



**WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION (WECAFC)**

**FOURTEENTH SESSION**

**Panama City, Panama, 6-9 February 2012**

**Summary report of the Fifth Session of the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) of WECAFC**

**Introduction**

1. The fifth session of the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) was held in Puerto Morelos, Mexico, from 28 to 29 October 2011. The Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI) hosted the session at the venue of its sixty-fourth annual meeting. The SAG discussed the fisheries resource status in the Wider Caribbean Region, identified emerging and continuing issues of concern to fisheries stakeholders, and produced a set of research-related priorities focusing on fisheries resource assessment and management.
2. The SAG called for renewed attention from policy makers to the declining trend in fish catches of some important commercial fisheries species stocks including the valuable Caribbean spiny lobster and several important reef species and urges action in support of the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. The SAG also drew the attention of WECAFC and its members to the following research priorities aimed at improving current fisheries resource assessment and management: comprehensive fisheries assessment; building capacity for research, assessment and management; aquaculture development and management; incorporating social, economic and livelihood considerations; impacts of climate change and variability on fisheries, and; governance of marine resources incorporating ecosystem approaches.
3. The list of SAG recommendations for the attention of the Commission is included below.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE COMMISSION

- The SAG recommends that WECAFC continues its efforts in support of the implementation of the CCRF and provides inputs for its biennial monitoring.
- The SAG urged FAO to organize a regional workshop in the Caribbean as part of the preparation of the international guidelines on small-scale fisheries, in order to raise awareness in the region on this initiative and provide an opportunity for small-scale fishers and organizations active in fisheries to participate in the process and generate ownership of the international guidelines in the region.
- The SAG recommends that FAO undertakes a review on current fisheries management performance and conservation measures that are applied in the Region.
- The SAG underscored the declining trend in fisheries production in the region and the need for WECAFC to alert policy makers in the region of this trend.
- The SAG recommends that a workshop on data collection and data management be organized to provide guidance to the Countries in order to improve the quality of the statistics that are available for fisheries resource assessment and management and for reporting to FAO.
- The SAG recommends that the Commission pays attention to the emerging and continuing issues of concern identified and provide appropriate response to:
  - The increase in sea cucumber fisheries. The SAG recognized that while the sea cucumber may be a good source of income for fishers, the stocks are easily overfished. A pattern of serial depletion of sea cucumber stocks in some areas was noted and it was emphasised that caution is needed in the development and management of these fisheries. The need for further research on and measures to control the growth, regulate and manage the fisheries throughout the Caribbean region.
  - Marine spatial planning is becoming increasingly important in the region and the SAG noted that the fisheries sector is often ignored in the planning process, especially in relation to use of off-shore marine areas. This can have negative consequences for the fisheries.
  - The continuing need for establishment of a regional shellfish hatchery.
  - The importance of research on fish spawning aggregations and management to avoid over-exploitation of these vulnerable stocks.
  - Impact of invasive species (e.g. lionfish) on marine ecosystems and fisheries.
  - Impact of climate change and climate variability on marine ecosystems, fishing communities and fisheries and aquaculture in general.
  - The need for further development and harmonization of policy, management plans and legal frameworks in the region. The SAG urged WECAFC to monitor ongoing fishery management, planning and policy development processes and provide advice where needed.

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- The SAG recommends that a joint OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM working group on Spiny lobster be formed, technically led by the FAO Subregional Office in Panama in the inter-sessional period 2012-13, which would organize in early 2012 a regional coordination meeting to discuss its programme of work
  - The SAG recommends to maintain the WG on Queen conch, which would be requested to report on the status of the resource and its management to the Commission at its fifteenth session (2014) and would follow-up on requests from Regional Fisheries Bodies to FAO/WECAFC for work on this subject
  - The SAG recommends to strengthen the CRFM/WECAFC Working Group on Flying Fish in the Eastern Caribbean, which should support the WECAF Commission and CRFM Ministerial Sub-Committee on Flyingfish with scientific and technical advice.
  - The SAG recommends the CFMC/WECAFC Nassau Grouper Working Group to be re-activated and expanded into a Spawning Aggregation Working Group, and focus on regulatory advice, vulnerability analysis, recovery measures and management actions to be taken. The SAG also recommends that an expert is identified to lead and convene this working group and that WECAFC and partners allocate seed money to get work started by the working group
  - The SAG recommends that WECAFC creates linkages to inform countries and stakeholders about the activities going on in the Region in terms of advances in the knowledge, fisheries management and projects' activities using the appropriate tools and instruments.
  - The SAG recommends that the profile of fisheries should also be raised through the existing media by improving and strengthening relationships with them.
  - The SAG suggested that the members of the Commission identify and designate National Focal Points in each of the WECAFC member countries, to facilitate scientific and technical exchange for improving fisheries performance.

#### **SUGGESTED ACTIONS FOR THE COMMISSION**

4. The Committee is invited to consider and, as appropriate, to endorse the report of the Fifth SAG session and provide guidance with regard to issues discussed during the session, including the continuation of various (joint) Working Groups and the designation of National Focal Points in each of the WECAFC member countries.
5. The complete SAG report is made available as WECAFC/XIV/2012/Ref.3 and is being published as FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Report No. 987.