Strategic Objective Focus Area	Priority (low, medium, high)	Link to other activities	Estimated Cost	Notes
<b>1. Vessel mapping Content</b>	2022-2024	WECAFC-FIRMS and member countries	ongoing	Technical	1, 2	medium	Needed for 6	Unknown	
a. Liaise with FDS WG focal points for additional submissions									
b. Review submissions from WECAFC Members and highlight where revisions are needed									
c. Implementations in the WECAFIS database with corresponding metadata									
d. Discussion of adding vessel type information into FIRMS tables, including vessels images when available									

<b>2. WECAFC Subarea Boundaries</b>	2023-2025	FDS-WG and member countries	ongoing	Technical Coordination	1, 2	medium	Needed for 6	Unknown	
a. Finalize the proposal in the Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala sub-region under the OSPESCA umbrella									
b. Review feedback from member countries on sub-areas related to area 31 and 41, and if the case appears feasible, prepare for presentation at CWP									
c. Discuss a recommendation for SAG and the Commission, or any other plan to move forward									
d. Conduct intersession discussions on Venezuela sub area delimitations									
<b>3. FIRMS Inventories</b>	2023-2025	WECAFC-FIRMS and	ongoing	Technical/Collaborative	1, 2	high	Needed for 6	Unknown (FIRMS)	

		member countries							
a. Continue to review and Summarize inputs by member countries, highlight latest submissions, discuss/elaborate specific FIRMS services for the region (delivered through WECAFC map viewer)									
b. discuss/identify/implement a path for updating inventories in OSPESCA region- e.g., consultant to further inventory development on a country by country basis possibly, considerations of focus groups working with fleet segments (across multiple member countries) to									

enrich inventories									
c. Also noting that FIRMS Secretariat may develop a pilot demonstrating how a possible future addition of FIRMS fishery Ids (optional) in certain Tasks of the DCRF can be exploited, for presentation at next FDS-WG									
<b>4. Small Scale Fisheries Matrix</b>	2022-2024	FAO and FDS-WG	No new progress	Technical/Collaboration	1, 2	low		Unknown	
a. Summarize list of member countries which submitted highlighting latest submissions and new pilot testing									
b. Present a synthesis of the level of adaption of the SSF matrix to the WECAFC region and what									



would need to be changed in the SSF matrix for it to be of practical application for the region									
c. Discuss a recommendation for submitting to FAO for consideration WECAFC DCRF									
<b>5. WECAFC Reference list of aquatic species, annotation of important Subareas by species and DCRF tasks</b>	2023-2025	FDS-WG and member countries	ongoing		1, 2	medium	Needed for 6	Unknown	
a. Review submissions by member countries and WGs for additional species, and sub-areas for species, and proceed with member countries endorsements for the proposals. The use of the FIRMS map			Two new species added to group 1						

viewer will help to obtain additional input on annotation of area by species.									
b. Review inputs from relevant Working groups, for the list of species and their sub-areas and identification of specific DCRF tasks			Two new species added to group 1						
c. Annotation of relevant standard conversion metrics by species/subarea for inclusion in DCRF catalogue (Tables) of conversions			No new progress						
d. Annotation of relevant biological parameters for select set of species in main list of species by important subareas (e.g., reproductive ogives, growth parameter estimates) for									

inclusion in DCRF catalogue (Tables) of biological parameters									
<b>6. DCRF</b>	2023-2025	FDS-WG and member countries	DCRF finalized as v1.0 and FAO Circular under preparation	Technical	1, 2	high		Unknown	
i. two proposed e-TWGs:									
a. for elaboration on measures of fishing effort per Fleet segment or Gear type									
b. for refinement of Biological tasks – member countries with experience invited to be part of this WG									
<b>I. Operationalization of the DCRF and Contributions to WECAFIS</b>	2022-2024	FDS-WG and member countries	ongoing	Technical/Collaboration	1, 2	high		Unknown	
a. Finalize the Maps viewer (through e-TWG?) for									

public release as soon as possible									
b. Identifying member countries willing to commit in the intersession, to populate the WECAFIS using local statistics in 2020 and 2021. Local statistics uploaded to WECAFIS. Identification of local country data manager.					/				
c. Liaising with and identifying Regional species WGs to combine their expectations for data with the member countries contribution (Shrimp and Groundfish, Lobster, ...), and organize joint activities									
d. Identifying issues/challenges with member countries committing data									

	to WECAFIS during pilot tests								
e.	Developing road map including pilot data sets for implementing data uploads to WECAFIS DB by end of 2023								
<b>II.</b>	<b>Discussion of how the WECAFIS information can contribute to informing SDG 14.4.1</b>	2022-2024	FAO and FDS-WG		Technical/scientific advisory	1, 2	high		Unknown
a.	Consider if a sub-committee needed- perhaps focus on one of the pilots (e.g., OSPESCA lobster)								
<b>III.</b>	<b>Fostering Growth of FDS-WG throughout region -</b>	2023-2025	FDS-WG	Ongoing	Communication/Outreach	1, 2	medium		Unknown
a.	Co-convener shadow training to develop leadership in WG								
<b>IV.</b>	<b>How can this WG interact or begin to interact with other</b>	2022-2024	FDS-WG//		Collaboration/Coordination/Outreach	1, 2	low		Unknown

<p><b>regional/international WGs</b> (species, topical, RFMOs) to further improve the regional statistics and information on fisheries</p>									
<p><b>a. Under MoU /agreement with ICCAT-</b> contribute to the planned joint ICCAT-WECAFC working group where respective species list might be examined</p>					1, 2				
<p><b>b. Should this WG contact ICCAT re' participating in ICCAT statistics WG</b> as observer to learn how ICCAT develops/prioritizes and carries out its tasks/intersessional work on the topic of statistics (a question to ask</p>									

to the participants? would anyone volunteer)									
<b>V. Review Logbooks guidelines</b> and revisit FDS-WG 2 (LOG-1)	2022-2024	FDS-WG		Technical	1, 2	medium		Unknown	
Review work done during FDS-WG 1 intersession- discuss LOG-1 (two pilot surveys) and LOG-2 (historical experiences) survey instruments in context of best practices in logbook implementation in region and identify needed revisions for survey instruments LOG-1, LOG-2.									
<b>VI. Capacity building- other needs-this work is ongoing</b>	2023-2025	FDS-WG, WECAFC-FIRMS, FAO-FIRMS	Ongoing	Communication/Coordination/ Collaboration	1, 2	high		Unknown	
1. Finalize the list of selection criteria and propose a short list of WECAFC Members meeting these									

criteria for final selection									
2. For the selected WECAFC member(s), define the work plan and related budget for support									
3. Seek for co-funding from other regional projects and agree on the shared investments									



**Working Group on Fisheries Using Anchored/Moored Fish Aggregating Devices**

**Colvin Taylor, Convener**

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## 1. Introduction and Background

The working group was first established by WECAFC in 2001 as the IFREMER/WECAFC Working Group on Development of Sustainable Moored FAD Fishing in the Lesser Antilles.

The joint CRFM/WECAFC/JICA/IFREMER Working Group on Fisheries using MFADs met for the fourth time in February 2022 in a virtual format. The documents reviewed at that meeting (Caribbean Regional MFAD Fishery Management Plan, Guide for improved monitoring of MFAD catches and improved assessment of MFAD impact on stocks, Tailored Terms of Reference to the specificities of the working group, 2022-2024 workplan) were consolidated and submitted to the 11<sup>th</sup> meeting of the 11<sup>th</sup> session of the Scientific Advisory Group (SAGXI), then the 18<sup>th</sup> plenary of the Commission (WECAFC18).

The WG held its (hybrid) fifth meeting as the CRFM/WECAFC/JICA WG, 17-19 April 2023 in Roseau, Commonwealth of Dominica, following the pulling out of IFREMER after decades of support. In addition to this change, the end long ago of the JICA project, made it essential to review further the name of the WG in streamlining its regional scope. The agreed name is now the WECAFC Working Group on Fisheries Using moored (or anchored) Fish Aggregating Devices (aFAD instead of commonly known MFADs, to comply with FAO's suggested terminology). An important development in the working group following the 18<sup>th</sup> Session of WECAFC (WECAFC18) held 26-29 July 2022 in Managua, Nicaragua is the assignment of the convener to high level national duties, hence became unavailable to coordinate the WG. A new convener was nominated at the fifth meeting, with the commitment of Barbados.

This document outlines intersessional activities accomplished by the WG Working Group during 2022-2023. They were largely marked (i) by the establishment of a task force of a consultant and two member volunteers (EU and USA) who further developed the two instruments endorsed as interim instruments by the 18<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission, (ii) an assistance to Dominica in the development of a national mFADs management plan, (iii) the preparation of a draft mFADs Governance manual and (iv) the implementation of targeted activities of the 2022-2024 workplan of the working group, including assessing the feasibility for managing the publication of the existing four draft mFADs manuals from a CRFM-implemented project.

## 2. Objectives

This document summarizes achievements, challenges and lessons learned by the aFAD WG during the period 2022-2023. Implementation of activities was within the context of its 2022 endorsed TORs by WECAFC18 as enshrined in the reports of SAGXI and WECAFC18 under publication, and posted at: <https://www.fao.org/3/cc0961en/cc0961en.pdf> (see page 3-8). The WG is expected to contribute to the fulfilment of national and regional responsibilities for the marine environment and for the management of pelagic oceanic and coastal fisheries resources harvested using Anchored/Moored Fish Aggregating Devices (aFADs) - including large and small tuna, swordfish, billfishes, dolphinfish, and mackerels - and related or interacting species or fisheries in the WECAFC Region. The objectives are reproduced as follows:

- Collect, review and share the existing (past and present) data and information on the aFAD fishery in the WECAFC area, involving the fishers and private sector, in addition to identifying the potential for sustainable management and development of such fisheries in the region.
- Analyze the data and information collected from aFAD fisheries and make recommendations for the sustainability of the fisheries in the WECAFC region.
- Promote the reporting of MFADs fisheries statistics to ICCAT.

- Facilitate the sharing of data, information, and experiences related to aFAD fisheries in the region in collaboration with the Fisheries Data and Statistics Working Group and the Recreational Fisheries Working Group.
- Monitor changes in distribution and abundance of species pelagic oceanic and coastal fish species harvested using MFADs, including large and small tuna, swordfish, billfishes, dolphinfish, and mackerels- in the WECAFC region.
- Develop common and feasible methodologies for assessment and monitoring of the fish stock especially in data poor fisheries.
- Collaborate with academia and other research institutions to gain knowledge on the biology of key pelagic oceanic and coastal fish species harvested using aFADs and on relevant socioeconomic and governance aspects of such fisheries to improve management.
- Seek partnerships with other institutions that could provide assistance in the monitoring, evaluation, and recommendations for management for sustainable use, protection and conservation of the resources.
- Seek partnerships with other institutions that could aid with the implementation of local/national level MFAD fishery management plans and co-management arrangements.
- Monitor and provide advice on the management and implementation of regional strategies, regulations and management plans to protect the fish resources.
- Establish communication between the members of the Working Group, other Working Groups and relevant parties on issues of common interest in order to strengthen regional collaboration in the assessment and management of living marine resources.
- Report to the Commission and contribute to communication and visibility of the deliverables of the Working Group as may be needed.
- Identify needs of communities dependent on the MFAD fishery resources and investigate alternative livelihoods from fisheries and aquaculture (recreational fishing, hospitality and tourism, etc.)

### **3. Main Accomplishments during the Intersession Period (2022-2023)**

A last milestone that deserve attention is the identification of a new convener tasked with leading the group through the upcoming intersession. The WG's main accomplishments after the deliverables reported to SAGXI and tabled at WECAFC18 are:

- Reviewed interim Caribbean Regional moored FAD Fishery Plan
- Reviewed guide for improved monitoring of aFAD catches and improved assessment of aFAD impact on stocks
- Draft aFADs Governance manual
- Draft National MFADs management plan of Dominica, work in progress for the national validation and cabinet's endorsement
- Preparation and publication of the proceedings of the fourth WG meeting: [Report of the Fourth Virtual Meeting of the Joint CRFM/WECAFC/JICA/IFREMER Working Group on Fisheries using Anchored Fish Aggregating Devices \(aFAD\), 14–16 February 2022](#)
- Fifth (Hybrid) Meeting , 17-19 April 2023, attended by various WECAFC Members, including Barbados, Brazil, Colombia, Commonwealth of Dominica, Dominican Republic, European Union, France, Nicaragua, Panama, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and the United States of America.

The objectives of the meeting included:

- a. Review data and recent developments and the state of play in Member Countries with aFAD fisheries and share experience on aFAD fisheries.
- b. Review the progress of relevant regional and sub-regional activities.
- c. Discuss various working documents coming out of the implementation of the endorsed 2022-2024 workplan, namely, (i) the Caribbean Regional moored FAD Fishery Plan as a result of the review of the CRFM sub-regional Management plan for FAD fisheries to adapt it to a broader WECAFC regional plan and support Member's efforts to develop local/national management plans, (ii) the guide to develop local moored FAD fishery management plans, and (iii) the guide for improved monitoring of moored FADs and assessment of impacts of moored FAD fishing on stocks, (iv) the draft moored FADs governance plan, and (v) manuals on the best practices in the fisheries using moored FADs. On the latter, the approach to the existing manuals (two in draft version-, two published-, all to be in the three languages of the Commission) have been agreed. The Secretariat of WECAFC has been following up with one of the authors and contact person in IFREMER.
- d. Provide status of the implementation of instruments, resolutions, and recommendations previously endorsed by the Commission with relevance to the moored FADs working group (See Appendix 2), and
- e. Develop recommendations and a proposed work plan for future work.

The objectives of the meeting also included identifying regional needs and priorities, highlight areas for potential collaboration, a work plan and recommendations for the future work of the WG.

The meeting was also an opportunity to share recent development on the aFAD fishery in key member states and share experiences from other regions, the field visit to Portsmouth Fishing Facility fits also within this framework.

Finally, the meeting was also an opportunity for Members to provide inputs into important background documents that were previously endorsed as interim by WECAFC18. This is especially, the regional management plan and the monitoring guide. These documents will be re-submitted to the Scientific Advisory Group and WECAFC19 for final approval and adoption later this year. The report is in advanced stage of preparation and is expected to be published before WECAFC19.

- Updated 2022-2024 workplan (see in Appendix)

#### **4. Challenges and issues faced during Intersession Period and steps taken to mitigate**

The main challenge faced was the lack of the convener, which made the coordination of the WG relatively less effective than it would have been. However, with the support of the WECAFC Secretariat, engagement of the Task Force and the Consultant, and the assignment of Mr. Derrick Theophile, Chief Fisheries Officer (Ag) of the Fisheries Division of the Commonwealth of Dominica who supported in the activity of a regional consultant for the national aFAD management plan development and in the organizational matters connected to local logistics of the fifth meeting, negative impact on the delivery of the WG was minimized.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The period in review 2022 – 2023 was short as an intersession, but was undoubtedly a busy one for the WG. It was able to produce the key deliverables expected as follow up actions from WECAFC19 and more outputs, despite being without a convener. These are namely the interim Regional Caribbean Anchored FAD fishery management plan, and the interim guide for monitoring of aFADs, in addition to the draft

aFADs Governance manual. These documents which are aimed towards improving aFAD fishery management in the WECAFC region were well received when presented at the Fifth meeting of the WG and ready to be tabled at the SAGXII and WECAFC 19 subsequently. Hosting of the fifth working group meeting, including in-person attendance after the exigencies of COVID-19 provided a good opportunity and a platform for members to adequately review and comment on matters pertaining to the working group including the 2022-2024 workplan for WECAFC 19.

**Table 1. The Anchored/Moored Fishery Aggregating Devices Working Group (MFADS) will carry out the following activities in 2022–2024 period:**

Activity	Proposed Activity Timetable	Responsible Entity	Status	Group/ Theme	Link to Commission Strategic Objective	Priority (low, medium, high)	Estimated cost	Notes
<b>5<sup>th</sup> Working Group Meeting</b>	2023	WECAFC Secretariat	Accomplished	Coordination/ Collaboration	2, 3, 4	High	-	Hybrid Meeting held 17-19 April.  Key documents reviewed by participants, to be tabled at SAG and WECAFC
<b>Publish and distribute Report of 5<sup>th</sup> aFAD WG meeting (2023)</b>	Summer 2023	WECAFC Secretariat	In preparation	Technical/ Scientific/ Advisory		High		
<b>Collect data on MFAD fishery from WECAFC members.</b>  <b>Conduct analysis on aFAD fishery data</b>	December 2022- June 2024	Convener with CRFM, OSPESCA, WECAFC Secretariat, and IFREMER.	Ongoing	Technical/Scientific/Advisory	1, 2, 3	Medium	30,000 USD	

<p><b>Identify suitable experts/ consultants.</b></p> <p><b>Develop manuals in collaboration with fisheries authorities in member states engaged in aFAD fishery</b></p>	<p>September 2022 - February 2024</p>	<p>Convener with CRFM, OSPESCA, WECAFC Secretariat</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Technical/Scientific/Advisory</p>	<p>1, 2, 3</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>20,000 USD</p>	<p>Discussed at the 5<sup>th</sup> WG Meeting.</p> <p>For the existing manuals to be finalized, follow up action was taken by the Secretariat with the representative of IFREMER. These are Manuals on best practices on (1) fishing and business strategies for sustainable aFAD fisheries, (2) safety and working conditions of aFAD fishers, and (3) the governance of aFAD fisheries,</p>
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								which was presented at the 5 <sup>th</sup> meeting and tabled at SAGXII, then to be finalized for WECAFC19.
<b>Advocate for the reporting of aFAD fisheries statistics at relevant regional fisheries forums</b>  <b>WECAFC Reporting to the Coordinating WG Party (CWP) - June 2023</b>	2022-2024	FDS Working Group CRFM, WECAFC Secretariat	To start soon	Coordination/ Collaboration	2	Medium		An important milestone would be that ICCAT adopts the reporting of MFADs fisheries statistics
<b>Identify ongoing co-management initiatives among aFAD members</b>  <b>Create synergies and linkages</b>	2022-2024	CRFM with assistance of CFMC (to be confirmed), OSPESCA, and relevant fisherfolk organizations and National Fishery Authorities	Ongoing	Coordination/ Collaboration	1, 2, 3			



<b>Assessment/review of ICT applications in MFAD states such as Dominica and Montserrat</b>  <b>Replicate in aFAD countries with relevant/applicable</b>  <b>Review the aFADs monitoring standards and integration into DCRF.</b>	2023-2024	WECAFC Secretariat and Fisheries Data and Statistics Working Group		Technical/Scientific/Advisory	1, 2, 3	Medium		
<b>Liase with FAO/CRFM/ICCAT to establish mechanism for sharing of aFAD data</b>	2023-2024	CRFM with assistance of CFMC, OSPESCA, and relevant fisherfolk organizations and National Fishery Authorities		Coordination/ Collaboration	2	Medium		Permanent Data/information sharing

<b>Liase with FAO/CRFM/ICCAT to establish mechanism for sharing of aFAD information on designs</b>	2023-2024	WECAFC Secretariat and Fisheries Data and Statistics Working Group, in connection with WECAFIS		Coordination/ Collaboration	2, 3	Medium		This will give stakeholders access to information and experiences related to aFAD designs in the region and outside the region
<b>Engage consultant for review and finalization of aFAD Regional MGT Plan, the guide for improved monitoring of aFADs, and the guide for implementation of local MFAD fishery management plans</b>	2022 – 2023	WECAFC Secretariat	Ongoing, presented at this 5 <sup>th</sup> WG; will be re-submitted to sag and WECAFC plenary	Technical/Scientific/Advisory	1,2,3	High		Mainstreaming of the Regional Management Plan for aFAD Fisheries in the Caribbean, the guide for improved monitoring of MFADs, and the guide for implementation of local aFAD fishery management plans

<b>Local aFAD fishery management plan developed for Dominica</b>	March 2023- July 2023	OSPESCA, CRFM, and WECAFC Secretariat, WECAFC members, FDS Working Group		Technical/Scientific/Advisory	1, 3	High		Effective technical support to Members to develop (sub-) national FAD (co-) management plans and improved monitoring systems for aFADs
<b>Undertaking E-learning course on aFADS manuals</b>	2024	WECAFC Secretariat, in collaboration with FAO Fisheries Division, Fish4ACP		Outreach/Education	1, 2, 3	Medium		
<b>Producing a Registry of experts, resource persons in aFADs in the region</b>	2023-2024	WECAFC Secretariat		Outreach/Education	2, 4	High		
<b>Support to aFAD Fishery Assessment training</b>	2023	CRFM , WECAFC Secretariat (with IFREMER)		Outreach/Education	1, 2, 3	Medium		

# Report on intersessional activities (2022-2023) of the Caribbean Spiny Lobster working group (CSL-WG)

CONVENER: Yesuri B. Pino

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### ***1. Introduction and background***

This report compiles the main activities undertaken during the intersessional period (2022-2023) with the aim of showcasing the progress achieved by the Caribbean Spiny Lobster Working Group (CSL-WG) with respect to the Work Plan and suggesting new activities that will enable the achievement of its objectives.

This Working Group held its last meeting on 21-23 March 2018 in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. This was the second meeting of the CSL-WG and took place in person. The endorsed Work Plan for 2022-2024 envisaged holding the third meeting of the CSL-WG at the end of December 2022, in virtual mode. However, during the WECAFC Working Group Convenors meeting, WECAFC Secretariat confirmed it could fund and support the organisation of the third meeting of the CSL-WG in the first quarter of 2023, as two meetings of other working groups were already underway. Despite the above, the meeting has not been held.

### ***2. Objectives***

The objectives of this report are: (i) presenting the background of this Working Group and the main activities carried out between mid-2022 and early 2023; (ii) showcasing the progress achieved in this intersessional period; and (iii) suggesting updates to the established Work Plan that will enable the achievement of the Working Group objectives and the implementation of the activities scheduled in the Regional Management Plan for the Caribbean Spiny Lobster Fishery (MARPLESCA Plan, for its acronym in Spanish).

### ***3. Main achievements of the Working Group during the intersessional period***

The main achievements of the Working Group have mainly corresponded to the activities undertaken by the Caribbean Spiny Lobster Joint Regional Working Subgroup, composed of representatives of Central American Organization of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector (OSPESCA) and Central American Integration System (SICA). Based on the projects and

consultancies carried out, substantial improvements have been made to the Caribbean spiny lobster stock assessment model. These updates have made the analysis more automated and easier to use. At the same time, a new option was included in the model to prepare the input data for the cohort analysis from those fisheries where the Caribbean spiny lobster is landed in bulk, generally in artisanal fisheries where catches are not directed to a processing plant or categorised.

#### ***4. Challenges and issues faced during the intersession period and steps taken to mitigate these***

The major challenges and issues faced during the intersession period have been:

- Limited availability of group members to provide active and timely feedback and lack of continuity of staff in national fisheries offices.
- Lack of support staff to implement the proposed activities in each country.
- Low budget allocation for the implementation of the Work Plan activities in member countries.

Thanks to an external consultant back-funded by the “Value Chain Integration in Fisheries and Aquaculture” project (INCAVPESCA, for its acronym in Spanish), who coordinated different activities and managed several meetings, and the financial and logistical coordination provided by OSPESCA, progress was made in various activities, which contributed to the overall achievements that can be extended to the whole region.

#### ***5. Activities carried out during the intersessional period (2022-2023)***

##### **a. Workshop and meetings convened by WECAFC Secretariat and SICA/OSPESCA Caribbean Spiny Lobster Joint Regional Working Subgroup.**

*SICA/OSPESCA Caribbean Spiny Lobster Joint Regional Working Subgroup*

- Regional course on the use of an updated Caribbean spiny lobster stock assessment model, held on 4-7 October 2022 in person in Comayagua, Honduras.

Objective: Two of its main objectives were: (i) training technicians from SICA member countries, in particular the SICA/OSPESCA Caribbean Spiny Lobster Joint Regional Working Subgroup members, on the updates made to the Caribbean spiny lobster stock assessment model featured in the MARPLESCA Plan; and (ii) reviewing the implementation of national databases as a follow-up to the regional course held in November 2021.

- Follow-up meeting (virtual) of the Caribbean Spiny Lobster Joint Regional Working Subgroup on 17 February 2023.

Objective: Presenting new adjustments to the Microsoft Excel cohort analysis module of the stock assessment model, identified during the workshop held in November 2022. Monitoring the Caribbean spiny lobster fishery and its Regional Management Regulation (OSP-02-09).

*WECAFC Secretariat:*

- Second meeting (virtual) of WECAFC Working Group Convenors on 23 November 2022.

- Working meeting coordinated by the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) chair for the development of a project proposal between the Convenors of the WECAFC Working Group on IUU Fishing and the CSL-WG, March-April 2023.

**b. Development of project proposals on regional research**

- Draft project proposal delivered in May 2023 to the SICA-OSPESCA Regional Directorate on a reproductive study of the Caribbean spiny lobster (*Panulirus argus*) in the Caribbean coasts of Belize, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and Dominican Republic.

**c. Implementation of the updated Regional Management Plan for the Caribbean Spiny Lobster Fishery (MARPLESCA Plan)**

*Stock assessment model of the MARPLESCA Plan:*

- Background (summary) of the SICA/OSPESCA Caribbean Spiny Lobster Joint Regional Working Subgroup

During 2018-2019 a software application for the Caribbean spiny lobster stock assessment was developed in Microsoft Excel using commercial categories data from processing plants as a basis.

In November 2021 the application was presented and distributed to SICA/OSPECA member countries. Furthermore, technical assistance and support was provided for the use of this software tool aimed at assessing Caribbean spiny lobster stocks.

Whilst providing technical assistance, a number of findings were made in the Microsoft Excel model that suggested the convenience of reviewing the software application. To this end, technicians from the Nicaraguan Institute for Fishing and Aquaculture (INPESCA, for its acronym in Spanish), who had developed the MARPLESCA Plan model, worked in implementing the suggested improvements with the aim of refining the Caribbean spiny lobster stock assessments.

- Activities and achievements during the intersessional period (2022-2023)

During 2022 and 2023 and, with the support of an external consultant back-funded by the INCAVPESCA project, the stock assessment model was updated. Several processes were automated and new useful elements for artisanal/bulk fishery data were incorporated to the model

**Outputs/outcomes**

1. Updated stock assessment model in Microsoft Excel, dynamic and expeditious in its calculations.
2. Size range modules in the automated model to modify the available range of sizes in the input data with their respective calibration.
3. New option included in the Microsoft Excel model to prepare the input data for the cohort analysis from those fisheries where the Caribbean spiny lobster is landed in bulk, generally in artisanal fisheries.
4. Updated manual on the use of the stock assessment model and three (3) videos explaining the procedures.

5. Regional working Ssubgroup members trained in the use of the a Caribbean spiny lobster stock assessment model applicable to small, medium and large scale fisheries.

## ***6. Conclusion***

In order to achieve greater efficiency in the development and scope of work of the CSL-WG, coordination and advice should be provided by an external collaborator.

To improve the coordination of future meetings, WECAFC Secretariat should request member states to designate a new representative in charge of monitoring the CSL-WG.

There are obvious challenges in sampling and data collection: logistics, access to plants, insufficient funding and low availability of staff in most countries.

Thanks to external funding, which has enabled the continuation of activities and training of technicians from member countries, progress has been made in data collection, in addition to substantial improvements in the applicability of the MARPLESCA Plan stock assessment model.

### 7. Draft Work Plan for the intersessional period (2023-2024)

This section presents the activities that the Convenor considers to be of highest priority, based on a review of the CSL-WG background and Work Plan. As the CSL-WG has not met during this intersessional period, this draft Work Plan needs to be extended and endorsed by the group.

**Table 1. The Caribbean Spiny Lobster Working Group will carry out the following activities in 2023–2024:**

Activity	Proposed Activity Timeframe	Responsible entity	Status	Group/ Theme	Link to Commission Strategic Objective	Priority (low, medium, high)	Estimated cost	Notes
Organize and hold the third meeting of the Caribbean Spiny Lobster Working Group	December 2022 at the latest	WECAFC OSPESCA	Not carried out	Implementation and monitoring by the countries of the actions of the Regional Management Plan (MARPLESCA Plan)	1	High	USD 5 000 - 7 000 (estimated budget for 3-day online meeting)	Changes in the proposed timeframe due to delays
	December 2022	CSL-WG	Ready for presentation and endorsement	Preparation and adoption of the CSL-WG Work Plan	1	High	Free of charge	
Conduct sampling for possible presence of	July-December 2023	FAO/OSPESCA/CRFM Interim Coordination Mechanism with support from CFMC	Not started	Detection of PaV1 in selected countries of the	2	Low		Requires budget and effective implementation mechanism



locust virus PaV1				WECAFC region				
Prepare the proposal for a Caribbean Spiny Lobster Reproductive Regional Survey in OSPESCA countries	2022 – 2023	OSPESCA CSL-WG	Ongoing	Update breeding season and size at first sexual maturity of this species	2	High	USD 353 000 (proposed fund for project implementation)	First draft submitted to OSPESCA Fundraising required
Review Regional Management Plan (MARPLESCA Plan)	2024	Interim Coordination Mechanism	Not started	Coordination for review by CSL-WG at a regional meeting	1	Medium	USD 70 000 (as per MARPLESCA Plan)	Development every 5 years (as per MARPLESCA Plan)
Extend the updates of the Caribbean spiny lobster stock assessment model of the MARPLESCA Plan	2024	WECAFC OSPESCA CSL-WG	Not started	Training in the use of the stock assessment tool for member countries	1, 2	Medium	USD 100 000 (as per MARPLESCA Plan)	Development of a training and extension programme every year (as per MARPLESCA Plan)

Organize and hold the fourth meeting of the Caribbean Spiny Lobster Working Group	First quarter 2025	WECAFC OSPESCA	Not started	Implementation and monitoring by the countries of the actions of the Regional Management Plan (MARPLESCA Plan)	1	Low	USD 5 000 - 7 000 7 000 (estimated budget for 3-day online meeting)	Every 2 years (as per MARPLESCA Plan)
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## CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES Working Group on Queen Conch (QCWG)

Convener: Maren Headley

### 1. Introduction and Background

The CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES Working Group on Queen Conch (QCWG) was established in 2012 by WECAFC 14. This document outlines intersessional activities accomplished by the QCWG since the 18th Session of WECAFC (WECAFC18) held 26-29 July 2022 in Managua, Nicaragua. WECAFC 18 adopted RECOMMENDATION WECAFC/XVIII/2022/3 ON “INCREASED EFFORTS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REGIONAL QUEEN CONCH FISHERY MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION PLAN IN THE WECAFC REGION.” Following WECAFC 18, the Sixth meeting of the QCWG was held on March 16, 2023.

The third meeting of the Queen Conch Scientific, Statistical and Technical Advisory Group (QC/SSTAG) took place at the Miami Marriott Airport hotel and virtually on April 12-13, 2023.

### 2. Main Accomplishments during the Inter-sessional Period by the QCWG (2022-2023)

A summary of the meetings and recommendations of the sixth meeting of the QCWG and the third meeting of the Queen Conch Scientific, Statistical and Technical Advisory Group (QC/SSTAG) are provided below.

During the 6<sup>th</sup> QCWG, discussions focused on monitoring the implementation of the [Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan](#), various Queen Conch recommendations and resolutions along with recommendations adopted at the 18th meeting of the Commission in 2022. Participants reviewed the CITES CoP19 decisions and recommendations, and discussed the progress of activities as called for in the Work Plan for 2022-2024. Various updates were given on projects, including an update on advancing data collection efforts for sustainable Queen Conch fisheries being conducted under the project entitled, “Support to the secretariat of WECAFC for effective implementation of priority actions of the Programme of Work agreed at the 17<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission” being funded by the EU. Participants learned about collaborative work on Queen conch, especially at the regional level, and an overview of the inter-sessional activities undertaken. These activities include a proposal to identify unique queen conch genetic markers for the purpose of determining connectivity and enhancing traceability of the species, and a collaborative Blue BioTrade project aimed at improving sustainability and traceability for Queen Conch in three WECAFC member countries. An amendment was made to the Recommendation WECAFC/XVIII/2022/3 On Increased Efforts in the Implementation of the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan in the WECAFC Region. The purpose of this amendment was to reflect the CoP 19.233 Decision directed to Range States of *Strombus gigas* (currently *Aliger gigas*)

which calls for Range States to provide progress reports on activities to the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CFRM/CITES working group on queen conch.

The third meeting of the QC SSTAG collectively made the following recommendations:

- a) To prioritize the collection of statistically valid landings data which forms the basis for the implementation of many other research priorities and sustainable management interventions (*e.g.*, NDFs, quotas, CF, etc.).
- b) To follow a stepwise approach to make broadly available a technical document on queen conch conversion factors, including the estimation of the meat dirty weight and the number of individuals by unit of weight. The first step shall include publishing online the technical document in English, which is already available, followed by preparation of Spanish and French translations of the document, and a subsequent organization of training workshops at the sub-regional level to strengthen understanding of the methodologies included in the document and their proper use. A generation of appropriate definitions of various meat processing grades is expected to result from this initiative.
- c) To follow a similar approach with the accessibility/availability, publication and training of three queen conch training modules regarding: (a) statistical sampling designs applicable to landings and fishing effort estimations in artisanal and commercial queen conch fisheries, (b) population density estimation in queen conch fisheries with revision of diving technologies, operational procedures and experimental sampling designs for direct stock assessments, and (c) assessment of the mathematical and statistical models historically applied in queen conch annual catch quota assessments, highlighting the impact of assumptions on the statistical data required.
- d) To apply the lessons and experiences gained on the methodologies utilized in the Jamaica pilot project aimed to improve estimation of queen conch landings to other countries / areas of interest where queen conch fisheries are relevant across the Wider Caribbean Region. This pilot project is based on surveys, self-assessments of existing queen conch statistical systems, and multi-stakeholder participation.
- e) To support CITES' efforts to help ensure that international trade in queen conch is sustainable and legal through improving NDFs; moving beyond general recommendations for multiple species to conduct better analysis of the species' overall population sustainability and health; confronting increasing threats from climate change, natural disasters, and IUU fishing; and addressing the limited understanding of the species' reproduction, recruitment, and their relationship with conch densities. Application of the precautionary approach and introduction of stronger statistical approaches to collect relevant fishery and biological information at the unit of stock/population level are urgently needed.
- f) To work collaboratively in securing funding and collaboration towards implementation of the six top research priorities (Annex 3) agreed upon at this meeting.<sup>1</sup>
- g) To promote the establishment of an educational team that is closely linked to the QC SSTAG to support the planning of more structured and enhanced training and education initiatives regarding the queen conch.
- h) If possible, explore ways to allow QC SSTAG representation (through its coordinator) at the next CITES animal committee meeting.

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<sup>1</sup> 1) Six priority areas: Queen conch NDF Guidance; 2) Improving Queen Conch landing and monitoring statistics in the WECAFC Region; 3) Comprehensive determination of queen conch genetic connectivity; 4) Increasing use of information on adult population dynamics for assessing ongoing sustainable exploitation; 5) Establishing methods alternative to the shell/lip-based minimum sizes to avoid landings of the shells; 6) Developing alliances for generating high-resolution habitat maps.

During the past two years, two Task Force Committees have been operative, one for queen conch and another for spawning aggregations issues. These committees have representatives of the WECAFC Secretariat, NOAA Fisheries and its associated CFMC, the Working Group Convener, a strategic group of experts, and a Scientific liaison, thus following a participative approach. The Task Force Committees conduct periodic meetings, agree on short-term assignments, follow an adaptive planning strategy, look for funding opportunities including writing and submitting proposals in coordination with the WECAFC Focal Points, and provide technical advice as required. The one that deals with the queen conch issues have achieved the following: (a) Support for the establishment of a Queen conch Statistical, Scientific and Technical Advisory Group; (b) drafting and approval small grants to improve communication; and (c) drafting, submission, approval and implementation of a small grant for improved collection of queen conch landing data.

### 3. Challenges and issues faced during Intersession Period and steps taken to mitigate them

The challenges faced by the queen conch fisheries throughout the region are summarized below:

- Ongoing lack of financial resources for fisheries data collection, field research and enforcement programs related to queen conch at the national level.
- Limited implementation of the QCWG and WECAFC recommendations including: Recommendation WECAFC/XVII/2019/12 “On Improved Compliance with Trade Measures for Queen Conch”; Recommendation WECAFC/XVII/2019/13 “On Queen Conch Conversion Factor”; and Recommendation WECAFC/XVIII/2022/3 on Increased efforts in the implementation of the Regional Queen conch fishery management and conservation plan in the WECAFC region.
- Limited implementation of the 14 management measures set out in the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan.
- IUU fishing by foreign vessels

Steps taken to mitigate these challenges during the 2022-2023 period included development and implementation of a pilot project aimed at improving statistical collection of data in Jamaica; and identification of six top priority research areas to increase the utilization of conversion factors and provide training in stock assessment. CITES is also working on a number of activities to improve management of queen conch, including a NDF technical guidance workshop and implementation of Phase 2 of the Blue Biotrade Project. The QC SSTAG will also be aiming to mainstream the use of the three updated modules for Queen Conch stock assessment along with providing training online and in person.

### 4. Conclusion

The QCWG continued to actively implement the 2022-2024 workplan through the successful completion of the 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting, inter-sessional meetings of the QCWG Task Force and one meeting of the Scientific, Statistical and Technical and Advisory Sub-group (SSTAG), which developed a number of recommendations. These recommendations covered: improving collection of statistical data; mainstreaming and use of the technical documents on conversion factors and the three stock assessment training modules; and obtaining funding to implement the six identified research priority areas.

## Appendix 1 : Updated Work Plan 2022-2024

Table 1: The QCWG will carry out the following activities in the 2022–2024 period:

Activity	Timetable	Responsible Entity	Status	Group/Theme	Strategic Plan Linkages	Priority (low, medium, high)	Estimated cost	Notes
1. Address any gaps in implementation of the management measures in the <i>Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan</i> (endorsed by WECAFC 17, CRFM, OSPESCA and CFMC), and continue to monitor implementation of the plan.	January 2022 onwards	CFMC, WECAFC, and CRFM, OSPESCA and the WG members	Ongoing	Technical/Scientific Advisory/Collaboration	1;2;3	High	\$5k  (at least two online workshops and active communication with country representatives)  \$20-30k if translation costs (documents) are included	
2. Finalize, publish and disseminate the report of the hybrid WG meeting	March 2022	CFMC and FAO with inputs from	Complete	Communication/Dissemination	2	-		

Activity	Timetable	Responsible Entity	Status	Group/Theme	Strategic Plan Linkages	Priority (low, medium, high)	Estimated cost	Notes
hosted in Puerto Rico (in hard copies and on-line on <a href="http://www.strombusgigas.com/index.htm">http://www.strombusgigas.com/index.htm</a> and at <a href="http://www.WECAFC.org">www.WECAFC.org</a> ; including the national summary reports).		meeting participants						
3. Provide technical and scientific advice to national governments, and support national consultations as needed in the region, to advance implementation of the <i>Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan</i> and relevant decisions and recommendations adopted by CITES and WECAFC.	January 2022 onwards	WG members (national fisheries and CITES authorities), CRFM, OSPESCA, CITES, CFMC, FAO/WECAFC, SSTAG	Ongoing	Technical/Scientific Advisory/Collaboration	1;2;3	High	\$15K  (for expert consultation to conduct regional analysis) based on intersessional activities and needs identified	
4. (i) Report on progress with the implementation of relevant CITES and WECAFC decisions, and the outcomes of the	In advance of deadlines for reporting required	CITES/Fisheries authorities of QC range States	Ongoing	Communication/Dissemination/Collaboration	1;2;3	High	\$20-30 K for training of range states on reporting	

Activity	Timetable	Responsible Entity	Status	Group/Theme	Strategic Plan Linkages	Priority (low, medium, high)	Estimated cost	Notes
<p>Working Group – at the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 18<sup>th</sup> session of WECAFC, July 2022;</li> <li>● 19<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES, November 2022; and consider the possibility of organizing a side-event</li> <li>● 32<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Animals Committee, 2023</li> </ul> <p>4. (ii) Reporting of Range States to QCWG as part of new CITES decision and upcoming COP</p> <p>4. (iii) Training for countries to facilitate reporting to CITES and production of</p>		<p>attending these meetings (as appropriate); CITES and WECAFC Secretariats</p>						



Activity	Timetable	Responsible Entity	Status	Group/Theme	Strategic Plan Linkages	Priority (low, medium, high)	Estimated cost	Notes
training materials/digital tools. 4. (iv) Development of reporting template								
5. Support fishers and fisheries administrations in addressing the decent work, employment, and safety-at-sea problems in the queen conch fisheries, in particular; fisher organizations should be engaged as much as possible for these activities.	January 2022 onwards	NOAA Fisheries/ CFMC and FAO with the fisheries authorities in the region	Ongoing	Capacity Building	1;2;3;4	High		
6. Prepare a recommendation on the promotion of decent work, health, and safety in the fisheries sector for potential endorsement by the Commission at WECAFC18.	January 2022 – February 2022	WECAFC/FAO with CRFM and OSPESCA	Complete	Technical/Scientific Advisory/Collaboration	1;2;3	-	Prepared as a Working Group recommendation	

Activity	Timetable	Responsible Entity	Status	Group/Theme	Strategic Plan Linkages	Priority (low, medium, high)	Estimated cost	Notes
7. Support publication of the health and safety study and proposed project.	January – September 2022		Complete	Communication/Dissemination	2	-		
8. Continue the review and consideration of options for the development of a transparent “chain of custody” procedure to track catches from their harvest location to their eventual destination.	January 2022 onwards	OSPESCA, CRFM, NOAA Fisheries/CFMC with CITES, WECAFC/FAO and the fisheries authorities in the region	Outstanding	Technical/Scientific Advisory/Collaboration	1;2;3	High	Funding required	
9. Advance research to determine genetic connectivity of queen conch across the Caribbean, identify stocks, and design/implement a protocol to trace illegally harvested queen conch in trade. Engage countries to identify points of contact to assist with sample	January 2022 onwards	SSTAG with support of WECAFC/FAO and CITES	Ongoing	Technical/Scientific Advisory/Collaboration	1;2;3	High	\$200 - 250k  Genetic study- Pilot project cost - \$80k-additional	

Activity	Timetable	Responsible Entity	Status	Group/Theme	Strategic Plan Linkages	Priority (low, medium, high)	Estimated cost	Notes
collection and participation in this research.							funding to be acquired	
10. Create a Task Force – comprised of members from the QCWG and Regional Working Group on IUU fishing – to interessionally draft a recommendation prioritizing genetic identification of queen conch to improve traceability and combat IUU fishing in the region for the QCWG to consider for potential endorsement by the Commission at WECAFC 18.	January 2024 – February 2024	SSTAG, WECAFC, CFMC, CRFM, OSPESCA	Completed	Technical/Scientific Advisory/Collaboration	1;2;3	-	\$15-20K  One in person workshop plus online follow-up?)	
11. Expand the collection of socio-economic information to analyze the contribution of queen conch fisheries to income, livelihoods, and trade.	January 2022 onwards  Completed for Blue Biotrade	CFMC, WECAFC, and CRFM, OSPESCA and the WG members	Outstanding	Technical/Scientific Advisory/Collaboration	1;2;3	High	\$ 15-20K  (for compiling existing information and plan to	

Activity	Timetable	Responsible Entity	Status	Group/Theme	Strategic Plan Linkages	Priority (low, medium, high)	Estimated cost	Notes
	project countries & Jamaica						collect new and standardized info)	
12. Provide training on the use of modules for the assessment of queen conch stocks through a regional conference.	January 2022 onwards	SSTAG with support from CFMC, WECAFC/FAO	Outstanding	Technical/Scientific Advisory/Collaboration/Capacity Building	2;3	High	\$15-25K  (Pilots already covered, need funding for higher coverage, values depending on level of the expansion)	
13. (i) Conduct two pilot studies for determination of fishery production as the basis for further analysis of the long-term sustainability of the species and its associated fisheries.	January 2022	SSTAG with support from CFMC, WECAFC/FAO	13 (i) Completed; 13 (ii) Outstanding	Technical/Scientific Advisory/Collaboration	1;2;3	High	\$35-50K  (Pilots already covered, need funding for higher	(i) Due to time and personnel constraints, pilot

Activity	Timetable	Responsible Entity	Status	Group/Theme	Strategic Plan Linkages	Priority (low, medium, high)	Estimated cost	Notes
13. (ii) Conduct a similar pilot to 13.(i) in an OSPESCA country.							coverage, values depending on level of the expansion)  Additional funding required	was only done in one country .
14. Investigate and consider the impacts of climate change on the queen conch resources and the fishery.	January 2023 onwards	WG members with support from CFMC, WECAFC/FAO	Outstanding	Technical/Scientific Advisory/Collaboration	3	High	\$35-50K  (Research on QC reproduction dynamics and changes at the regional level)  Funding required	

Activity	Timetable	Responsible Entity	Status	Group/Theme	Strategic Plan Linkages	Priority (low, medium, high)	Estimated cost	Notes
15. Investigate the ecological and biological impacts of pollution on queen conch resources.	January 2023 onwards	WG members with support from CFMC, WECAFC/FAO	Outstanding	Technical/Scientific Advisory/Collaboration	3	High	\$35-45K  (Microplastic pilots covered, need to expand at the regional level or inclusion of other pollutants; degradation of habitat quality in coastal areas which would impact recruitment )  Funding required	

Activity	Timetable	Responsible Entity	Status	Group/Theme	Strategic Plan Linkages	Priority (low, medium, high)	Estimated cost	Notes
<p>16. Continue / expand the scientific support to apply updated conversion factors by all countries with a queen conch fishery. For this purpose, the Scientific and Statistical Sub-Group (SST Sub-group) has:</p> <p>Elaborated a series of technical documents on conversion factors that need to be applied and updated when reporting conch production / trade data across the region.</p>	<p>Work in progress initiated in 2019 and will continue over the next two years.</p>	<p>CFMC/WEC AFC, SST Sub-group membership, CITES</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Technical/Scientific Advisory/Collaboration</p>	<p>1;2;3</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>\$20-35K  (Linked with act. 12, need add funding for field work and expert support, depending on level of expansion and secure matching funds)  After QCWG-SSTAG expert meeting to be updated.</p>	

Activity	Timetable	Responsible Entity	Status	Group/Theme	Strategic Plan Linkages	Priority (low, medium, high)	Estimated cost	Notes
17. Continue review of existing queen conch NDFs and guidance in order to develop a simplified template for making non-detriment findings for queen conch, in consultation with the CITES Animals Committee, dissemination of the template to the Working Group membership for their consideration, and supporting selected countries in applying the templates and sharing the results at the regional level.	Work in progress initiated in 2019 and will continue over the next two years.	CFMC/WEC AFC, SST Sub-group membership, CITES, GCFI	Outstanding	Technical/Scientific Advisory/Collaboration/Capacity Building	1;2;3	High	\$15-20K  (Need a task force with country representatives for final agreements )  Parties to participate in technical NDF workshop sessions are needed	
18. Determine priority next steps to implement education and outreach as stated in the <i>Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan</i> .	January 2022 onwards	CFMC/WEC AFC Secretariat and the Working Group	Outstanding	Communication/Collaboration/Education and Outreach	1;2;3	High		



Activity	Timetable	Responsible Entity	Status	Group/Theme	Strategic Plan Linkages	Priority (low, medium, high)	Estimated cost	Notes
19. Consult with the PROCARIBE+ project to identify potential areas for improving the sustainability of the queen conch fishery including contributions to the State of the Marine Environment and Associated Economies (SOMEE) reporting mechanism, habitat impacts/restoration and an updated Strategic Action Program Monitoring and Evaluation framework.	January 2022 onwards	CFMC, the WECAFC Secretariat too and/or the relevant sub-regional partners (CRFM, OSPESCA, Coordination Mechanism for Integrated Ocean Governance in the Wider Caribbean)	Outstanding	Monitoring/Evaluation/Collaboration	1;2;3	High	OSPESCA & CRFM to follow up with PROCARIBE+	
20. Collaborate with the Blue BioTrade Project regarding improved trade and value-chain activities.	January 2022 onwards	CFMC/WEC AFC Secretariat and the Working Group	Ongoing	Collaboration	1;2;3	High	(Linked with activ. 8)	
21. Continue support to the development of the	January 2022-	CFMC/WEC AFC Secretariat	Ongoing	Collaboration	1;2;3;4	-		

Activity	Timetable	Responsible Entity	Status	Group/Theme	Strategic Plan Linkages	Priority (low, medium, high)	Estimated cost	Notes
WECAFC Strategic Plan 2021-2027	February 2022	and the Working Group						
22. Review and finalize the new TORs for the QCWG	January 2022-February 2022	CFMC/WEC AFC Secretariat and the Working Group	Completed	Collaboration	1;2;3;4	-		

## Appendix 2:

### **Draft AMENDED RECOMMENDATION WECAFC/XVIII/2022/3 ON INCREASED EFFORTS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REGIONAL QUEEN CONCH FISHERIES 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<sup>2</sup>.” “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<sup>3</sup>.”

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 Fisheries 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 Fisheries 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 conch respectively held in 2018 and 2019. In general, Member States have made improvements in the management of their queen conch fisheries at the national level through implementation of the measures. However, given the differences in scales, gear types, 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 Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan was preliminarily evaluated using quantitative values collected in 2019-2020, and the Queen Conch 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 Fisheries 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 products to fetch higher prices<sup>4</sup>. This management measure is also aligned with the objectives of

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

the Regional Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU Fishing in WECAFC Member Countries (RPOA-IUU) (2019-2029). These objectives aim 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 virtually. The purposes of the meeting were to continue monitoring the 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 Queen Conch Working Group should liaise with the IUU Working Group to develop a joint recommendation to address IUU fishing in queen conch fisheries in the region.

The Sixth meeting of the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES Working Group on Queen Conch was held on March 16, 2023 in Puerto Rico and virtually. The purposes of the meeting were to monitor the implementation of the various queen conch recommendations and resolutions, and continue monitoring implementation of the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan. The progress of activities as called for in the Work Plan for 2022 – 2024 were discussed and some additional activities were added. A review of the CITES CoP19 decisions and recommendations was also provided. COP Decision 19.233 calls for Range States to provide progress reports on activities to the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES working group on queen conch. This led to an amendment to the Working Group Recommendation.

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

Failing to approve this amended 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 fisheries.

## **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;

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).

ALSO COGNIZANT of COP 19.233 Decision directed to Range States of *Strombus gigas* which calls for Range States to provide progress reports on activities to the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CFRM/CITES working group on queen conch;

RECALLING the outcomes of the Third and Fourth meetings of the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CFRM/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 with concern the limited implementation of the conservation and management plan for QC to date and that some WECAFC Members are facing significant challenges in implementing the plan.

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 fulfil the WECAFC Members' 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 Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan, the qualitative values collected in 2019-2020 should be updated with additional data from all countries in the Wider Caribbean participating in the queen conch fisheries using the information presented at the 2021 Working Group meeting. The update on the implementation status should be completed by April 2023 and a progress report provided to the CITES Secretariat. Monitoring the plan's implementation should be done on an annual basis 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. The SNPs 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 as required under CITES. 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.

WECAFC Members are strongly encouraged to participate in the development of this genetic work. In order for the genetic work to be statistically robust, at least 15 countries would be required to provide genetic samples of queen conch.

The Queen Conch 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.

# Regional Working Group on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (RWG-IUU)

Convenor: Peter A. Murray

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## 1. Introduction and Background

Western Central Atlantic Fisheries Commission (WECAFC) Member States seek to address the challenge of Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing, which poses a major threat to fisheries resources in the Commission region. IUU fishing undermines regional and national efforts to sustainably use, manage and protect fish stocks and marine ecosystems, leading to untold losses of both short and long-term social and economic opportunities, including food security, livelihoods, exports, and the realization of sustainable and inclusive blue economic growth of the region.

The joint Regional Working Group on Illegal, Unreported And Unregulated Fishing IUU fishing of the WECAFC, the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) and the Organization for Fisheries and Aquaculture for Central America (OSPESCA), a.k.a. the Regional Working Group on IUU fishing, RWG-IUU, was established in March 2014 by the 15th Session of WECAFC.

The WECAFC Regional Plan of Action to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing (RPOA-IUU) was developed by the RWG-IUU, between 2018 and 2019, with the objective to combat IUU fishing in the WECAFC area of competence; through effective regional cooperation among the WECAFC Member States and other sub-regional organizations. It was approved by WECAFC 17, in June 2019, and is seen as an important link between the implementation of the IPOA-IUU and the formulation of National Plans of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU fishing (NPOA-IUU) and corresponding measures to combat IUU fishing in WECAFC Member States. The RPOA-IUU is further important to harmonize policies, to encourage information sharing, to identify capacity development needs, and to better facilitate the implementation of international instruments and tools to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing through effective regional and international cooperation, such as already foreseen in sub-regional policy mandates: for example, the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy (CCCFP).

This document outlines intersessional activities accomplished by the RWG-IUU since the last Meeting of WECAFC. Additionally, in this regard, this report outlines activities undertaken by Member States at the regional and national levels.

## 2. Objectives

This document summarizes achievements, challenges and lessons learned by the RWG-IUU since its last meeting. Implementation of activities was within the context of its TOR as enshrined in the report of the First Meeting of the RWG-IUU in March 2017 and regularised/revised based on mandate of WECAFC 17 (as seen in appendix 1):

## 3. Main Accomplishments during the Intersession Period (2022-2023)

- **Assessment of WECAFC Members’ readiness to implement the RPOA-IUU**

The readiness study carried out in 2020 remains “state of the art” with regard to the level of readiness to implement the RPOA-IUU. The top two needs appear still to be budgetary/financial assistance, and training and capacity development, with limited significant differences across the regions. PSMA Parties were seen, on average, to be readier to accomplish the measures in comparison to the other WECAFC Member States. The overview of the recommended strategic implementation plans, proposed in the study, for the consideration of the member States still appears (on the surface) to be valid. These strategic recommendations can provide an opportunity to address the identified readiness gaps based on the requirements in the RPOA-IUU.

- **Determining implementation status in WECAFC Member States of the RPOA-IUU**

Overview: Caribbean Regional Fishery Mechanism (CRFM) Member States

Most of the measures taken by CRFM Member States still appear to have been at the policy and regulatory level, though there is recognition of the need to put in place and/or strengthen enforcement/compliance measures. Concern has also been expressed regarding the need to redouble efforts at collaboration and cooperation from importing countries.

While only eight (8) CRFM Member States are Parties to the PSMA<sup>5</sup>, they all remain committed to the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy (and its protocols) and the CRFM MCS Strategy; and since 2017, eight (8) of these States<sup>6</sup> have had (a total of 93) personnel receiving some level of training in Fisheries Prosecution and Interdiction as part of a joint initiative between the CRFM Secretariat and the Regional Security System (RSS) through its Training Institute and the CRFM Secretariat.

As noted previously, CRFM Member States participate in the RWG-IUU and WECAFC and have endorsed the Regional Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing (RPOA-IUU) in the region. Three CRFM Member States had developed National Plans of Action to Prevent, Deter and IUU fishing (NPOAs-IUU), prior to 2019 and five (5) are currently working on developing their NPOAs-IUU utilising the model/template developed by the CRFM Secretariat. The CRFM Secretariat continues to provide specific technical guidance and assistance to its member States when called upon to do so.

The CRFM Secretariat continues interfacing with the UNODC Global Maritime Crime Program. The CRFM Secretariat also collaborates with the CARICOM Implementing Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS) and is a member of the working group on the development of this regional Maritime Security Strategy. CARICOM IMPACS utilises a Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) tool that provides reports to give an idea of the flagged vessels, recognised in the system as fishing vessels, that incur into Member States waters. Regular reports are shared with Member States’ border control agencies (coast guard, police, defence force as appropriate). CARICOM IMPACS shares monthly summaries of the “fishing reports” coming from Windward, with the CRFM Secretariat, and as appropriate, has begun monitoring vessels “flagged by the system as probably being involved in illegal fishing”.

Fourteen (14) CRFM Member States<sup>7</sup> have become signatory to the International Declaration on Transnational Organized Crime in the Global Fishing Industry (also known as the ‘*Copenhagen Declaration*’). CRFM Member Countries and Secretariat participated in the international Blue Justice Conference held at UN City, Copenhagen, Denmark, 23 - 24 March 2023, co-hosted by the Norwegian Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries and UNDP, in cooperation with CRFM and a number of other partners. The conference objectives were: to share experiences, highlight challenges and inspire creative solutions towards strengthened interagency cooperation and international cooperation to address

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<sup>5</sup> The Bahamas, Barbados, Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago

<sup>6</sup> Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Saint Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines

<sup>7</sup> The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and The Turks and Caicos Islands



fisheries crime; to highlight innovative digital tools and opportunities available through the Norwegian Blue Justice Initiative to address fisheries crime, such as the Blue Justice Community digital platform administrated by UNDP; and, to facilitate technical support in use of these digital tools, including AIS and Satellite based information.

At the conference, it was formally announced that Jamaica, in November 2022 with support from the Blue Justice Initiative, had launched a Multi-agency Fisheries Crime Coordinating Mechanism to combat organized crime in the fishing sector. The CRFM Ministerial Council has since encouraged other Member States to set up similar Multi-agency Fisheries Crime Coordinating Mechanisms to that of Jamaica, with appropriate support from the CRFM Secretariat, to combat organized crime in the fishing sector. A “Caribbean Blue Justice Hub” was also formally launched at the Copenhagen conference, to be hosted by Jamaica, that will serve as a focal point for the priorities and next steps mapped out at the CRFM regional technical meeting, held in March of 2022.

#### Overview: Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization (OSPESCA) Member States

Main directions on IUU fishing issues in the region apparently remain as MCS, broaden exchange of experiences, capitalize on the lessons learned and the results obtained in the previous regional work and to support the activities of the regional WECAFC/CRFM/OSPESCA Working Group (RWG-IUU).

Development of a proposal continues on a Protocol for the implementation of regional regulations regarding IUU Fishing, to improve the harmonious implementation of national, regional and international regulations regarding IUU Fishing, through concerted efforts and review of procedures carried out by national, regional or extra-regional actors, especially including administrative sanctions and the effective prosecution of IUU fishing activities.

he Regulation OSP-02-09 was updated for the regional fishery management of the Caribbean lobster (*Panulirus argus*). The Regional Regulation on Port State Steering Measures designed to Prevent, Discourage and Eliminate IUU Fishing was approved, with the objective to establish a set of regionally harmonized norms in matters of Port State Governing measures to prevent, discourage and eliminate IUU Fishing. It includes regulations on: designation of ports, authorization or denial of entry to port, inspections in port, inspection priorities. authorization of inspection procedures, refusal of entry, joint cooperation actions, stricter measures, among others.

An update and adaptation of the digital platform for the fisheries Registry was made, which includes registration of the fleet, fisheries and aquaculture production, and dynamic consultations.

At the country level, OSPESCA Member States continue activities such as:

- Promulgation of new fisheries legislation to modernize and transform the small-scale fishing industry.
- Implementing interagency agreement to fight illegal fishing, for the certification of sustainable fishing for tuna, dorado and swordfish, to access international markets for responsible consumption.
- Organising a program for the strengthening of Fisher’s General Registry, organized by the Centre for Marine Studies (CEM) and the international organization RARE through Fish Forever.
- Developing National strategies to combat Illegal Fishing and the roadmap for compliance with the Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA).
- Promulgating an Inter-institutional Resolution for collection centers and fishery and aquaculture products.
- Achieving progress in inter-institutional agreement for IUU fishing issues.

COVID-19 had affected all the activities carried out in every position in the value chain, including the provision of equipment and supplies required. OSPESCA continues working in an intersectoral manner, regarding the Road Map “United Central America against Coronavirus”.

Other activities that had been carried out include: (i) Training in the Caribbean Lobster Stock Assessment Model (ii) Technical assistance for data collection regarding artisanal fisheries, (iii) Central American Network (REDCA) of monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) for IUU fishing.

The Regional Aquaculture and Fisheries Traceability Standard has been implemented, as well as computer and smartphone applications. Technical training has been done to address traceability regarding: (i) Capture, (ii) Harvest, (iii) Transportation, (iv) Processing and (v) Marketing.

#### Selected WECAFC Member States (other than CRFM or OSPESCA Member States)

Brazil has been restructuring its system to have a more comprehensive and consistent knowledge on the occurrence, nature or intensity of IUU fishing in the country. Work has been done for working towards having a clearer and more consistent picture of IUU fishing in Brazil, in order to better tackle the issue. Efforts continue being made for greater effectiveness in monitoring and control, and enforcement actions, and the integration and coordination of actions, tools, financial resources and coordination with the relevant public authorities.

In addition, Brazil has been carrying out restructuring and modernization mechanisms of fishing activities that support measures to combat IUU fishing.

In Colombia the National Aquaculture and Fisheries Authority (AUNAP), through the Office for Monitoring and Surveillance, has the goal to implement and apply control actions that allow verifying compliance with current legal provisions related to the exercise of fishing and aquaculture activities in the country, which are oriented to ensure the sustainability and the good use of fishery resources.

With the support of FAO human resources affiliated to this agency had received training aiming for the strengthening its control and monitoring capacity. Colombia with technical support from FAO, signed in November 2019 the Agreement of AUNAP for the Global Program for capacity building, to strengthen the application of Port State Measures against IUU fishing. AUNAP, as the fishing authority, leads the National Board of Fishing and Illicit Activity, which comprises all state entities related (directly or indirectly) to the fight against illegal fishing. AUNAP is the agency designing and coordinating the actions that the country must undertake to control IUU fishing (National Action Plan against IUU fishing).

Within the framework of the National Board on Illegal Fishing, the competencies required to adhere to and comply with the requirements of the Port State Measures Agreement are being improved and implemented, with the view to strengthen its capacity to control IUU fishing effectively with regional participatory actions.

In the case of the United States of America, the Department of State, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) and the U.S. Coast Guard all coordinate closely to implement domestic and international actions related to combatting IUU fishing. Under the Maritime SAFE Act and the United States has sought to take a whole-of-government approach to strengthen the global fight against IUU fishing and maritime security threats, including through a new interagency Working Group on IUU fishing, which brings together twenty-one agencies for an integrated, Federal Government-wide response to IUU fishing globally.

In Venezuela, the Ministry of Popular Power for Fisheries and Aquaculture, in 2016, had developed policies in the production chain derived from fishing, aquaculture and its related activities, which contribute to the strengthening of the new social and economic model being developed; with the main goal being to boost the fishing sector guaranteeing the sustainability of the activity to guarantee food sovereignty and security for the people.

Despite having experienced some inconveniences when subscribing to the Port States Measures Agreement, Venezuela has been making a big effort to comply with the effective control and surveillance of the fleet. The National Socialist Fisheries and Aquaculture Institute (INSOPESCA), which is attached to the Ministry of the Popular Power of Fisheries and Aquaculture, is the entity in charge of policy implementation.

Among measures that Venezuela is implementing to combat IUU fishing in the exclusive economic zone and in international waters are: analysis of all the information and evidence that confirms the facts; initiation, through INSOPESCA, of an Administrative Procedure aimed to defining the responsibilities and sanctions to impose; implementing various measures when the responsibilities for non-compliance are verified.

- **Fifth meeting of the Regional Working Group on Illegal, Unreported And Unregulated Fishing IUU fishing.**

Consequent upon logistical and convener availability issues, a fifth meeting of the RWG-IUU was not held in the intersessional period.

- **Small Task Force (STF-IUU)**

Under the direction of the Convener, the RWG-IUU had set up a small Task force (STF-IUU) to regularise the RWG-IUU's terms of reference and recommendation of the 4th meeting of RWG-IUU. This STF-IUU at its first meeting, comprised representation from CRFM (in the person of the Convener), the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations (CNFO), the Regional Security System (RSS), the United States of America, and FAOSLC (including in the person of the Secretary to WECAFC); and absent convening of actual RWG-IUU meetings, the STF-IUU remains the "go to" mechanism for considering working group initiatives intersessionally.

- **Regional Workshop on the 2022 FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Transshipment**

The 2022 FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Transshipment (VGT) were endorsed by the FAO Committee on Fisheries at its Thirty-fifth Session in September 2022. The Guidelines are an additional international instrument developed within the framework of the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and complement the 2009 Agreement on Port State Measures and other relevant instruments aimed at preventing, deterring and eliminating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

The VGT constitute internationally agreed minimum standards and practices for the regulation, monitoring and control of transshipment of fish, which have not been previously landed, whether processed or not. The specific objective of the VGT is to provide assistance to States, regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements, regional economic integration organizations and other intergovernmental organizations, when developing transshipment regulations, revising existing regulations and integrating these within the broader regulatory framework for fisheries management.

With this milestone, FAO expected to convene a series of regional workshops to promote the benefits of implementing the VGT and to facilitate discussions amongst States with a view to strengthening concerted action in combatting IUU fishing. The regional workshop for Latin America, the Caribbean and North America was held, in person, in Bridgetown, Barbados from 6 to 10 March 2023 with the financial support of the European Union and in collaboration with the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC). Senior officials and technical experts from FAO Member Countries in the region participated in the workshop, along with those from relevant international and regional intergovernmental organizations.

The workshop objectives were to:

- take stock of the regulation, monitoring and control of transshipment in the region;
- appreciate and discuss the requirements contained in the provisions of the VGT;
- appreciate and discuss the linkages between the VGT, the PSMA and other relevant instruments aimed at combatting IUU fishing;
- identify actions to implement the VGT at national and regional level, including through regional fishery bodies;
- discuss the requirements of developing States.

Significant outcomes of the meeting included identification of alignments, challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the voluntary guidelines (see appendix 2). In general, there appears to be little alignment between the VGT and existing legislations or policy instruments; and the challenge that

appears the most seems to be time and personnel needed to process necessary amendments. Most notable/prevalent among the key proposals is the need for FAO support by way of legal drafting, training and capacity building supportive of putting in place the required systems and procedures.

#### **4. Challenges**

With regard to implementing measures stated in the RPOA-IUU, some countries are still not currently ready to develop national strategies and procedures for combatting IUU fishing with due regard to port, flag, coastal and market State obligations; nor to adopt and implement measures on the marking and identification of fishing vessels in order to improve transparency and allow a better identification of noncompliant vessels, or to develop regionally harmonised national inspection plans. Resource limitations hamper many countries' ability to establish fisheries enforcement units in their fisheries agencies and to formalize an inter-agency information sharing and coordination mechanism at the national level for relevant agencies.

Increased incidence of extreme meteorological events due to climate change continues to make the job of fisheries monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement (MCSE) that much harder.

Consequent upon the COVID-19 pandemic, MCSE capabilities and resources of fisheries administrations were reduced. There has been no indication whether this situation has improved since the "relaxing" of the pandemic.

The top two needs of Member States still, anecdotally, appear to be budgetary/financial assistance, and training and capacity development. Related to the issue of capacities continues to be the ability of States to make optimal use of the wealth of data available, such as that obtained through MDA tools, including through in-country discussions between Fisheries, Coast Guard, Defence, and Maritime administrations and other such agencies, to effectively analyse such data to derive insights and information to assist with combating IUU fishing.

At the regional and sub-regional levels, the issue of budgetary/financial resources and the concomitant training and capacity challenges still appears to need to be addressed. Training is needed in various fields to enhance the capacity to strengthen the implementation of the PSMA and relevant international instruments. While five (5) CARICOM/WECAFC Member States are currently working towards adopting a NPOA-IUU, some Member States still have not ratified, adopted or acceded to the relevant international fisheries instruments (such as the PSMA). Gaps still appear to remain in the legal frameworks and inter-agency coordination. Importantly, information sharing, and cooperation needs to be improved, both on the national and the regional levels. This includes the introduction of mechanisms and tools to effectively identify vessels engaged in IUU fishing and related activities and to take coordinated action against the vessel operators.

While the use of MDA tools can enable greater insights into activities in the maritime space of Member States, particularly with respect to the vessels using the AIS and their activities in these spaces. maritime law enforcement (MLE) units, which receive information directly, need to be better organized in utilizing the data, including carrying out trend analyses to improve planning and execution of fisheries patrols in their respective jurisdiction. In all cases, greater capability is required to facilitate routine operations, extending to the outer limits of their jurisdictions.

#### **5. Conclusions**

Notwithstanding the challenges faced by many WECAFC Member Countries in dealing with IUU fishing, at national, sub-regional and regional levels, high priority is still being given to the implementation of the majority of the measures in the RPOA-IUU. However, there still is great variation observed in the extent of readiness to implement the associated measures and the timeline for implementation, though PSMA Parties on average are readier to accomplish the measures in comparison to the other WECAFC Member States.

It is not clear whether Member States have improved their readiness to implement the regional-level measures of the RPOA-IUU while being ready to implement measures associated with the policy and legal framework; and some of them have begun this process.

The solutions most often proposed to eliminate illegal fishing are associated with increased governance and the rule of law, increased cooperation between regional management authorities in management and control activities, increased maritime assets to facilitate sustained territorial and EEZ patrols, increased capacity to undertake covert and overt surveillance, enforcement of port state control, and other means of reducing the economic incentives to engage in IUU fishing, such as increased sanctions and trade measures. A recent study suggests that at the national, sub-regional and regional levels, consideration should be given to incorporating the use of the data obtained from MDA tools into both the strategic and operational planning cycles.<sup>8</sup> Given that some states do not have adequate facilities to conduct MCS, hence it is also important for them to cooperate with other affected countries to improve understanding and knowledge of the problem, identify countermeasures, and build capacity to prevent, deter and eradicate IUU fishing and any associated fisheries crime.<sup>9</sup>

In general, it appears that Member States have begun to actively consider their approaches to tackle IUU fishing at the national level. Simultaneously, the sub-regional grouping bodies continue seeking to develop the enabling environment and capacities to assist Member States achieve the national and regional objectives. In carrying out its own stated objectives, the work of the RWG-IUU should continue to be supportive of these efforts.

## 6. Required actions of SAG XII

- **Note** that fourteen (14) CRFM Member States<sup>10</sup> have become signatory to the International Declaration on Transnational Organized Crime in the Global Fishing Industry (also known as the ‘*Copenhagen Declaration*’)
- **Note also** that the CRFM Ministerial Council has since encouraged other Member States to set up Multi-agency Fisheries Crime Coordinating Mechanisms to that of Jamaica, with appropriate support from the CRFM Secretariat, to combat organized crime in the fishing sector, and that a “Caribbean Blue Justice Hub”, to be hosted by Jamaica, has been launched.
- **Recall** that for OSPESCA Member States, the main directions on IUU fishing issues remain MCS, broaden exchange of experiences, capitalize on the lessons learned and the results obtained in the previous regional work and to support the activities of the regional WECAFC/CRFM/OSPESCA Working Group (RWG-IUU).
- **Note** the outcomes of the regional workshop on the Voluntary Guidelines on Transshipment (VGT), including alignments, challenges, opportunities and key proposals related to the voluntary guidelines.
- **Consider** that, given States in the region do not all have adequate facilities to conduct MCS, it is important for them to cooperate among themselves to prevent, deter and eradicate IUU fishing and any associated fisheries crime.

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<sup>8</sup> P. A. Murray, T. Etienne, R. Sobers and N. Wint. Use of Windward Maritime AI™ for detecting fishing activity in the Waters of Caribbean States. (Paper to be presented at CRFM 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Scientific Conference, 29-31 August 2023)

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and The Turks and Caicos Islands

## Appendix 1: Updated TOR

### WORKING GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE

#### REGIONAL WORKING GROUP ON ILLEGAL, UNREPORTED AND UNREGULATED FISHING (RWG-IUU)

**Terms of Reference agreed/approved at the fifteenth session of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC), Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, 26 to 28 March 2014, revised in 2022**

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## **I Background and justification**

Fishery management advice and recommendations, based on the best available scientific information, are provided to WECAFC member countries for their implementation by dedicated Working Groups, established by the Commission.

The Working Groups that were established or confirmed in the subsequent sessions since the 14th session of the Commission in 2012 are the following:

1. [OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CFMC Working Group on Caribbean Spiny Lobster](#)
2. [CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES Working Group on Queen Conch](#)
3. [WECAFC Working Group on the Management of Deep-Sea Fisheries](#)
4. [WECAFC/OSPESCA/CRFM/CFMC Working Group on Recreational Fisheries](#)
5. [CRFM/WECAFC/JICA/IFREMER Working Group on Fisheries Using fish aggregating devices \(FADS\)](#)
6. [CRFM/WECAFC Working Group on Flyingfish in the Eastern Caribbean \(established since the 17<sup>th</sup> Session of WECAFC as the flyingfish- Dolphinfish WG\)](#)
7. [WECAFC/CRFM/IFREMER Working Group on Shrimp and Groundfish in the Northern Brazil-Guianas Shelf](#)
8. [CFMC/WECAFC/OSPESCA/CRFM Working Group on Spawning Aggregations](#)
9. [Regional Working Group on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing \(RWG-IUU\)](#)
10. [WECAFC Working Group for the Conservation And Management of Sharks in the Wider Caribbean Region](#)
11. [WECAFC/CRFM/OSPESCA Fisheries Data and Statistics Working Group \(FDS-WG\)](#)

Most Working Groups are joint working groups with other regional partner institutions, such as the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM), the Organization of Fisheries for the Central American Isthmus (OSPESCA), the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC), the French Research Institute for Exploration of the Sea (IFREMER), etc. Fishery scientists, experts, managers and decision-makers of member countries, Regional partner organizations including academia and NGOs participate in the Working Groups, which have specific terms of reference that are time bound. The data used by the Working Groups to assess the status of fish stocks, to conduct fishery assessments and to generate fishery management advice and recommendations to the Commission are collected by the participating countries and NGOs. The key drivers behind the establishment of these working groups are the need to collaborate and cooperate in the assessment and management of shared resources; need to standardize data collection and reporting systems to enable assessment of stock status using data and information from a range of countries that target the stock/species/resources throughout their distribution range; need to standardize conservation and management measures for effective management, need for training and capacity building to improve data collection and assessment of the status of fisheries/fish stocks; etc. etc.

In undertaking its work, the Working Group will pay due attention to the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and its related guidelines, including the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries, as well as any other agreed international or regional instruments for the conservation and management of fisheries, and the principles of precautionary, participatory and ecosystem approaches to fisheries management. The activities of the WG are also guided by any specific regional or international fisheries management or related obligations and initiatives or instruments of relevance to the respective resources associated with the specific WG – e.g. any FMPs, Declarations, agreed CMMs, regional strategies, regulations etc.

## **II Role of the Working Group**

### **a. Scope of the Work**

The scope of each Working Group is to provide scientific and management advice for the sustainable management, conservation and development of living marine resources in the area of competence of WECAFC. This includes the development and support to national and regional plans of action in order to regulate target and bycatch fisheries, as well as manage existing populations within the region. Using a multidisciplinary approach, the working group will contribute to the sustainable management by providing management advice to Members of WECAFC based on the best available scientific knowledge/evidence and traditional/local ecological knowledge. In pursuing this goal, the Working Group will contribute to the fulfilment of national and regional responsibilities for the marine environment and for the management of all living aquatic species and resources WECAFC and related or interacting species or fisheries in the WECAFC Region.

#### **b. Goal**

The goal of each Working Group is to inform and provide guidance for the management of living marine resources in WECAFC members in such a manner as to promote responsible fisheries that provide economic opportunities, secure social wellbeing while ensuring the conservation of living marine resources and the protection of marine biodiversity. Specifically, the objective of the RWG-IUU is to improve coordination and cooperation between national organizations / institutions responsible for fisheries-related MCS in support of their common efforts to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing.

#### **c. Tasks/ functions**

The Working Group will:

- As a matter of priority, identify and recommend cost effective measures that can be easily implemented in the short to medium term to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing;
- Review and assess the nature and extent of IUU fishing in the WECAFC area. In particular, the specific areas and species that are targeted by foreign illegal fishing and the main market for these IUU fishing products;
- Review current methods and arrangements for timely collection, analysis, reporting and dissemination of data and information relating to Distant Water Fishing Nations (DWFN) IUU fishing activities;
- Assess the viability of adopting modern technologies and methodologies to increase data capture, coverage and reliability;
- Develop recommendations for the establishment of formal protocols to facilitate the collection, compilation and transmittal of information regarding IUU fishing to the Flag State;
- Conduct a comprehensive review and assessment of the methods by which IUU fishing products are harvested, handled and traded including potential loopholes in legal systems and make recommendations for cost effective strategies and mechanisms to address identified deficiencies;
- Review and assess best practices employed to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing and determine the suitability for adoption and implementation in the WECAFC area;
- Review and assess systems and mechanisms used by WECAFC Member to address IUU fishing and make such recommendations as may be necessary to improve their effectiveness;
- Provide advice and recommendations on viable methodologies to engage with flag States, regional fishery bodies and regional fishery management organizations in relation to data exchanges, in pursuit of reducing IUU fishing opportunities within the WECAFC area;
- Recommend mechanisms to ensure effective cooperation and coordination among WECAFC Members and entities as well as among national agencies within states as may be necessary to combat IUU fishing and seafood fraud including but not limited to sharing of data and information, capacity building, legal reforms, and enhancing prosecutorial success;
- Promote the concept of collaborative policing approaches, with national fishers, and, where possible, through fisher organizations;
- Recommend way of improving public education and awareness in order to strengthen community support and political will to marshal the resources and implement the legal and institutional reforms needed to eradicate IUU fishing;



- Identify and recommend policies and measures to ensure transparency in activities such as the allocation of fishing permits and licenses by official authorities; the reporting of catches, payment of fees, taxes and charges by fishers and fishing entities; and disclosure of the identity of the beneficial owners of fishing vessels and companies throughout the supply chain;
- Seek complementary funding to support activities relating to data capture, analysis and sharing at the regional, national and local levels;
- Promote technical assistance, training, experience exchange, and institutional development, to increase MCS knowledge and capability amongst participating parties; and
- Perform other tasks as may be determined by the members.

#### **d. Membership**

Membership of the Working Group shall consist of all Member States of CRFM and WECAFC, OSPESCA, including overseas territories and Departments.

Specifically, the national organizations responsible for fisheries MCS and IUU fishing in general nominated by each WECAFC member; and, experts of key partner organizations (OECS, Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organizations, CRFM, OSPESCA, FAO). Persons or organizations with expertise in matters pertaining to MCS and IUU fishing may also be invited to participate as [experts] observer to the RWG-IUU. The WECAFC Secretariat will act as secretary to the RWG-IUU.

### **III Mode of Operation:**

#### **a. Role of Countries**

The members of the Working Group will play a leading role in its activities through the following activities and commitments, and through a monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement perspective:

- Participate in agreed activities of the Working Group, and ensure the participation of appropriate experts;
- Implement, at the National level, the work identified in the WECAFC endorsed work plan (as appropriate);
- Report on implementation of agreed measures
- Assist with mobilization of resources for the activities of the Working Group;
- Facilitate the organization of Working Group meetings in the languages of the Commission
- Host Working Group meetings on a rotational basis.
- Facilitate the identification of the Convener of the Working Group

#### **b. Role of Convener**

The Convener of the Working Group will play a leading role during the organization of the meetings and subsequent follow up with the Secretariat of WECAFC by coordinating the inputs of the members of the Working Group. The Convener should:

- Seek experts from among the WECAFC Members, contact potential partner organizations, and solicit their interest to join in the Working Group;
- Call for meetings as appropriate;
- Ensure that technical contributions are received in a timely manner and in the appropriate format;
- Ensure that outputs are delivered as agreed during each meeting
- Collaborate closely with FAO-WECAFC and other sub-regional and regional organizations as appropriate;

- Assist in the preparation and publication process of the proceedings of the Working Group meeting;
- Participate (in person or virtually) at the SAG meetings to present the draft working documents and provide any clarifications as required;
- Facilitate the review by the Working Group membership within a reasonable period of time (max. 15 days) on suggested edits or modifications as considered necessary to address the comments of the SAG and the return of the revised document to the WECAFC Secretariat for distribution and consideration by the Commission;
- Participate in the Commission's sessions (physically or virtually) if required, to support the Secretariat in clarifying or substantiating some points of the draft working documents;
- Assist in the relevant processes to gather information in support of seeking funds to implement priority activities of the Working Group.

#### **c. Election and role of Convener of the Working Group**

- The Working Group shall elect a Convener from among its Members to serve over a two-year period. The term of office of the Convener may be extended as determined appropriate. In the case where another qualified Convener is not available, the Convener's term may be renewed for an additional two-year term until another Convener is selected.

#### **d. Roles of the FAO/WECAFC Secretariat**

The FAO/WECAFC Secretariat will play a supporting role in the activities of the Working Group by assisting in:

- Coordinating activities of the Working Group, among WECAFC and Non-WECAFC Members, at the wider regional level (including facilitate procurement of funding);
  - Assisting with logistical arrangements for the convening of meetings of the Working Group;
  - Providing technical assistance, such as a technical secretary or research support, if needed and as resources permit
- Liaising with other Regional Fishery Bodies (RFBs) active in the Wider Caribbean Region and neighboring areas for their engagement as much as possible in the work of the Working Group; these RFBs include amongst others OSPESCA, CRFM, CFMC, ICCAT, NAFO, NEAFC, CECAF, COPPESAALC, etc..
- Liaising with other relevant regional and international organizations as appropriate
- Coordinating the formulation and adoption of recommendations and/or resolutions and reports/documents by the Working Group so as to facilitate the decision-making process by the Commission
- Ensuring the strategic linkage between the work of the Working Group and programmes and projects hosted to support the fisheries and healthy ecosystems framework of the CLME+ and any future phase of this project.
- Facilitating training and collaboration of WECAFC Member States and sub-regional training institutions as appropriate and based on available resources.

#### **e. Roles of other Subregional organizations (e.g. CFMC, CRFM, ICCAT, OSPESCA, UNEP-CEP, IFREMER, NOAA, CARICOM, OECS, CARICOM IMPACS, RSS, etc.)**

Sub-regional organizations have an important role to play in assisting their member countries to participate fully in the activities of the Working Group. Therefore, they may be invited to:

- Provide expertise, technical assistance and support;
- Facilitate procurement of funding when possible;
- Collaborate in implementing the activities of the Working Group;
- Collaborate with the WECAFC Secretariat and sub-regional organizations in coordinating the activities of the Working Group
- Facilitate the decision-making process at the Sub-regional level.

#### **IV Outputs**

In discharging its duties, the WG will deliver the following outputs, monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement perspective:

- Biennial Work Plans including providing performance of projects on a routine schedule;
- Reports on the status of monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement of measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing in WECAFC Member Countries;
- Report on the implementation of the Regional Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing in WECAFC Member Countries
- Make recommendation for the revision and/or updating of the Regional Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing in WECAFC Member Countries
- Proposed Recommendations and Resolutions to the Commission,
- Revised TORs as needed

#### **V Communication**

A mechanism for on-going communication among Working Group members (video conference, Skype, zoom meeting and email), is essential to ensure that the work of the group is sustained between meetings. It must include all Working Group members and the communication tools must be accessible to all Working Group members.

The successful functioning of the Working Group also requires that each member country and organization/ agency identify a national node or focal point who will be contacted through the WECAFC National Focal Point and technically coordinate at national level all matters pertinent to the WG. The outputs of the Working Group will be communicated through working group reports to WECAFC, OSPESCA, CFMC, CRFM, CITES, UNEP-CEP, ICCAT, IFREMER, and national fishery administrations via the WECAFC Secretariat.

#### **VI Working Group meetings and cost**

The Working Group should meet physically or virtually on a regular basis, the timing of which is decided by the members, but at a minimum once every two years. The meetings should be of 2-5 days' duration. The meetings should use cost effective accommodations and institutional facilities and where possible take advantage of other meetings in the region. Meetings shall be chaired by the Convener of the Working Group. The reports of the meetings will be formally submitted to OSPESCA, WECAFC, CFMC and CRFM, ICCAT, CITES, UNEP-CEP, IFREMER, Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute Network, etc.

#### **VII Amendments to the Terms of Reference**

Amendment of these terms of reference may be done at each biennial meeting of the Commission for implementation by the working groups in the subsequent intersessional period.

#### **VIII Templates for Recommendations and Resolutions**

[Standardized templates will ensure a common understanding of what should be included in draft recommendations and resolutions, ease the reporting of deliverables as well as facilitate their review by other WECAFC bodies, as appropriate. Working Groups should include the following elements when preparing draft recommendations and resolutions to be presented to the WECAFC membership or other WECAFC bodies (e.g. the Scientific Advisory Group or other WECAFC Working Groups).

### **Recommendations and Resolutions**

Draft recommendations and resolutions for review by other WECAFC bodies and the WECAFC membership should include the following elements:

- **Cover Note**: A brief cover note for draft recommendations and/or resolutions should be provided to assist reviewers. The cover note should include a clear, candid, and transparent explanation of:
  - a. why the action was developed,
  - b. at which Working Group meeting it was discussed,
  - c. a brief overview of how the Working Group arrived at its decision to put the action forward;
  - d. how the action will impact future WECAFC activities, including, where relevant any possible changes in resource or workload requirements for Members or the WECAFC Secretariat;
  - e. the ramifications of \*not\* approving the recommended action;
  - f. the full picture of the context for the recommended action.
- **Preambular Text**: This should provide essential elements to highlight the context and intent of the proposed action in a concise bulleted format. The preambular text should include only the core historical elements and should include references to related decisions or measures.
- **Action Text**: This should indicate clearly what action(s) the Working Group is taking, or is asking the WECAFC Membership to take, at a national, subregional, and/or regional level, including specific timelines to which the action(s) will adhere.

Considering that each Working Group can have more than one meeting, and more than one issue to address during each intersessional period, the Working Groups can produce several reports/documents or draft resolutions/recommendations. In order to facilitate analysis by the Commission, each Working Group shall prepare a single set of recommendations and/or resolutions organized by fishery or by theme, including all the topics addressed in the intersessional meetings. In this regard, the Commission would consider a single set of draft recommendations and/or resolutions for spiny lobster, queen conch, flying fish and dolphinfish, FADs, FDS, etc.

The Working Groups shall refer relevant recommendations and resolutions of a scientific nature to the SAG for scientific review at least one month before the meeting of SAG, in order to provide adequate time to the Secretariat and SAG members to review them before the meeting. This will improve the efficiency of the reviews during the SAG sessions.

**8. Appendix 2. Summary outcomes – alignments, challenges and opportunities in the implementation of voluntary guidelines of transshipment**

ALIGNMENTS	CHALLENGES	KEY PROPOSALS
<i>Section 0. Scope and objectives</i>		
Consistent with national legislation and regional policy instruments	Time taken to process necessary amendments In some jurisdiction the term voluntary may prove challenging	FAO support by way of legal drafting
<i>Section 1. Definitions (question 1)</i>		
Definitions except “landing”, receiving vessel”, “donor vessel” and “transshipment” are in alignment with current legislative instruments In other countries it is not written in the same specific language In some countries the regulation includes some of the definitions. OROPs in the area have some regulation on transshipment with definitions aligned with FAO	Time taken to process necessary amendments because of the amount of changes to be made Revision of legislation to include or amend definitions Variability in national laws harmonise national regulation with FAO instruments Political will to adopt and adapt definitions and concepts	FAO support by way of legal drafting of a model legal instrument Update national regulation using FAO concepts. Take advantage of existing mechanism.
<i>Section 2. Principles (question 2)</i>		
There is not much alignment with existing legislations and some countries comply with international requirements	Need to incorporate principles that deal with regulation, monitoring, control and surveillance transshipment operations	FAO support by way of legal drafting including, for example, the application of GIES Implement and strengthen technical and logistical capacity to implement risk assessment
<i>Section 3. Application (question 3 to 9)</i>		
Little alignment with existing legislations or policy instruments.	Time and personnel needed to process necessary amendments Measures need to be created to fully monitor other transporting vessels.	FAO support by way of legal drafting

<p>There are regulations in countries which covers transshipment, however there aren't measures to fully monitor other type of vessels that engage in transfer of crew, supplies etc.</p>	<p>Apply the guidelines to national regulation</p>	<p>Adopt the transshipment voluntary guidelines</p>
<p><b><i>Section 4. Authorizations (question 10 to 25)</i></b></p>		
<p>Only for countries currently party to PSMA and with necessary changes already made to national legislative instruments.</p> <p>There are regulations in countries that covers force majeure waiver for vessels in distress under the officer in charge.</p> <p>Designated ports are not being encouraged.</p> <p>Alignment depends on countries.</p>	<p>Time and personnel needed to process necessary amendments</p> <p>There are countries where national observer program has not been implemented and for some cases observers are outsourced and only covers 5% long liners 100% purse seiners (tuna fishery).</p> <p>Non-tuna fishing vessels do not have observers' placements regularly since there are no international regulation for coverage,</p> <p>MOU needs to be created for information sharing of these reports.</p> <p>Vessels may be using high-risk ports with lack of proper monitoring and control.</p> <p>To define templates and national protocols and risk assessment protocols.</p> <p>Strengthen transshipment control of national fleet.</p> <p>Exchange information mechanism need to be established among countries.</p>	<p>FAO support by way of legal drafting</p> <p>policy is needed to ensure that vessels are encouraged to use designated ports despite not being a party to the PSMA.</p> <p>Create national transshipment templates. Risk assessment protocol. Implement observers' program.</p>
<p><b><i>Section 5. Standard notification and reporting (question 26)</i></b></p>		
<p>No specific AGREED format for reporting, except and apart from that re PSMA</p> <p>In some countries only under the tuna RFMO there is an agreed format or criteria for reporting of information. However, the format and criteria of the RFMO is in alignment with the guidelines.</p> <p>Not standardise templates everywhere</p>	<p>Time and personnel needed to process necessary amendments</p> <p>No agreed format of reporting for non-tuna vessels. However, the reporting format for these types of vessels are similarly set to those of the tuna RFMOs.</p> <p>Standardise templates to ensure the exchange of information between flag and port state.</p>	<p>FAO support by way of legal drafting</p> <p>Countries should review and develop reporting formats to ensure the current reporting formats are aligned with the guidelines.</p>

		Create standardise reporting procedures.
<b>Section 6. Pre-event notification and verification (question 27 to 38)</b>		
<p><i>Little alignment, currently</i> Mostly aligned with regulations in some countries</p> <p>Prenotification usually received between 72 and 48 hours in participant countries</p>	<p>Policy space, time and personnel needed to process necessary amendments.</p> <p>Human resources needed to properly verify pre-event notification and supporting information. Need for electronic system to create more efficiency. National Inspection program needs to be implemented and enforced.</p> <p>The quality of information needs to be improved, with minimum inconsistencies related to the volume transshipped.</p>	<p>FAO support by way of legal drafting</p> <p>Resources required to identify and acquire appropriate VMS technology</p> <p><i>FAO support through training, capacity building etc.</i></p> <p>Training for observers related to identification of species. Monitoring of electronic information.</p>
<b>Section 7. Post event reporting (question 39 to 53)</b>		
<p><i>Little alignment, currently, except for some PSMA parties and SOPs for fisheries prosecution</i></p> <p>aligned through country regulations of the relevant maritime administration</p> <p>Similar declarations in the countries, submitted in time and with the minimum information required by every country, minimum data as in the annex.</p>	<p>Policy space, time and personnel needed to process necessary amendments.</p> <p>Challenges regarding listing of known IUU vessels given lack of current information in this regard</p> <p>Strengthen follow up procedures and sanctions related to discrepancies between catches declared and verified.</p>	<p>FAO support by way of legal drafting and compilation of list of IUU vessels. This could be supported by MDA tools currently in use</p> <p>Strengthen procedures.</p> <p>Develop regulation for transshipment of national fleet.</p>
<b>Section 8. Follow up procedures (questions 54 to 62)</b>		

<p><i>Little alignment, except what is plan for countries signatory to PSMA and they are standard procedures in relation to fisheries prosecution</i></p> <p>aligned through Sanctions regulation in countries to provide procedures to sanction/prosecute vessels for violations relating to transshipments.</p> <p>All countries need to be aligned with the voluntary guidelines.</p>	<p>Timely putting in place the required systems and procedures</p> <p>Delay in implementation of National Inspection Program that allows reliability on Port state inspectors to facilitate inspections. There are countries that are not parties to the PSMA</p> <p>vessels are not being encourage to utilize designated PSMA ports opening doors to using ports where poor monitoring and control mechanisms maybe</p> <p>There is a need to make a follow up of inspection reports and impose strict sanctions to deter IUU fishing.</p>	<p>FAO providing the necessary support</p> <p>create policy to only authorize vessels to use designated PSMA ports where initial inspection of these ports is done by the flag state to ensure optimum inspections are done. Creating MOUs with Port states on effective monitoring and information sharing/cross verification.</p> <p>Engage customs with control of fishing activities</p> <p>OROPs should carry out follow up of infringements, requiring results to the parties.</p>
<p><b><i>Section 9. Monitoring (question 63 to 74)</i></b></p>		
<p>Alignment sub-optimal. Procedures and mechanisms need to be put in place</p> <p>Mostly aligned through the requirements of the RFMOs. There is no agreed template on manual reporting, however there is some require manual reporting for inactive VMS for up to 48hrs according to regulations</p> <p>There are templates for data collection</p>	<p>Necessary resources (human, financial, technology) in support of monitoring.</p> <p>Determination of appropriate VMS technology requirements</p> <p>There is a need to improve the observers coverage and implement electronic monitoring systems.</p>	<p>FAO assistance by way of support for VMS technology</p> <p>Capacity building and legal drafting support for POA for Observer Program.</p> <p>Require stowage plan by species and donor vessel.</p>



<i>Section 10. Data exchange and information-sharing (question 75 to 76)</i>		
<p>No alignment in the context of transshipment</p> <p>At RFMO level there are data sharing/information requirements that is in alignment with the guidelines.</p> <p>Transshipment information is shared at RFMO level and is public information for member and cooperating non-member states.</p> <p>The information does exist but should be standardise.</p> <p>There is a regional group established to fight against IUU</p>	<p>Everything here is a challenge</p> <p>Absence of cooperative arrangements</p> <p>More Human resources needed to efficiently/timely meet the reporting requirements of the RFMOs</p> <p>Coordination and management of transshipment among organizations with standardise data to prevent IUU fishing.</p>	<p>Some RFMO creating online reporting portal (in pilot phase) e.g. ICCAT</p> <p>Signing of MOU with other flag states</p> <p>Standardise templates in OROPs and information exchange among them</p>
<i>Section 12. Recognition of the special requirements of developing States</i>		
<p>Legal and policy instruments are consistent with special requirements of developing states in general though not necessarily in terms of transshipment given responses to previous sections</p>	<p>Identification of gaps and inclusion of lessons learned to obviate gaps</p> <p>Identification of gaps and inclusion of lessons learned to obviate gaps</p>	<p>Support from appropriate partners, including but not limited to FAO</p> <p>Need financial capacity and support from FAO and OROPs</p>