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<b>FISHERY COMMITTEE FOR THE EASTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC</b>
<b>Scientific Sub-Committee</b>
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<b>REPORTING ON THE STATE OF RESOURCES IN THE CECAF AREA AND OPTIONS FOR SCIENTIFIC ADVICE AND MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS</b>

#### **SUMMARY**

One of the key roles of Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic (CECAF) in recent years has been to provide scientific advice on the state of living marine resources in the CECAF Area, with focus on transboundary demersal and small pelagic resources. A specific framework has been set up to provide this advice through the scientific working groups that analyses available data and information on small pelagic and demersal resources, conducts assessments by applying agreed methods, classifies the resources by relating assessment outcomes to agreed biological reference points, and provides management advice based on the assessments or other information available to the group, as appropriate. The work of the working groups is documented in the working group reports that follows a standard format, including for the presentation of the data.

With the aim to strengthen and improve the work of the Working Groups, external technical reviews of the reports of the different subgroups were initiated in 2014, followed by an expert group meeting to discuss the reviews in 2015. The outcome of this external review was reported on and discussed at the last Scientific Sub-Committee (SSC) in 2015 and recommendations to follow up actions were made (FAO, 2016).

This summary report provides an overview of main outcomes of the review process and the recommendations made at the last Scientific Sub-committee in 2015 and by the Committee in 2016 in this regard to highlight recurring issues that needs the attention of the SSC. Furthermore, the Committee requested the SSC to present a proposal for a revision to the format of the advice and the management recommendations, which should integrate information related to the quality of data, the models used, and other pertinent information that might affect the management advice given and elements for such a proposal is provided in a draft working document for the consideration of the SSC.

## **REPORTING ON THE STATE OF RESOURCES IN THE CECAF AREA AND OPTIONS FOR SCIENTIFIC ADVICE AND MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

1. One of the key roles of CECAF in recent years has been to provide scientific advice on the state of living marine resources in the CECAF Area, with focus on transboundary demersal and small pelagic resources. A specific framework has been set up to provide this advice through the scientific Working Groups that analyses available data and information on small pelagic and demersal resources, conducts assessments by applying agreed methods, classifies the resources by relating assessment outcomes to agreed biological reference points, and provides management advice based on the assessments or other information available to the group, as appropriate. The work of the Working Groups is documented in the Working Group reports that follows a standard format, including for the presentation of the data themselves.
2. With the aim to strengthen and improve the work of the Working Groups, external technical reviews of the reports of the different subgroups were initiated in 2014, followed by an Expert Group meeting to discuss the reviews in 2015. The outcome of this external review was reported on and discussed at the last SSC in 2015 and recommendations to follow up actions were made.
3. This summary report provides an overview of main outcomes of the review process and the recommendations made at the last Scientific Sub-Committee and by the Committee in 2016 in this regard to highlight recurring issues that needs the attention of the SSC. Furthermore, the Committee requested the SSC to present a proposal for a revision to the format of the advice and the management recommendations, which should integrate information related to the quality of data, the models used, and other pertinent information that might affect the management advice given and elements for such a proposal is provided in a draft working document for the consideration of the SSC (CECAF/SSCVIII/2018/Inf.7).

### **INDEPENDENT TECHNICAL REVIEW OF THE ASSESSMENTS AND THE WORK OF THE SMALL PELAGICS AND DEMERSAL WORKING GROUPS**

4. A technical review of the Working Group reports and the assessment methods applied by the Working Groups were carried out in two steps in 2015: the first with independent experts and the second by a CECAF Expert Group. The experts provided recommendations on assessments conducted and considered possible alternative methods, including for data-poor fisheries.
5. The SSC 7 endorsed the conclusions of the expert group meeting, that concluded that the Working Group reports meet the primary objective of documenting the assessment methods that are the basis of stock status determination and management recommendations for the CECAF process. Some suggestions for exploring alternative assessment approaches and for improving reporting and transparency were made, however a key focus should be on improved data and access to existing data, and this is generally a priority over the development and application of more statistically advanced modelling approaches. It was noted that, traditional modelling approaches are appropriate for the available data. However, short lived species may require nonconventional stock assessment approaches (e.g. depletion models). More advanced approaches are available, but would not necessarily be appropriate. It was also noted that management procedures should be consistent with the information available.
6. SSC 7 also endorsed the next steps to follow up on this review included the appropriation by the

different Working Group's members of the final outcome of the reviews, testing of alternative assessment methods (or alternative approaches) during upcoming meetings, seek means to conduct training of Working Group members on retained assessment methods and/or approaches as appropriate, interaction with CECAF on management objectives and management framework, to see if it is a need to further document process and choices; and consider the development of a decision tree approach based on the data and tools available, and the results of the data analyses (e.g. ICES framework page 25, ICES 2012).

7. While follow up actions were taken to address these steps, key constraints remain with the information made available to the working group and the preparation for the assessments.
8. The outcomes and recommendations of the SSC rely on the completeness and quality of the data submitted to it, and this ultimately rests with the Member Countries to provide the best scientific information available.
9. The Committee in 2016 reflected on the continued problems with limited availability of data to conduct assessments in some countries. The Committee recognized that this situation was leading to limited knowledge on many stocks and making it difficult to apply assessment models. Delegations supported the call for improved data quality and reliability as they are submitted to the Working Groups and SSC, and for more harmonized and standardized research programmes, including surveys. The need to improve data collection and scientific research to address this situation was pointed out, as well as the need to continue and maintain existing data series and ensure that all data are made available to the Working Groups for the assessments before their meetings.
10. As can be seen from the reports on the different sub-groups, the information available for stock assessment varies greatly by area and fishery. The situation has not improved since the last meeting of the SSC, despite the recommendations of the SSC and the Committee, and in fact the number of stocks for which limited information is available has increased. Also, many countries still come to the Working Groups without data or without the data prepared in the agreed formats. The turnover of members in the Working Group, also requires additional technical support to familiarize these with procedures, concepts and measures. A strategy to address this issue needs to be developed, so that the Working Groups are better enabled to fulfill their mandate. This could include that members are appointed for a given period, and that they are made responsible to follow up on any data issues internally within the country and report back on these in the following meeting. At the last SSC meeting, terms of reference for the responsibility of the chairs of the Working Groups were presented, however perhaps clear descriptions of the responsibilities of the members needs to be developed and approved (Appendix 1).
11. The SSC 7 also suggested to harmonize and standardize research programmes and to look into providing an overview of the current research capacity in the region. While the EAF-Nansen Programme provides some of this support to CECAF, an overview of current research capacity has not yet been prepared. The SSC is requested to reflect on what such an overview document should contain and how it can be structured, to assist the preparation for the next committee meeting.
12. While the expert group meeting concluded that the Working Group reports meet the primary objective of documenting the assessment methods that are the basis of stock status determination and management recommendations for the CECAF process they were encouraged to document all explorations, discussions and technical choices made during the meeting, even if these are not all included in the reports and to document the reliability for each data source to facilitate quality control, transparency and continuity during changes in Working Group membership. Timely finalization and submission of reports was also recommended.
13. The Secretariat and the Working Groups have strived to address these recommendations, but

challenges still remain in particular with the finalization and quality check of the reports which is time consuming, in particular given the quality of some of the data inputs.

14. Working Group reports continues to be made available to the Working Group members in draft form after the meeting, whereas the final report is subject to internal technical editing and finalized in English and French. While some of the steps to steam line the process, and the strengthen role of the Working Group chairs through the revised TORs suggested by the last SSC and adopted by CECF 21, challenges remains with finalizing reports in a timely manner, amongst others to the increased level of quality checking required to finalize the reports due to amongst the issues highlighted in the paragraphs above. The SSC may to further reflect upon if and how online feedback from the SSC can be organized, in the case a physical meeting of the SSC cannot be organized, following up on suggestions at earlier sessions.

## **MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK AND SCIENTIFIC ADVICE**

15. The 21st Committee session of CECAF recommended that the Scientific Sub-Committee should present a proposal for a revision to the format of the advice and the management recommendations. The proposal should integrate information related to the quality of data, the models used, and other pertinent information that might affect the management advice given.
16. The current CECAF management procedure, format of management advice, and recommendations of CECAF were reviewed, including the biological reference points used. The CECAF format of advice was compared to similar processes used in other organizations providing scientific advice for management to identify areas of improvement in the format for this advice and recommendations. The quality of data, the models used, and other available information for CECAF stock assessments were also considered in the development of recommendations. These elements are provided in a draft working document for the consideration of the SSC (CECAF/SSCVIII/2018/Inf.7)

## **CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE SSC**

17. The SSC 8 members are asked to:
  - i. Advise on how CECAF can continue to follow up on recommendations from the 2015 technical review, including reflecting on the suggestions made to address issues of data quality for the Working Groups and provide suggestions on how CECAF can continue to strive for improved reporting including suggested responsibilities of Working Group chairs and members;
  - ii. Reflect on elements for an overview paper to document current research to be presented to the 22<sup>nd</sup> session of CECAF, including content and structure;
  - iii. Consider the elements provided in the draft working paper to address the request by the 21<sup>st</sup> session of the Committee that the Scientific Sub-Committee should present a proposal for a revision to the format of the advice and the management recommendations, and advice on the way forward.

## **Appendix 1: TERMS OF REFERENCE CHAIRS WORKING GROUPS** *(as presented to SSC 7)*

### **GUIDELINES FOR CHAIRS OF CECAF WORKING GROUPS**

#### Appointment of Chair

The Chair of the Working group will be elected by the respective Working Groups. FAO/CECAF will inform the Scientific Sub-Committee and the Committee accordingly.

The period of tenure of Chairs is three years (or after three meetings when meetings are biannual).

Chairs should be appointed on the basis of merit, leadership, and scientific excellence.

In principle, the Chair must be a duly appointed member of the Working Group. If a Chair-invited member is recommended as Chair of a Working Group, that person must be advised to seek formal nomination to the Group by the relevant national delegate.

Agreement by individuals to accept the role of Chair implies an investment of time, to carry out the duties of the Chair. CECAF member and affiliate countries are responsible for ensuring that individuals accepting the Working Group Chairs will be capable to meet the commitments required to carry out the responsibilities of the position. Chairs of Working Groups should plan to participate in the meetings of the SSC.

The Technical unit of FAO responsible for providing scientific support to CECAF will provide technical support to the Chair. They provide the Chair with a copy of the TORs, showing expected task and expected outcomes for the meeting and provide any supporting information.

#### Responsibilities and functions of the Chair of a Working Group

The main responsibility of a Chair is to, in close consultation with the FAO technical officer responsible for scientific support to the CECAF Secretariat and the Working Group members, and ensure that the specific tasks assigned to the Working Group are carried out. In general, this includes:

- making plans for the specified meeting(s) of the group, including the preparation of an agenda and work schedule;
- lead preliminary discussions and exchange and preparation of data prior to the meeting
- chairing the meeting;
- overseeing the preparation of the Working Group reports and ensuring that a first draft is available at the end of the meeting and that a finalized draft it is submitted to FAO and CECAF according to the date agreed at the meeting for processing, and distribution to the relevant committees/members;
- ensure that a management summary is available at the end of the meeting, according to the agreed format;
- ensure that all files from the meeting are available to the FAO/CECAF on the Working Groups D-group site or in electronic format at the end of the meeting;
- assist with the preparation of the Working Group summary report for the SSC and present the report to the Scientific Sub-Committee; and
- in cooperation with FAO/CECAF prepare eventual draft resolutions or other communication from the working group, as appropriate

Specifically, the Chair is expected to complete the following tasks in relation to the organization of a meeting of the Working group:

#### Before the meeting

- Seeking final agreement on the date and venue of the next meeting, while ensuring that the meeting is organised within the time period indicated by the FAO/CECAF and at the agreed venue. The final timing and place of the meeting must be agreed with FAO/CECAF and must be supported by a clear explanation if changes to the original time period are proposed.
- The Chair will lead the discussions for the arrangement of the meeting through email exchange with all members of the group well in advance of the meeting to agree on date and venue; share terms of reference; propose agenda including start time, work schedule, and meeting timetable; instructions/requests for information, data; compilation and preparation of data and preliminary analyses to be assembled and brought to the meeting as well as the preparation of some descriptive text; work assignments at the meeting; and any other relevant information.
- Formal contacts with other international and intergovernmental organizations with regard to the activities of the Working Group must first be agreed by the FAO/CECAF Secretariat.
- Assessment Working Groups, should prepare, process, and summarize as much data as possible before the meeting to ensure optimal use of time at the meeting.

#### During the meeting

- The meeting time should be focused on data analysis, discussion, and report preparation.
- A daily work schedule should be established at the beginning of the meeting.
- All participants are expected to share in the responsibility for the contents of the work to be conducted and the report.
- The draft report should be reviewed in plenum and agreed to before the end of the meeting, in particular all assessments and recommendations sections.
- Chairs should ensure that the workload during a meeting is appropriately and equitably distributed among the meeting participants, and that sufficient time is allocated for planning, overseeing and reviewing the work of other members, organizing plenary discussions, summarizing, and drawing conclusions, etc.
- At the end of the meeting the Chair should make sure that all the group responsible provide all the relevant files with respect to Tables, Figures, Assessments, relevant sections of text, as well as descriptive notes on specific choices made or on relevant discussions from plenary discussions are provided to the Chair, the FAO Scientific support officer and made available on the shared drive for the working group

#### After the meeting

- It is recommended that Chairs put aside 1-2 days right after the meeting to finalise the draft report, with the assistance of the FAO scientific support officer and FAO/CECAF.
- An updated draft of the Working Group reports should be uploaded to D-groups or sent electronically to FAO/CECAF within the deadline agreed by the working group using the report template provided by FAO CECAF.
- Reports should be as concise as possible, while at the same time providing accurate and complete descriptions of data, assumptions made, methods and analytical procedures used, inputs to relevant analyses, results, conclusions, and recommendations.
- All working papers, data and work sheets, computer output, and any other material used, considered, and/or produced by a group during its meeting and deemed necessary for future use or reference should be provided to FAO/CECAF (or deposited at the Dgroup site) for the relevant meeting.
- FAO CECAF will inform the Chair and all nominated group members as well as the parent and any reference committees when the report is available for download from the FAO website.