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WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION Twelfth Session
WECAFC LESSER ANTILLES FISHERIES COMMITTEE Ninth Session
Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, 25-28 October 2005
REPORT OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE INTERSESSIONAL WORKING GROUP ON THE STRENGTHENING OF WECAFC Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, 12-14 July 2005

INTRODUCTION

1. The Eleventh Session of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC), Grenada, October 2003, recognized the need for improved regional cooperation leading to effective conservation and management of the region's fisheries resources and agreed that strengthening of WECAFC was a possible way forward in this regard. It expressed the need for the region to adopt a coordinated approach to fisheries management for shared and straddling stocks, recognizing that the diversity of the region will sometimes require multiple approaches. The Eleventh Session recommended the establishment of an Intersessional Working Group (IWG) to study the feasibility of strengthening WECAFC, and identified issues that the IWG should examine. The recommendation is attached as Appendix A.

2. The meeting of the Intersessional Working Group (IWG) on the Strengthening of WECAFC was held in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, 12-14 July 2005. The meeting was organised by the WECAFC Secretariat with the financial and logistic support of the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC) based in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

3. All member countries of WECAFC were invited to participate in the IWG. The list of participants is in appendix B.

OPENING CEREMONY

4. At the informal opening ceremony the participants were welcomed by Mr. Antonio Morales Mengual, FAO Representative in the Dominican Republic, Mr. Ricardo Colón Alvarez, Director of Fishery Resources, Dominican Republic, Mr. Jean-François Pulvenis, Director, Fishery Policy and Planning Service, FAO and Mr.

Miguel Rolón, Executive Director of the CFMC. In welcoming the participants, the speakers coincided in highlighting the importance of the fisheries sector for WECAFC member countries and emphasized the need to improve the management and conservation of the fishery resources of the region, the majority of which are shared or straddling stocks. They also expressed their hope that the outputs of the meeting should contribute to the formulation of a plan for the strengthening of WECAFC.

ELECTION OF THE CHAIR

5. The meeting elected, by consensus, Ms. Cheryl Jeffrey-Appleton as Chairperson and Mr. David Balton as Vice-Chair.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

6. In adopting the Agenda, Appendix C, the meeting noted that the main item of the agenda was Item 4, Strengthening of WECAFC. The list of background documents is included in Appendix C.

7. In relation to the adoption of the Agenda, the Chairman stated the following: “The European Community (EC) is participating in this meeting in accordance with paragraphs 8 and 9 of Article II the FAO Constitution. I have been asked to inform you that the declaration made by the European Community and its Member States is contained in Information Document WECAFC/XI/03/Inf. 6, “Statement of Competence and Voting Rights submitted by the European Community (EC) and its Member States”, which has already been distributed to all members of this meeting. I wish to draw the attention of the meeting to this declaration”.

STRENGTHENING OF WECAFC

8. At the request of the Chair the Secretariat presented the recommendations of the Eleventh Session of WECAFC on its Strengthening, WECAFC/IWG/05/I/Inf. 1, which were considered the terms of reference for the work of the IWG. There were no observations or comments on the Commission’s recommendations.

9. The Secretariat presented document WECAFC/IWG/05/I/2 “Considerations for Strengthening the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) and Fisheries Management in the WECAFC Region - A Discussion Paper”. During the discussions on this document the meeting requested that the document WECAFC/IWG/05/I/Inf. 2 “Main Decisions of the Third Session of the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) regarding the Strengthening of WECAFC” be presented. The meeting observed that this document also contained valuable suggestions on the subject.

10. Following the presentations, there was an intense exchange of opinions, ideas and suggestions on the process for achieving the primary objective of the IWG meeting. During the discussions the US delegation presented a document entitled, “Strengthening WECAFC – Options for Moving Forward”, which contained the following five options:

- (i) WECAFC remains an Article VI body with a strengthened mandate;

- (ii) One or more WECAFC working Groups gradually develop management authority;
- (iii) WECAFC becomes an umbrella organization;
 - Serving as funding and coordination institution for region, and/or
 - Overseeing smaller bodies with fisheries management authority for certain sub/areas and/or certain key stocks
- (iv) WECAFC becomes an RFMO under Article XIV; and
- (v) WECAFC becomes an RFMO independent of FAO.

11. In reviewing and discussing the options for strengthening WECAFC presented in the documents prepared by the Secretariat and the options presented in the document prepared by the US delegation, most of the participants expressed their views and made suggestions for improvement.

12. After the debate, the IWG agreed that WECAFC should remain an article VI body under the FAO Constitution and should not become an article XIV body.

13. The IWG found options 1, 2 and 3, presented by the US, useful and complementary and suggested that they should be combined, modified and enriched by the suggestions contained in the other two Secretariat documents, in addition to the proposals made by the plenary. The meeting felt that options 4 and 5 should not be considered. Based on these comments and suggestions, the meeting requested the Secretariat to prepare a proposal on the strengthening of WECAFC for further discussion.

14. The proposal entitled, "Elements of a Plan to Strengthen WECAFC" was presented to the plenary. The proposal contained the following sections: Basic Concepts, Strengthening of WECAFC mandate Strengthening WECAFC Ad Hoc Working Groups and SAG, Strengthening WECAFC Secretariat and Strengthening WECAFC relationships with other Organizations. Under the last heading, the proposal suggested coordination with the GEF Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem (CLME) Project.

15. In discussing this proposal the Secretariat provided information on the GEF CLME Project, being prepared by IOCARIBE, and attempted to clarify how WECAFC member countries could participate in and benefit from it. The Secretariat suggested that fisheries administrators should contact the GEF focal point in their respective countries to ensure that the fish and fisheries module of the CLME proposal takes into consideration the regional needs and priorities for fisheries conservation and management.

16. The IWG provided comments, suggestions and recommendations on the proposal. Based on the new inputs from the plenary, a draft plan for the strengthening of WECAFC was prepared by the Secretariat and was adopted by the IWG. The draft plan is found in Appendix D.

17. The representatives of the US and the EC indicated that the US and the EC would be willing to consider providing financial resources as necessary to support activities of a strengthened WECAFC through the appropriate mechanisms. In this respect, it was suggested that a trust fund could be established by WECAFC for receiving voluntary contributions from member states or other sources. The representative of Mexico indicated that his government would similarly consider providing financial and technical assistance to the ad hoc working groups. Some participants suggested that countries could consider seconding experts to assist the WECAFC Secretariat in executing its functions. The IWG agreed that the draft plan should be presented to the second meeting of the IWG, which should be held immediately before the Twelfth Session of WECAFC.

18. The meeting requested that FAO:

- Prepare a draft revised statute of the WECAFC for discussion at the second meeting of the IWG. This draft should be circulated to Members of the IWG before the second meeting.
- Prepare cost estimates for the strengthening of the WECAFC Secretariat which should include the levels of support starting from a full time Secretary as a minimal requirement up to a full fledged independent office. These estimates should be prepared for the next meeting of the IWG.

20. The meeting recommended that the WECAFC Secretariat should encourage countries of the region that are not members of WECAFC to become members. The IWG suggested that FAO and the WECAFC Secretariat should use the “good offices” of current WECAFC members (for example, member country Ambassadors to FAO) to publicize the work of WECAFC and to encourage members to participate more actively in the work of the Commission. It was suggested that participants in the IWG should inform the relevant agencies in their respective governments of the outcome of the First IWG and encourage their active participation in WECAFC and in the process of its strengthening.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

21. There was no other business.

TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING

22. The IWG agreed that the second meeting should be held immediately before the Twelfth Session of WECAFC, which is tentatively scheduled for 23 to 27 of October 2005. The participant from Colombia offered to host the next meeting of the IWG and the Twelfth Session of WECAFC. This offer is subject to official confirmation by the Government of Colombia.

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

23. The report was adopted by the meeting on 14 July 2005.

APPENDIX A

RECOMMENDATION ON STRENGTHENING WECAFC AS AN ORGANIZATION

The Commission recommended intersessional work be conducted to explore the feasibility of strengthening WECAFC to promote effective conservation and management of marine capture fisheries throughout the Western Central Atlantic region.

Participants in the Eleventh Session of WECAFC recognized the following factors as relevant to this recommendation:

- The WECAFC region is extremely diverse, both with respect to social, economic, cultural and political characteristics and with respect to the types of fisheries resources available.
- Many of the most critical fisheries resources are trans-boundary, straddling or highly migratory stocks, making regional and sub-regional cooperation a prerequisite for sustainable fisheries management.
- The lack of effective regional cooperation has contributed to the current state of the region's fisheries. Many of the most economically and socially important fisheries are in decline.

In its 2003 assessment of the Status of Fisheries in the Western Central Atlantic Region, FAO assessed the situation as follows: "Unless urgent steps are taken to collect sufficient information on landings and effort to provide, at least, the minimum information necessary to ensure sustainable utilization, there is a high risk that landings will continue to decline, as this review shows many have already done. This will lead to further erosion of the social and economic benefits currently being derived from the region's marine resources. As so many of the resources are shared between two or more countries, close co-operation between countries at a variety of international levels will commonly be advantageous and often essential in securing this".

The Commission considered that improved regional cooperation leading to effective regional conservation and management measures was essential to change the present situation and believed that strengthening WECAFC was a possible way forward in this regard. The region needs to adopt a unified and coordinated approach to fisheries management for shared stocks, recognizing that the diversity of the region will sometimes require multiple approaches.

As noted in the paper, "Current Strategy of WECAFC" (WECAFC/XI/03/09), "WECAFC is the only regional cooperation institution whose geographic jurisdiction covers the entire region and whose membership includes all of the countries bordering it". For these reasons, a strengthened WECAFC would bring substantial benefits to the region. As the focal point for fisheries management in the region, this organization would be better placed to secure increased financial contributions from member States along the lines of other regional fisheries management organizations. A strengthened WECAFC would also be in a much better position to coordinate

relevant scientific research and to contribute to the region's battle against IUU fishing, as it could adopt anti-IUU measures now in use in other regional fora. With progress on the twin goals of science and enforcement, the long-term sustainability of fisheries resources in the Caribbean would be more assured and planners could more effectively use this resource in poverty alleviation programs at the national level.

WECAFC members have repeatedly stressed the need for strengthened regional cooperation for critical fish stocks. With respect to queen conch resources, Caribbean countries have adopted the 1996 San Juan Declaration, which explicitly calls for strengthened regional cooperation on queen conch. Prior to the 2001 WECAFC meeting, Ministers and senior decision-makers at a meeting of the Spiny Lobster Ad Hoc Working Group declared that "greater cooperation was required among lobster-producing nations of the WECAFC region given the shared nature of the resource".

The Commission accordingly recommended the establishment of a WECAFC intersessional working group tasked to study the feasibility of strengthening regional fisheries management in the region and to report to the twelfth session of WECAFC. Funding for the intersessional working group would be channeled through FAO. To achieve equitable geographic distribution, this working group should be open to participation by all WECAFC members. The Scientific Advisory Group should also be invited to participate in the intersessional work.

This Intersessional work should explore the following issues:

- Experience within FAO in strengthening other international fisheries bodies.
- How a strengthened WECAFC could most effectively interact with existing mechanisms and programs in the region.
- How a strengthened WECAFC could increase economic benefits derived from fishing activities, particularly with respect to the contribution of artisanal fisheries to economic development and food security in the region.
- How a strengthened WECAFC could promote the adoption, implementation and enforcement at the national level of compatible management measures for shared stocks in the region.
- How a strengthened WECAFC could build on current structures and programs in the region such as the existing working groups and build effective outreach with related organizations and institutions.
- Cost estimates for the establishment and running of a strengthened WECAFC with management authorities and a timetable for its establishment.
- Whether a strengthened WECAFC should initially focus on species of particular interest. Case studies could include the following spiny lobster, queen conch, snapper-grouper complex, shrimp and groundfish, wahoo, and dolphin fish.

The Commission also expressed the wish that participants in the White Water to Blue Water Conference to be held in Miami, Florida, USA, 21-26 March 2004, specifically support the intersessional work envisioned through this recommendation.

APPENDIX/ANNEXE/APÉNDICE B

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AGENDA

1. Opening of the Session
2. Adoption of the Agenda WECAFC/IWG/05/I/1
3. Recommendations of the Eleventh Session of WECAFC on Strengthening of WECAFC as an Organization, St George's, Grenada, 21-24 October 2003 WECAFC/IWG/05/I/Inf.1
4. Strengthening of WECAFC
 - Considerations for Strengthening the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) and Fisheries Management in the WECAFC Region - A Discussion Paper. (A discussion paper on the subject based on the recommendation of the Eleventh Session of WECAFC, Grenada, 21-24 October 2003) – Parts I and II WECAFC/IWG/05/I/2
 - Main Decisions of the Third Session of the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) re strengthening of WECAFC WECAFC/IWG/05/I/Inf. 2
 - Current Strategy of WECAFC – a discussion paper (presented to the Eleventh Session of WECAFC, St George's, Grenada, October 2003) WECAFC/IWG/05/I/Inf.3
 - The Status of Fisheries Resources in the WECAFC Region WECAFC/IWG/05/I/Inf.4
 - Status and Trends of Fisheries and Aquaculture in the WECAFC Region WECAFC/IWG/05/I/Inf.5
5. Any Other Business
6. Time and Place of next meeting
7. Adoption of the Report

APPENDIX D

ELEMENTS OF A PLAN TO STRENGTHEN WECAFC

Basic Concepts

- WECAFC remains an Article VI body with a strengthened mandate.
- WECAFC's Ad Hoc Working Groups and SAG are strengthened.
- WECAFC's secretariat is strengthened.
- WECAFC's relationships with other regional and sub-regional organizations are strengthened.

Strengthening WECAFC's mandate

- Update WECAFC's Statutes¹ in light of developments in international fisheries management in order to:
 - assist WECAFC members in implementing relevant international fisheries instruments, in particular the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and its related International Plans of Action;
 - facilitate harmonizing of relevant national laws and regulations, and compatibility of conservation and management measures;
 - ensure an adequate attention on small-scale, artisanal and subsistence fisheries;
 - assist WECAFC members in coordinating scientific research, in collection of data, and in sharing the results of such research; and
 - assist, as appropriate, WECAFC members in preventing and resolving fisheries disputes.
- Develop a comprehensive Programme of Work for WECAFC as a whole.
- Seek additional on-going financial resources to support strengthened mandate.
- Deepen WECAFC's role in coordination and communication among WECAFC members, particularly as a source of information on status and trends of fisheries in the region, with a view to encouraging complementarity and avoiding duplication.
- Strengthen WECAFC's ability to assist in the development of coastal and marine aquaculture.
- Seek greater political support and direction (political will) for WECAFC from all relevant governments and institutions, as well as their active participation in WECAFC's activities.
- Interact with Foreign Affairs Ministries and all other relevant Departments to help ensure proper coordination at the national level with respect to the work being undertaken by WECAFC.

¹ FAO is requested to prepare a draft set of updated WECAFC Statutes in accordance with these suggestions, as well as other relevant suggestions in Discussion Paper WECAFC/IWG/05/I/2, paragraph 89.

Strengthening WECAFC's Ad Hoc Working Groups and SAG

- Develop concrete programs of work for each Ad Hoc Working Group in conjunction with corresponding national programs of work of their respective members.
- The SAG should develop minimum data requirements for use by members of each Working Group so that it can provide appropriate scientific advice to them.
- Assist Working Groups in securing sufficient financial resources to enable regular meetings and continuity of work.
- Gradually develop capacity by one or more of these Working Groups to recommend to their respective members the adoption of conservation and management measures for relevant stocks, with the view to achieving measures that are compatible throughout the range of stocks.
- Provide additional support to the SAG to assist Working Groups with their strengthened mandates.

Strengthening WECAFC's Secretariat

- Consider making WECAFC Secretary a full-time position.
- Seek other resources to provide Secretariat with expanded financial and human resources necessary to support WECAFC's expanded mandate; for example, by seconding personnel to the Secretariat and by providing other forms of expertise and assistance.²

Strengthening WECAFC's relationships with other organizations

- Strengthen WECAFC's ability to engage and partner with other regional and sub-regional organizations involved in fisheries management, as well as international financial institutions and donors.
- Develop capacity for WECAFC to serve as a funding conduit for sustainable fisheries initiatives in the region.
- Coordinate with Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem project:
 - Participate actively in the PDF-B stage of the CLME project and the subsequent implementation of the full project; and
 - Encourage the use by the CLME project of the WECAFC Ad Hoc Working Groups as vehicles for relevant assessment and governance activities and, where applicable, strengthen the work of those Groups.
- Continue to consider WECAFC's potential to serve as a body for coordinating fisheries management throughout the region, in partnership with WECAFC members and other regional and sub-regional bodies.

² FAO is requested to prepare cost estimates for various options relating to strengthening the WECAFC Secretariat.