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# COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

## Thirty-fourth Session

1–5 February 2021

### REGIONAL FISHERY BODIES ESTABLISHED WITHIN THE FAO FRAMEWORK

#### Executive Summary

This information paper provides an overview of developments and work performed since the Thirty-third Session of the Commission on Fisheries (COFI) by regional fisheries bodies (RFBs) established under article VI and XIV of the FAO Constitution. Following aspects highlighted by Members during the Thirty-first Session of COFI, this paper includes an introduction on the subject, a presentation of the main differences among RFBs according to their constitutive instruments, and reported information on their related work, grouped according to their geographical area of competence.

## I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1. This information paper provides an overview of activities and work performed, since the Thirty-third Session of COFI, by regional fisheries bodies (RFBs) established under article VI and XIV of the FAO Constitution.
2. Eleven RFBs have been established under the legal framework of FAO. These RFBs have been established in accordance with the provisions of either Article VI or Article XIV of the FAO Constitution.
3. Statutory Bodies established under Article VI of the FAO Constitution ("Article VI Statutory Fisheries Bodies") for fisheries and aquaculture are:
  - The Commission for Small-Scale and Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture of Latin America and the Caribbean (COPPESAALC);
  - The Committee on Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture of Africa (CIFAA);
  - The European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission (EIFAAC);
  - The Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic (CECAF);
  - The South West Indian Ocean Fisheries Commission (SWIOFC); and
  - The Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC).
4. Article VI Statutory Fisheries Bodies have advisory function. These types of RFBs are referred to as Regional Fisheries Advisory Bodies (RFABs).
5. Statutory Bodies established under Article XIV of the FAO Constitution ("Article XIV Statutory Fisheries Bodies") for fisheries and aquaculture are:
  - The Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission (APFIC);
  - The Central Asian and Caucasus Regional Fisheries and Aquaculture Commission (CACFish);
  - The General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM);
  - The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC); and
  - The Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI).
6. Article XIV Statutory Fisheries Bodies are constituted by international agreement between States, which may include non-FAO Member Nations. They have regulatory powers in addition to broad advisory powers and may for example adopt conservation and management measures that are binding on their Members. These types of RFBs are referred to as Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs). While RFMOs established under article XIV of the FAO Constitution are considered to be administratively linked to FAO, they enjoy a certain level of functional autonomy.
7. Following the structure proposed at the Thirty-first Session of COFI in 2014, the information presented in this paper is reported by the RFB Secretariats, introduced according to their mandate and geographical area of competence.

## II. FAO REGIONAL FISHERY BODIES: ACTIVITIES AND DEVELOPMENTS

8. This section applies a grouping of FAO RFABs and RFMOs based on their geographical area of competence.

### A. Inland waters

#### Africa

##### Committee on Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture of Africa (CIFAA)

9. CIFAA was established by the FAO Council in 1971, under Article VI of the FAO Constitution and acts as a RFAB. It represents a continent-wide inland fisheries and aquaculture body working to foster and promote international cooperation in the development, management, utilization, and conservation of inland fisheries resources and sustainable development of aquaculture in its 37 African member States. CIFAA normally holds its sessions at intervals of two years.

10. The Eighteenth Session of the Committee was held in Bamako, the Republic of Mali, from 26 to 28 November 2019. Representatives of 29 member countries and two observers (African Development Bank and *Commission Economique du Bétail de la Viande et des Ressources Halieutiques*) attended the Session. The session covered the main topics of: follow-up of the intersessional activities on the decisions and recommendations of the 17<sup>th</sup> session; sustainability of aquaculture production; the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (VGSSF) and Inland fisheries and Aquaculture; fish disease and environmental constraints; sharing of experiences in sustainable development of inland fisheries and aquaculture in West Africa – Challenges in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region.

11. The Session highlighted the contribution that inland fisheries and aquaculture could play, in many countries, including their national poverty alleviation and food security programmes. The Committee noted the various conflicts among the various water uses that hinder sustainable production and the important role that the River or lake basin organizations can play in resolving those conflicts.

12. The Committee noted that most Members had aquaculture-specific legislation and guidelines, an indication that aquaculture has grown beyond the promotion stage and is generating significant socio-economic benefits to their populations but require further expansion. It highlighted the key constraints to aquaculture development in Africa as: shortage of appropriate feed and seed, inadequate access to financing and insurance, inadequate skills and know how, uncoordinated fish markets, insufficient research, data and information sharing, conflicts with other resource users such as agriculture and inland fisheries and limited enforcement of laws and regulations. The VGSSF were recognized by the Committee as a global consensus on principles and guidance for small-scale fisheries (including inland) governance and development.

13. In response to diseases and environmental constraints, the CIFAA noted the need to provide information in regards to biosecurity challenges in a more systematic way and to use preventative rather than reactive measures, and national strategy on aquatic animal health.

14. The Session concluded by a strong appeal to member countries to: consolidate inland fisheries management across the Africa region; promote aquaculture including small-scale and large-scale private farms and all environments/systems; support research including in feed and seed, enforce research-extension linkages; promote post-harvest/marketing and enhance experience-sharing including exchange visits; and support small-scale inland fisheries to increase the contribution of the sub-sector to food security, sustainable development and poverty eradication.

15. The Committee noted the principle of having its next session in the fourth quarter of 2021 in the Republic of Malawi subject to necessary approvals. This session will coincide with the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the creation of CIFAA.

16. CIFAA also continued working with the Aquaculture Network for Africa (ANAF), which aims to stimulate aquaculture discussion, technical exchanges and advancement of aquaculture in the continent. During its 17<sup>th</sup> session held in Banjul, the Republic of the Gambia, 9 to 11 May 2017, the Committee agreed that in order to formalize ANAF as a legally recognized platform, and to better facilitate cooperation among countries and the dissemination of aquaculture information in the continent, the network is to be integrated within the African Union Inter African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) structure, with FAO providing required technical expertise. The integration became effective in 2018, and since then the network has carried out several activities, including its regular annual meetings, the last of which was held on 17–19 February 2020 in Accra, the Republic of Ghana. During this Session, it was recommended that AU-IBAR (i) to quickly fast-track the process of finalize drafting of legal instruments (Rules of Procedures) of ANAF to secure its key role in sustainable aquaculture development in the Continent; (ii) utilizes the final legal instruments for setting up and hosting a new ANAF website within AU website; (iii) expand ANAF mandate including knowledge generation and delivery of capacity building; and (iv) ensure that the network is operational and that the role played by the Regional Economic Communities is well defined in the Network.

17. AU-IBAR shall submit the finalised ANAF Rules of Procedures and other legal instruments to the AU General Assembly prior to the NEPAD Specialised Technical Committee (STC) on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment meeting for consideration. Follow-up work has been initiated and is proceeding at an appropriate pace. With the support of member countries, the objectives should be fully achieved before the next regular meeting of the Network in 2021.

### **Latin America**

#### **Commission for Small-Scale and Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture of Latin America and the Caribbean (COPPESAALC)**

18. COPPESAALC was established in 1976 by the FAO Council, under article VI of the FAO Constitution, and act as an advisory body. Its Rules of Procedure were adopted by the Commission at its First Session in 1979; they were reviewed in 2008 and approved by the FAO Council in 2009, to incorporate aquaculture and the Caribbean region. In 2019, FAO's Council approved the expansion of the scope of the Commission to incorporate small-scale marine fisheries.

19. COPPESAALC comprises 21 member countries; its mandate includes the promotion of sustainable development and management of small scale, inland and marine fisheries and aquaculture, according to the norms and principles of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. The Regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean in Santiago de Chile hosts the Commission and provides Secretariat services.

20. According to the report of the Sixteenth Session held in September 2019, members highlighted the progress made in the implementation of recommendations and decisions taken at the previous session. They recognized the impact of the technical assistance provided to member States in formulating national fisheries and aquaculture development strategies, policies and programmes; to strengthen regional and national legal frameworks such as the Guidelines to Improve Occupational Safety and Social Protection in Fisher Folk that use Diving; to strengthen institutional capacities in combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and to incorporate the elements of the VGSSF.

21. The Commission, within the framework of the Blue Growth Initiative (BGI) for Latin America and the Caribbean countries, organized the Regional Fisheries and Aquaculture South-South

Cooperation Meeting, in Cartagena, the Republic of Colombia, in November 2019, where more than 70 bilateral and multilateral agreements were made among 19 member countries.

22. Within the framework of a previous BGI meeting, the Government of Mexico carried out a fisheries exploratory campaign using its fisheries research vessel, to support Central American countries in their efforts to assess fish stocks and improve fishery resource evaluation, with the facilitation of the Secretariat of the Commission.

23. The prioritized work areas for the period 2019–2021, include the implementation of policies and programmes to foster sustainable fisheries and aquaculture development; combating IUU fishing in SSF; strengthening resilience of fisheries communities to climate change; support efforts to increase fish consumption and the introduction of fish in school feeding programmes and public procurement schemes; occupational safety and social protection in SSF and Small Scale Aquaculture; transboundary diseases that affect aquaculture and assistance towards the achievement of national commitments within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1, 2 and 14. Fisheries and aquaculture sectors are considered relevant for food and nutrition security as well as poverty eradication, and are linked to programmes on territorial rural development. Members highlighted the need for support from FAO, to assist countries in the formulation and implementation of the above-mentioned policies and specific areas of needs.

24. The cooperation system in this region includes working with other subregional organizations (i.e. The Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization, the Aquaculture Network of the Americas; the Latin American and Caribbean Forum of Fish and Aquaculture Parliamentarians, the Confederation of Central American Small-Scale Fisher Folk, and the Latin American Fund for Indigenous Populations), civil society organizations, indigenous populations, local communities and other UN agencies. South-South Cooperation, as well as triangular cooperation among members, is key to achieve the objectives of COPPESAALC.

25. FAO provided support to the Commission's plan of work, both through regional and subregional fisheries and aquaculture development processes and at a national level by assisting member States, in their efforts to comply with internationally agreed commitments, such as the SDGs. Through FAO's Technical Cooperation Programme, institutional capacities of members have been strengthened to combat, deter and eliminate IUU fishing. Also, resource-limited aquaculture farmers of member States have strengthened their capacities in formulating locally available, low-cost aquaculture feeds, thus increasing their economic sustainability. Many national fisheries and aquaculture development strategies and policies have been supported at country level, such as to integrate the principles of the VGSSF in national legal and policy frameworks.

## **Europe**

### **European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission (EIFAAC)**

26. EIFAAC was established in 1957 under Article VI of FAO Constitution as a statutory body of FAO and held its first session in 1960 in Dublin, Ireland. Today it has 33 members and the European Union. The Commission acts as a RFAB and promotes the long-term sustainable development, utilization, conservation, restoration and responsible management of European inland fisheries and freshwater aquaculture, consistent with the objectives and principles of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and other relevant international instruments. The area of competence comprises inland waters in member States.

27. EIFAAC plays a key role in the network of academic and government research institutes, civil society and environmental organizations, and intergovernmental organizations supporting inland fisheries and freshwater aquaculture in Europe, such as the Working Group on Eel, a joint Expert

Scientific Working Group between EIFAAC and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), GFCM and the European Union.

28. The 30<sup>th</sup> session of EIFAAC and the EIFAAC international symposium on "Food Safety and Conservation in Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture" were held in Dresden, the Federal Republic of Germany, from 9 to 13 September 2019. The symposium produced scientific findings as well as evidence-based policy recommendations for inland fisheries and freshwater aquaculture of Europe. The symposium was attended by 91 participants from 15 countries.

29. The Commission adopted a five-year EIFAAC strategy for 2020–2024 and a workplan for the intersessional period 2020–2021, which reflects EIFAAC's key objectives, goals, priority issues and specific action plan ([www.fao.org/fishery/rfb/eifaac/en](http://www.fao.org/fishery/rfb/eifaac/en)). The Commission reconfirmed its commitment to dissemination of regional advice within its technical area to the EU and national policymakers of its 33 Member Countries by identifying the priority needs of members when planning new EIFAAC regional projects, especially those that can contribute to UN SDG targets. Recent FAO publications of EIFAAC research findings include: Welfare of Fishes in Aquaculture (FAO, 2019), Regional Conference on River Habitat Restoration for Fisheries (FAO, 2019) and Data Collection Systems and Methodologies for Inland Fisheries of Europe (FAO, 2020).

30. The Commission highlighted the need for active engagement of the official focal points of the only pan-European network focusing on inland fisheries and freshwater aquaculture. In this light, the 30<sup>th</sup> session adopted a new communication strategy to better inform its members.

### **Central Asia-Caucasus**

#### Central Asian and Caucasus Regional Fisheries and Aquaculture Commission (CACFish)

31. CACFish is a statutory body established under Article XIV of the FAO Constitution. The CACFish Agreement was approved by the FAO Council at its 137<sup>th</sup> Session in 2009, and entered into force in December 2010. The Commission currently has one subsidiary body, the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), which was established in 2011. Both the regular session of the Commission and meetings of TAC are held at two year intervals. The Commission's area of competence is Central Asia and the Caucasus, comprising mostly inland water bodies. The seat of CACFish Secretariat is at the FAO Subregional Office for Central Asia (SEC), Ankara, the Republic of Turkey. The commission currently has five Members. Several non-member States regularly are invited to the events and regular session of the Commission. The Commission aims at increasing its number of members.

32. The Sixth Session of CACFish was held in Izmir, the Republic of Turkey from 15 to 18 October 2018. The meeting was attended by five CACFish Member States and ten invited countries. The Session discussed: main decisions and recommendations of relevant FAO Conferences and Committees; decisions and recommendations of the Fifth Session of CACFish; and Commission's activities implemented in the intersessional period 2016–2017. The Session also reviewed and approved the recommendations of the Fourth Meeting of TAC (28–30 November 2017, Tbilisi, Georgia), namely on the Commission's annual budget for 2018 and 2019 (USD180 000) and priority activities to be funded by the CACFish Trust Fund during the intersessional period 2018–2019.

33. The Fourth Meeting of the TAC was held in Tbilisi, Georgia, 28 to 30 November 2017. The meeting discussed the priority activities, mainly for development of freshwater aquaculture, inland fisheries management and post-harvest sector in CACFish region, and recommendations were made for the consideration of the Sixth Session of the Commission.

34. Limited financial resources and growing arrears remains key challenges for the Commission. The project "Capacity Development for Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture Management in Central Asia" (FISHCap-Phase I: aquaculture and food safety) which became operational in 2020 under the

second phase of the FAO Turkey Partnership Programme), will support the CACFish work programme in achieving the following outcomes, including: improved institutional capacity for sustainable management; planning, protection and development of fisheries and aquaculture resources; and transfer of good management practices.

## **B. Marine waters**

### **Asia and Pacific Ocean**

#### Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission (APFIC)

35. APFIC was established under Article XIV in 1948, and held its First meeting in the same year in in Baguio City, the Philippines. Now APFIC has 21 members. The Commission convenes biennially, which has been complemented with the Regional Consultative Forum Meeting (RCFM) since its Twenty-ninth Session. The RCFM session is attended by government delegates from the member States and observers from regional and inter-governmental fisheries and aquaculture bodies as well as other UN agencies. The participation of the RCFM has been expanded to major regional projects staff, and provide sector representatives. The fisheries team at FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific acts as the APFIC Secretariat.

36. The Commission is competent in capture fisheries (both inland and marine) and aquaculture. It has a broad mandate that includes the promotion of sustainable utilization of living aquatic resources and sustainable aquaculture development through advising and supporting the members on economically viable and environmentally sustainable policies, practices and operations and finding solutions to emerging regional fisheries and aquaculture issues with impact on member States. As an article XIV body, APFIC has the potential for regulatory powers, although the membership have chosen not exercise this option and the Commission remains an advisory body.

37. Since the last Session (35<sup>th</sup> Session) held in Cebu, the Republic of the Philippines, from 11 to 13 May 2018, a range of activities have been carried to implement the APFIC's Programme of Work endorsed by the previous Session that align with the APFIC Strategy and priority areas for work endorsed at the 35<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission. The Seventy-seventh Session of the Executive Committee was held on 5–7 March 2019 in Chiang Mai, the Kingdom of Thailand, to discuss, among others, the preparation for the Eighth Regional Consultative Forum Meeting and the Thirty-Sixth Session of the Commission to be held in the Kingdom of Thailand.

38. These inter-sessional activities of APFIC are principally delivered through alignment with FAO's field and normative programmes, and thorough the FAO Regional initiative for blue growth in Asia-Pacific, FAO Asia and Pacific Regional One Health Programme and Regional Climate Change Programme. Thus actions and activities recommended by the Commission are undertaken using resources outside of the Commission's framework.

39. Following recommendations of previous sessions, the FAO Regional initiative on sustainable intensification of aquaculture for blue growth in Asia-Pacific was expanded in scope and coverage to focus more broadly on all aquatic resources related sectors and cover more countries in the implementation.

40. The FAO Secretariat has independently or jointly organized or supported more than 19 regional and international workshops and a major regional consultative workshop, with the participation of APFIC member countries and typically in partnership with a range of regional fishery organizations, institutions and projects. The Commission has not convened any technical workshop this biennium as it does not have an autonomous budget.

41. As an Article XIV body without an autonomous budget and with no ring-fenced allocations under the FAO regular programme, the possibilities for initiating activities within the framework of the Commission are severely constrained. APFIC has no standing or ad hoc working groups. It is now essential that a sustainable financial mechanism to support the normal activities of the Commission be identified.

### **Atlantic Ocean**

#### **Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic (CECAF)**

42. CECAF has been established as advisory body, within the framework of Article VI of the FAO Constitution, by the 48th Session of the FAO Council in 1967. Its purpose is to promote the sustainable utilization of the living marine resources of its area of competence, which includes high seas and national waters, by the proper management and development of the fisheries and fishing operations. CECAF has 34 members.

43. In addition to the Committee, CECAF has a Scientific Sub-committee (SSC), one of the main functions of which is to study the main stocks and fisheries, to assess their status and, on the basis of the results achieved, to provide fisheries management advice to the Committee, with focus on transboundary resources. However, it also discusses other issues of pertinence to fisheries management in the region, including for artisanal fisheries. The SSC is supported by three working groups, the Working Group for Small Pelagic Species, the Working Group for Demersal Species, and the Working Group for Artisanal Fisheries.

44. The twenty-second session of CECAF was organized from 17 to 19 September 2019 in Libreville, the Gabonese Republic. It was attended by representatives of 21 members of CECAF, and observers from the Regional Commission of Fisheries of Gulf of Guinea (COREP) and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA). Major topics discussed were: action on recommendations from the 21st session; main outcomes of the eighth session of the Scientific Sub-Committee (SSC); the independent cost-benefit assessment for improved directions of CECAF; improvement of data quality and assessment models for Working Groups; CECAF rules and procedures for Working Group members; the EU-funded PESCAO project Improved regional fisheries governance in west Africa; matters regarding the EAF-Nansen Programme; and other matters including the CECAF Programme of Work for 2019–2020.

45. The Committee noted with satisfaction the progress on the decisions and recommendations made during the 21<sup>st</sup> Session. The Secretariat was encouraged to: complete the action plan for the recommendations of the 2011 technical performance review; establish a work programme for two or three years to better plan activities; ensure that the Committee and the Scientific Sub-Committee meet at regular intervals, according to the agreed schedule (every two years); scientific advice should be shared with all parties involved when it becomes available; publish the outcomes of the meeting quicker than is presently the case; and develop an interactive website that may support strengthened communication among partners.

46. The Committee expressed concern about the reoccurring issue of inadequate financial and human capacities of the CECAF Secretariat to pursue its mandate across the region. Increasing these capacities will also address the issue of infrequent and limited management advice provided by CECAF to its member countries. It called for the consideration in its works of all fleets actively fishing in the CECAF region and encouraged the involvement of all members and the FAO in achieving this objective.

47. Concerning the improvement of the CECAF functioning, the Committee discussed the draft report on the cost and benefit assessment (CBA) and noted that the financial and organizational enhancement costs related to strengthening CECAF should be much less than its benefits. The



Committee requested that comments made by member countries be incorporated into the final version of the CBA report especially inclusion of additional options to improve CECAF functioning.

48. The Committee noted that progress continue to be achieved in the fight against IUU fishing, and recorded the increasing number of Members party to the Port State Measures Agreement. The strengthening of Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance at country level was recognized as an important condition for the development of a more efficient cooperation to combat IUU fishing at subregional and regional levels.

49. The Session closed by a call upon all partners especially African countries to enhance their commitment into CECAF activities including implementation of decisions on management advice and financial support.

#### Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC)

50. WECAFC is an advisory body, established in 1973 by the FAO Council, within the framework of Article VI of the FAO Constitution. The related statute was amended in December 1978 and in November 2006. WECAFC comprises 34 Members, including coastal States, whose territories are situated within the area of the Commission, States whose vessels engage in fishing in the area of competence, and the European Union. WECAFC area of competence includes an area of high seas of 9.4 million km<sup>2</sup> as well as national waters.

51. The main role of WECAFC is the promotion of the effective conservation, management and development of the living marine resources in the area of competence, in accordance with the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, as well as addressing common problems of fisheries management and development faced by its member countries.

52. As a follow up to a decision of the Commission at its Sixteenth Session held in Guadeloupe, the French Republic, 20–24 June 2016 to "launch a process to establish a Regional Fisheries Management Organization, and to clarify issues in relation to competency area, stocks coverage, budgetary implications for Members, institutional structure, membership, decision-making processes, national sovereignty aspects, its objectives and any other relevant matters that the Members may wish to consider", the First Preparatory Meeting for the Transformation into a Regional Fisheries Management Organization was convened in Bridgetown, Barbados, on 25 and 26 March 2019. At that meeting WECAFC Members agreed on short, medium and long term approaches starting with the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ) where binding conservation and management measures can be implemented, with the possibility of retaining the option to include the EEZ in order to maintain consistency for certain stocks/species as it is done, for instance, under the North Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) Convention.

53. The Seventeenth Plenary of the WECAFC, held in Miami, the United States of America, from 15 to 18 July 2019, was attended by 70 delegates from 25 member countries and 20 partner organizations, which agreed and endorsed seven recommendations in light of the deliberations. A major step was reached regarding the transformation process of the Commission, as it indeed featured WECAFC Members taking ownership of the process to chart the way forward in a transparent manner and to research and outline what may be the scope, administrative structure and legal considerations of the proposed regional fisheries management entity or arrangement. Moving forward in a spirit of trust and confidence, they provided a clear roadmap to the WECAFC Secretariat, and agreed to establish an ad hoc Intersessional Working Group (IWG) for progressing towards the development of a model for a regional fisheries management entity or arrangement in the WECAFC area of competence, being the Western Central Atlantic (area 31) and the Northern part of the Southwest Atlantic (area 41). In keeping the roadmap, a comprehensive questionnaire was designed by the IWG to elicit preliminary inputs from members and observers on key subject areas, which would be discussed at a second preparatory meeting scheduled for the second half of 2020 and currently postponed to COVID-19 pandemic.

54. The Seventeenth Session of the Commission also discussed intersessional activities (2016–2018) and approved the Programme of Work (2019–2020). The past three years recorded an increased activity of the joint working groups and the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG). Up until the 17<sup>th</sup> Session, nine out of the 11 working groups (Data and Statistics, Deep sea fisheries, Fisheries using fish aggregating devices/FAD, Flyingfish, IUU fishing, Queen Conch, Shrimp and groundfish, spawning aggregations, Spiny Lobster, recreational fisheries, sharks,) jointly coordinated with the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM), the Organization for fisheries and Aquaculture of Central America (OSPESCA), and other regional stakeholders, as well as the partnership with FIRMS met at least once while SAG had convened physically or remotely three meetings. Beyond the efficiency brought by the Interim Coordination Mechanism for Sustainable Fisheries (ICM), which was formally established in January 2016 through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the CRFM, OSPESCA and FAO/WECAFC, the strengthened collaboration and partnership pursued with organizations such as CITES, the Caribbean Fishery Management Council, UNOPS and UNDP through the second phase of the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem project, CLME+, played an important part in the full implementation of the workplan committed.

55. The Commission adopted seven regional fisheries management recommendations respectively on: the conservation and management of sharks and rays; the regional plan for the Caribbean spiny lobster (*Panulirus argus*) fishery; the management of shrimp and groundfish resources of the North Brazil-Guianas shelf; improved compliance with trade measures for queen conch; queen conch conversion factors; the sustainability of fisheries using anchored fish aggregating devices; and sustainable management of spawning aggregations and aggregating species.

56. The Commission endorsed a 10-year Regional Plan of Action with 28 measures and actions to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing in WECAFC Member Countries (2019–2029). Three recommendations were adopted in support of this plan, that relate to the monitoring and control of transshipment at sea, the application of the technical guidelines on methodologies and indicators for the estimation of the magnitude and impact of IUU fishing, and the marking of fishing gear.

57. The WECAFC members also endorsed the interim Data Collection and Reference Framework (DCRF), together with the regional data access and sharing policies, and the list of main species for data collection in the WECAFC area, all important tools aimed at providing decision-makers with sufficient and reliable information on data and statistics to develop effective fisheries policies.

58. A development of a new intersessional process on dolphinfish management was discussed to which the Commission agreed, expanding the mandate of the existing Joint Working Group on Flying Fish in the Eastern Caribbean, to incorporate flying fish, dolphinfish and other pelagic species not managed by ICCAT.

59. In addressing a call by the Commission for the WECAFC Secretariat to liaise with ICCAT Secretariat in view of developing a MoU between the two organizations on matters of common interest, a draft MoU was presented to the 26th Regular Meeting of ICCAT, and is being assessed for consideration by ICCAT. It is expected that this process leads to a signature this year (2020) of this important mechanism, to allow for the first meeting of a subsequent working group before the 18<sup>th</sup> Plenary of WECAFC in mid-2021.

60. The core activities of the Commission are implemented through the FAO regular programme (WECAFC ring-fenced) funds, in-kind contributions and trust funds projects coordinated directly by the Secretariat of WECAFC, estimated to around USD800 000 per biennium. On the FAO's declining support, especially the ring-fenced funds which fell over times (e.g. from USD110 000 in 2014–2015 to a stable figure of USD80 000 since 2016–2017 biennium) amidst limited human resources and ever increasing regional fisheries management challenges and threats to long term sustainable development WECAFC is experiencing, the Commission underscored at its 17<sup>th</sup> Session the urgent need for each and every Member to advocate for FAO's dedicated financial efforts towards the programme of work agreed upon and committed by the Commission. The encouraging data however remain the increased extra-

budgetary contribution of over three million USD in the 2018–2019 portfolio of other fisheries projects hosted by the Secretariat and interregional or global scope projects on members' capacity building for compliance with the PSMA.

## **Indian Ocean**

### **Southwest Indian Ocean Fisheries Commission (SWIOFC)**

61. SWIOFC is an advisory body, established by the FAO Council in 2004, within the framework of Article VI of the FAO Constitution. Its Secretariat is hosted at the National Fisheries Administration office (ADNAP) of Ministry of the Sea, Inland Waters and Fisheries of the Republic of Mozambique, in Maputo. SWIOFC has 12 Members.

62. The tenth SWIOFC Session was held in the Maldives (1–3 October 2019). For the first time since the Commission was established, all Member Countries attended the Session. The SWIOFC approved the reports and recommendations by the ninth Scientific Committee (SC) and the ninth Working Party on Collaboration and Cooperation in Tuna Fisheries (WPCCTF).

63. According to the SC analysis, 44 percent of the 86 species groups assessed in the SWIOFC are overexploited. Recognizing that all sea cucumber stocks were classified as overfished and that there is no local consumption of this resource as all catches are exported, the SC was requested to carry out a study on management measures and plans adopted or not by all countries in the region. The Session was also informed about output of the 1st SWIOFC Working Group on small pelagic fisheries (9–12 April 2019, the Republic of Mauritius) and requested the Secretariat to prepare a Catalogue of the Fishing Gear and Methods.

64. The WPCCTF reported to the Commission that the "Guidelines for Minimum Terms and Conditions (MTC) for Foreign Fisheries Access in the SWIOFC Region" were finally adopted in February 2019. To follow-up on the ten provisions in the Guidelines classified as requiring joint implementation by Member States, a meeting of the MTC Task Force was scheduled for 1–2 April 2020 but it had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

65. In order to bring to a conclusion to the discussions that started in 2012 on a SWIOFC financing mechanism and the establishment of a Southwest Indian Ocean Fisheries Framework Agreement (SWIO FFA), the Secretariat presented possible options to the tenth Session. The Commission requested that all Member Countries would carry out an internal consultation on both proposals and communicate the national position to the Secretariat by 3 February 2020. Unfortunately, only one Member reported its national position within the fixed deadline and then both proposals were not approved.

66. The SWIOFC, in partnership with the UNEP-Nairobi Convention, is working at project called "A Partnership for Marine and Coastal Governance and Fisheries Management for Blue Growth" funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The project's main goal is to reconcile fisheries and conservation management objectives. Unfortunately, implementation of project's activities suffered delays due to the slow procedures for recruiting the Project Manager.

### **Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)**

67. The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) is a RFMO that was established under Article XIV of the FAO constitution and currently has 31 Members and two cooperating parties. IOTC is responsible for the management of 16 tuna and tuna-like species in the Indian Ocean. The Commission has an autonomous budget of just over USD4 million, which is funded by its member States. This budget

supports the work of 15 staff members, eight working parties, two technical committees, and permanent committees on Science, Compliance, and Administration and Finance.

68. The IOTC has three major functions. These involve the collection of information from its fisheries, analysis and the provision of scientific advice; putting in place management measures on the basis of the advice received; and the monitoring of compliance with those management measures.

69. The total catch of IOTC species is currently around 1.8 million tonnes, with tropical tunas (yellowfin, skipjack and bigeye) accounting for around one million tonnes. IOTC is different to other tuna RFMOs in that around 70 percent of the catch of IOTC species is taken by small-scale vessels in the EEZs of coastal States and this poses particular challenges for the implementation of management measures, data collection and stock assessment.

70. The Commission has 59 conservation and management measures that cover all aspects of its mandate. These include measures related to: fisheries management (such as conservation measures in general, rebuilding of stocks, vessel chartering, discards, transshipment, gear specifications, formation or requirements of subsidiary bodies); records of vessels (including authorised vessels, active vessels, IUU vessels); statistics (such as catch and effort); deterring IUU fishing activities (including port State, flag State and market State measures); and ecosystems impacts (such as bycatch of sharks, seabirds, marine turtles).

71. Considerable effort has been undertaken to strengthen the science-management interface at IOTC at both the Working Party level and through the introduction of science/management dialogue forums. In particular, a Technical Committee on Management Procedures brings together scientists and managers in a workshop environment. IOTC managers now have a better understanding of what questions to ask the scientists, and scientists are better equipped to communicate complex technical matters in a clear and concise manner to managers. In addition, managers know more about the ecosystem and precautionary approaches; they understand that better compliance will lead to better science; and, through the Technical Committee on Management Procedures there is considerable progress being made towards the introduction of management procedures which provide pre-specified management measures for the major tuna species in response to stock status. Furthermore, the Science Committee is better responding to the Commission's needs because the stock assessments for the major species have incorporated additional sources of risk and uncertainty and assessments of data poor species are being improved; the communication of science to managers has improved; and the Scientific Committee's work is more focused due to the adoption of a five year strategic science plan.

72. Considerable effort has also gone into monitoring and reporting compliance by IOTC member countries in the implementation of the IOTC Conservation and Management Measures. This involves annual reporting by Members, annual reporting on the compliance of Members by the Secretariat, conducting in-country support missions, developing tools to assist Members with reporting (such as reporting guidelines and templates and implementation manuals), and assistance in the transposition of decisions of the Commission into national law. The Commission could be optimistic that its approach to improving compliance is gradually succeeding given the average level of compliance by IOTC members increased from 25 percent in 2010 to 68 percent in 2018.

73. While IOTC is largely autonomous from FAO, except for its administrative processes, there is a significant ongoing exchange of technical knowledge and expertise between the two bodies, especially in the areas of fisheries monitoring and compliance. Furthermore, the IOTC has benefitted from its partnership with the GEF-FAO ABNJ Tuna Project, which has accelerated IOTC's work in important areas of science and compliance. IOTC also actively interacts with the other tuna RFMOs and a wide range of regional bodies and organizations that are active in the Indian Ocean Region.

74. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission took place in Hyderabad, the Republic of India, from 17 to 21 June 2019 and was attended by 24 Contracting Parties (Members) of the Commission, and 2 Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties, together with observers. The Commission

adopted a budget of USD4 367 285 for the 2020 calendar year. The Commission granted the status of Cooperating Non-Contracting Party, until the close of the 24<sup>th</sup> Session in 2020, to the Republic of Liberia and the Republic of Senegal. The Commission added one vessel to the IOTC IUU Vessels List, bringing the total number of vessels listed to 65 vessels.

75. The Commission gathered at the session adopted seven Conservation and Management Measures: (i) on an interim plan for rebuilding the Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna stock in the IOTC; (ii) on an interim plan for rebuilding the Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna stock in the IOTC Area of competence; (iii) Procedures on a fish aggregating devices (FADs) management plan and on the conservation of mobulid species caught in association with fisheries in the IOTC Area of Competence; (iv) concerning the IOTC Record of Vessels Authorised to operate in the IOTC Area of Competence; (v) on a ban on discards of bigeye tuna, skipjack tuna, yellowfin tuna, and non-targeted species caught by purse seine vessels in the IOTC Area of Competence; (vi) on establishing a programme for transshipment by large-scale fishing vessels; and (vii) on vessel chartering in the IOTC Area of Competence.

#### Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI)

76. RECOFI is a RFMO that was established by an Agreement formulated in the context of Article XIV of the FAO Constitution and entered into force in 2001. Current members are eight coastal countries of the Gulf and Sea of Oman. The Commission is empowered to adopt binding conservation and management measures.

77. RECOFI is mandated to promote the development, conservation, rational management and best utilization of living marine resources, as well as the sustainable development of aquaculture within the provided area of competence, which comprises national waters. The species covered include all living marine resources in this area.

78. The Commission has two subsidiary bodies: the Working Group on Fisheries Management (WGFM) and the Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA). The Secretariat is currently provided by FAO and is based at the FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa, in Cairo, the Arab Republic of Egypt.

79. The Tenth Session of RECOFI was held in FAO HQ in Rome, Italy, 9–11 July 2019. The Commission took note and agreed on the inclusion of the main decisions and recommendations provided by the 33<sup>rd</sup> Session of COFI and the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of FAO Regional Conference for the Near East to the regular meetings of its working groups. RECOFI members recognized the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals and the need to collect data regarding SDG 14, which will assist in the sustainable management of fisheries resources and the economic benefit of the fisheries sector. The commission also commended the outcomes of the eighth meeting of the WGA (Kuwait City, the State of Kuwait, 17–19 April 2018) as well as continued activities undertaken in the intersessional period; noting the continues efforts to update of RECOFI Regional Aquaculture Information System (RAIS), and the initiative on the integration of current RECOFI regional data set into RAIS.

80. The Commission also commended the WGFM on the activities undertaken during the intersessional period and noted the outcomes of the Eleventh meeting of WGFM February 2019. The Commission also noted the outcomes of the Workshop on Regional Joint Assessment of Kingfish (*Scomberomorus commerson*) in the RECOFI area that was held in February 2019. The Commission agreed to establish a permanent RECOFI Working Group on Stock Assessment in order to assess the kingfish stock on a regular basis.

81. Based on the outcome of the regional kingfish stock assessment in RECOFI area, the following management recommendations were formulated for the consideration of the WGFM: (i) to introduce a closed season on an annual basis; (ii) to have the closed season during the same period which is from

the 15<sup>th</sup> of August to the 15<sup>th</sup> of October, for all the fishing gears exploiting the stock; (iii) the annual closed season in the RECOFI Area for kingfish fishery should be between 45 and 60 days; (iv) these measures shall apply to all the fleets including commercial and recreational fishing; and (v) these measures shall be reviewed annually and may be amended by the Commission based on the results of the stock assessment.

82. The Commission also acknowledged the value in cooperation between RECOFI and the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Environment (ROPME) and the important role that this MoU will play in that cooperation. The Commission agreed that the promotion of ecosystem-based fisheries and aquaculture management including the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries and Aquaculture and the joint organization of seminars, workshops and technical training in the fields of mutual interest are good starting points, with further priorities to be agreed upon at a later stage.

83. The Commission also recognized the benefits of developing FIRMS Stocks inventory of regional relevance for the RECOFI region and recommended the initiation of the process focusing on the kingfish and shrimps as priority species.

84. The current level of Member' contribution does not allow the Commission to deliver an extensive programme of work and fully carry out its role effectively. The work programme has been kept to a minimum while a considerable number of the activities have been financed by modest extra-budgetary sources or mostly by the FAO Regular Programme funds.

85. During the past years, RECOFI has had discussions on strengthening its function. FAO, in January 2020, circulated a note dated 31 December 2019 from the Director General to RECOFI Members concerning the performance of RECOFI and inviting greater engagement and support by Members to enable the Commission to deliver better services and achieve its objectives. Following the recommendation of RECOFI in its Ninth and Tenth Sessions, the following two possible scenarios were suggested for consideration: (i) Maintain RECOFI activities within current budget and reduced the FAO support; and (ii) Strengthen RECOFI to function with an increased budget and secretariat.

### **Mediterranean and Black Sea**

#### **The General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)**

86. The General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) was established in 1949 pursuant to Article XIV of the FAO Constitution. The GFCM is the RFMO with competence over the Mediterranean and the Black Sea regions and has the capacity to adopt conservation and management measures binding on its 24 contracting parties (GFCM CPCs) and five cooperating non-contracting parties.

87. Focusing on the Mediterranean sub-region, the "GFCM High-level Conference on MedFish4Ever Initiatives" organized in June 2019 assessed the progress made by GFCM CPCs towards the implementation of the 2017 Malta MedFish4Ever Ministerial Declaration. In this regard, GFCM CPCs renewed their strong commitments towards achieving the various targets set by this declaration. An ad hoc session was dedicated to issues relating to social development in small-scale fisheries, decent work and the implementation of the Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea (RPOA-SSF), which was signed by GFCM CPCs in September 2018. Another important feature of this conference was the regional celebration of the International Day for the Fight Against IUU Fishing, which culminated with an award-ceremony hailing select Mediterranean best practices.

88. Moving forward in its work in the Black Sea sub-region, the GFCM organized a "High-level conference on Black Sea Fisheries and Aquaculture" in June 2018 to strengthen governance and regional cooperation in fisheries and aquaculture. This conference, which led to the signing of the Sofia

Ministerial Declaration, addressed most salient priorities relating to marine scientific research in the Black Sea, the sustainability of aquaculture and stakeholders engagement in the fisheries sector.

89. Having regard to the importance of science and information, the GFCM Fish Forum was organized at FAO headquarters in 2018 to gather together experts, scientists and policy makers from within and beyond the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions. This watershed event, attended by some 450 participants, was recognized for its positive contribution in bridging science and policy by the United Nations General Assembly in 2019. A second edition of the GFCM Fish Forum is expected to be held in 2021 to be organized in the context of the UN Decade of Ocean Science (2021–2030).

90. Regarding science and information, the upcoming third edition of the GFCM flagship publication "The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries (SoMFi)" will provide an overview of the most important aspects of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries. The publication is expected to be issued by the end of 2020 and, among others, it will continue to monitor progress towards the sustainability of fisheries in the region consistent with GFCM policies in place.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

91. FAO (and non-FAO) Regional Fishery Bodies are a key mechanism for regional cooperation for fisheries and aquaculture resources sustainability and therefore, they are fundamental to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 14 through international cooperation. RFBs provide a forum for lesson-learning, discussion, negotiation and joint-action as well as an enabling environment to increase technical and scientific assistance, and coordinated work with the main actors in the region and beyond, including other RFABs or RFMOs, UN agencies, and stakeholders.

92. Despite the RFBs' successful ventures in creating partnerships that are providing responses to climate change impacts, sustainable fisheries, aquaculture governance, ecosystem and biodiversity conservation, and social and economic challenges, some regional fishery bodies established within the FAO framework report budget constraints in order to fully and effectively carry out their roles.

93. FAO recognizes that there is a compelling urgency to address the weaknesses of those bodies. FAO will continue to provide a framework and technical support for the RFBs established under Article VI and XIV of its Constitution. However, ultimately these bodies exist for, and by, their members. If changes need to be made to the existing regime of FAO Article VI and Article XIV statutory bodies, it is for the members of these bodies, not FAO, to drive this change.