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THIRTY-FIRST FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Panama City, Panama, 26 to 30 April 2010

REPORT OF THE WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION (WECAFC)

1. The Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) was established by Resolution 4/61 of the FAO Council at its Sixty-first Session held in Rome in November 1973 under Article VI (1) of the FAO Constitution. The Commission has competence to deal with all living marine resources.
2. The membership of the WECAFC is open to all Member Nations and Associate Members of FAO which notify the Director-General of their desire to be considered as members. The present members of the Commission are: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, European Community, France, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Japan, Korea (Rep. of), Mexico, Netherlands (Kingdom of), Nicaragua, Panama, Saint Christopher and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Spain, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom, United States of America, Venezuela.
3. The goal of the Commission is to promote international cooperation for the conservation, development and sustainable utilisation of the living marine resources of the Western Central Atlantic region (Wider Caribbean region). The main objectives of the Commission are to facilitate the coordination of research, to encourage education and training, to assist Member Governments in establishing rational policies and to promote the rational management of resources that are of interest for two or more countries.

Thirteen Session of WECAFC

4. The thirteenth session of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) and the tenth session of the Committee for Development and Management of Fisheries in the Lesser Antilles were held at the Hotel Caribe, Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, 21 to 24 October 2008, at the kind invitation of the Government of Colombia.
5. Delegates from 17 WECAFC member countries, and observers from Turks and Caicos, the Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES) and the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) attended the Session.
6. Given the social and economic importance of fisheries to the WECAFC member countries and the role that fisheries play in their national food security, as well as the keen interest of these

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countries in seeing that regional cooperation for the conservation and management of these fisheries resources is facilitated through WECAFC, as a unique and neutral forum, it was considered important and useful to inform the FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean on the outcome of the Thirteenth Session of the Commission.

Main Decisions and Recommendations of the Commission

Intersessional Activities

7. The Commission expressed satisfaction with the work of the WECAFC *ad hoc* working groups during the intersessional period and their achievements:

- a. Three Working Groups were held to discuss status and management of very important species and species groups in the region, namely Queen conch, *Strombus gigas* (meeting held in Jamaica, 1–5 May 2006), Spiny lobster, *Panulirus argus* (Merida, Mexico, 19–29 September 2006), and flying fish (Trinidad and Tobago, 20–26 July 2008).
- b. Under the Working Group on the Shrimp and Groundfish fisheries in the Brazil-Guianas shelf, Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela had conducted a bilateral assessment for the shrimp and groundfish fisheries in the Gulf of Paria – Orinoco Delta. Results of this activity were also presented to and discussed with fishing industry stakeholders.
- c. IFREMER¹ organized a meeting of the Working Group on Sustainable use of moored FAD² fishing in the Lesser Antilles, Guadeloupe, 4–8 December 2006, and finalized the project proposal for the strengthening of regional cooperation on the use of moored FADs in the Lesser Antilles region. Potential funding sources were identified to which the project would be submitted.

8. The Commission noted the substantial FAO/WECAFC technical assistance to the region. The FAO FishCode STF Project in collaboration with OSPESCA³ promoted the following activities, mainly focused on Central-American countries:

- a. Support to the improvement of routine fisheries monitoring in Central America.
- b. Improvement of information on status and trends of Queen conch capture fishery in the Caribbean region.
- c. Increasing the profile of artisanal fisheries in the national policies of Nicaragua.

9. A number of activities have been conducted in the region with the support of the FAO Technical Assistance Programme (TCP), the FAO TCP Facility, and Trust Fund Projects funded by United Nations Environment Programme - Caribbean Environment Programme and the Government of Japan.

The Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) of WECAFC

10. The Commission noted the SAG statement about the decline of effectiveness of the fishery management over the last decade throughout the region. The Commission also noted that the SAG had called on Members to urgently reverse this trend to avoid that the already poor status of many resources would deteriorate further.

11. Several participants reported that management initiatives recently taken in their country have been effective or are promising for future improvements, noting that results from new fishery management measures need time for their outcomes to be realized.

¹ IFREMER, Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer

² FAD, Fish Aggregating Devices

³ OSPESCA, Organización del Sector Pesquero y Acuícola del Istmo Centroamericano

National Workshop on Nassau Grouper (20–21 October 2008)

12. A Regional Workshop on Nassau grouper, which was coordinated by the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC) and WECAFC, was held on 20 and 21 October 2008, prior to the WECAFC Session. Representatives from 17 countries attended the workshop.

13. The Nassau grouper workshop recommended that WECAFC and the CFMC establish an *ad hoc* Nassau grouper working group (NGW). The main purpose of the group is to foster regional cooperation in the management and conservation and restoration of Nassau grouper stocks in the WECAFC region; and to include coordination and harmonization of efforts for the management and conservation of the Nassau grouper. This group should meet in two years, prior to the fourteenth session of WECAFC. Other countries not present at the workshop should be invited to participate in the NGW.

14. The Nassau grouper workshop agreed that the management of Nassau grouper is more effective at the national level and countries should take national actions to be harmonized at the regional level. The meeting recognized that closed seasons is one of the most effective ways of protecting spawning aggregations when this species is more vulnerable to fishing. Given that spawning is linked to the full moon phase, this fact should be taken into consideration when determining the period for the closed season when a full moon occurs late in November or early in March.

15. The Commission accepted and endorsed the recommendations of the workshop.

Strengthening of WECAFC. Rules of procedure

16. The eleventh session of the Commission (Grenada 2003) established an Intersessional Working Group (IWG) for the strengthening of WECAFC. The twelfth session of the Commission requested the IWG to prepare, in assistance with the FAO Fisheries Department, draft Rules of procedure for WECAFC for adoption by the thirteenth session of the Commission. The draft Rules of procedure were circulated to the members of the IWG and the persons selected by member governments to attend the thirteenth session of WECAFC for their review, suggestions and comments.

17. The Commission endorsed the recommendation and adopted the proposed rules of procedure

The status of fishery resources in the WECAFC region

18. The Secretariat highlighted the general trend of decreasing landings of reef fishes including groupers not elsewhere identified (nei), snappers and jobfishes and others. Attention was also drawn to the decrease in recorded catches of oceanic large pelagics, common octopus and queen conch while catches of coastal large pelagics, sharks and seabob shrimp have increased in recent years, probably indicating increasing fishing effort.

19. A number of countries reported on progress in development of national plans of action (NPOA) for conservation and management of sharks. Several countries referred to progress and problems in management of their fisheries for Caribbean spiny lobster. It was suggested that WECAFC could assist in coordinating regional harmonization of regulations.

20. Some countries referred to the difficulties of monitoring and managing multi-species fisheries and to the problems faced by countries in securing adequate funds and human resources from their governments for monitoring catches and effort. It was noted that effective management was only possible if it could be based on reliable information and statistics.

Status and trends of fisheries and aquaculture in the WECAFC region

21. Increased international awareness on the need to ensure the sustainability of fisheries resources has accelerated actions to promote the establishment of adequate normative and institutional frameworks and practices for fisheries sustainable development. This process is posing significant challenges to countries' national governance in terms of institutional structure changes as well as on the improvement of policy formulation systems and processes and management practices. Some countries supported the suggestion to organize a regional workshop to review existing fisheries policy formulation systems and processes, taking into account the challenges posed by the changing international fisheries normative environment. Small-scale fisheries policy formulation issues should receive a preferential treatment in the proposed workshop programme.

FAO Fishery Statistics Programme

22. Through the use of indicators, it was shown that in recent years reporting of fishery statistics to FAO by countries and territories in the WECAFC region worsened, and if this trend would not be soon modified it may cause an impoverishment of the fishery statistics available for the region. In noting the importance of fisheries statistics for analysis and decision-making, the Chair of the meeting requested the delegations to report to their national offices in charge of fishery statistics and exhort them to submit the available statistics to FAO, as soon as possible.

Work Programme of WECAFC

23. In reviewing the proposed work programme for the 2008–09 biennium, the Commission was requested to note that the running costs for the WECAFC Secretariat were being met by the FAO Regular Programme Budget and to take into account the limited resources, human and financial, available to the Secretariat. Members of the Commission were invited to support, in-kind and/or financially, specific activities of the Work Programme, as was done by some Members in the last biennium.

24. The Commission approved the draft Work Programme for 2008–09, and noted that its implementation would depend on the availability of extra budgetary sources of funding.

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS FOR FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE: CONTRIBUTIONS TO GLOBAL DISCUSSION FROM FAO

25. The Commission agreed that there was a need for improved coordination and collaboration between countries in the region in improving disaster preparedness. In particular, there was a need to improve the collation and distribution of available information on climate change and its likely impacts. Fishers have said that very little information is reaching them on climate change in relation to small-scale fisheries in the Caribbean and it was agreed that this needs to be addressed. Advance warning facilities also need to be improved in the region. The meeting agreed that implementation of an ecosystem approach to fisheries was an important mechanism for maximising the resilience of marine ecosystems to climate change.

26. It was reported that several governmental and non-governmental agencies in the Caribbean are involved in climate change research and outreach (e.g. Caribbean Community Climate Change Center [CCCCC] and Caribbean Natural Resources Institute [CANARI]). To contribute to dissemination and exchange of information, at the forthcoming Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI) in Guadeloupe, the Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) are sponsoring a Fisheries Forum focused on fisher perspectives on climate variability and change to elicit recommendations for specific projects on related topics. The IUCN Caribbean Initiative, launched

at the World Conservation Congress in October 2008, includes a programme of activities on 'Ecosystems and livelihoods: sustainability, adaptation and resilience'.

27. The Commission recommended that fisheries administrators should ensure that climate change issues related to fisheries and aquaculture are adequately addressed at the national and regional levels. Some delegates suggested that, given the social and economic importance of the sector, special efforts are necessary to ensure that fisheries and climate change are given adequate attention and are well integrated into national policies and strategies.

CITES⁴ ISSUES WITH RESPECT TO FISH TRADE AND CITES/FAO MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

28. A number of countries reported on their experiences in implementing CITES regulations for export of queen conch and their efforts to meet those requirements. There was general agreement that the role of CITES had been beneficial in this case, assisting them in achieving effective management and control of fisheries and trade.

29. It was pointed out that the fifteenth Conference of the Parties (CoP) to CITES would be held in Qatar from 16 to 28 January 2010 and that the deadline for submission of listing proposals and other topics for consideration by the CoP was August 2009. It was noted that there was frequently poor or no communication between national fisheries agencies and the CITES authorities in the same country. The need for fishery authorities of the region to work closely with their national CITES counterparts on any relevant matters that would be discussed at the fifteenth CoP, was emphasized.

Any Other Matters

UNDP/UNESCO/IOCARIBE/GEF⁵ – Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem Project (CLME)

30. The Commission urged member countries to contribute to and cooperate very closely with the CLME to ensure that high priority issues related to fisheries in the region were adequately addressed, especially at the ecosystem level.

Lionfish in the Bahamas

31. The delegate of The Bahamas made a short slide presentation on the invasive lionfish, *Pterois volitans*, found in the Bahamian archipelago and which is a cause for great concern.

Magnuson-Stevens Act Reauthorization Act

32. The delegate of the United States provided an overview of major changes in the Magnuson-Stevens Act which was signed into law in January 2007 and which contains a number of new provisions for both domestic and international fisheries. The act should be of interest to members in that it provides for the prohibition of imports of certain fisheries products into the United States from countries that have taken no actions to address the problems of Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing and by-catch of protected living marine resources (e.g. sea turtles). Rather than imposing these restrictions the United States would strongly prefer to collaborate with countries to promote sustainable fisheries. In this respect, the United States have established a capacity building programme to provide assistance to other countries.

⁴ CITES, The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

⁵ United Nations Development Programme / United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization / Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission / Global Environment Facility