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WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION (WECAFC)

SEVENTEENTH SESSION

Miami, United States of America, 15-18 July 2019

Summary of the reports of the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) meetings held during the intersessional period- SAG 8 (mexico 2017), SAG 9 (barbados 2018), and SAG 10 (virtual meeting 2019)

This document presents a summary of the three SAG meetings held between 2017 and 2019, after WECAFC 16. Its objective is to provide to WECAFC 17 participants an overview of key topics that the Scientific Advisory Group reviewed, based on the work done by the WECAFC partner agencies, the several regional projects, Working Groups and subject experts. More detailed information can be found in the official SAG reports published by FAO as: FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Report N° 1195, FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Report N° 1266 and Summary notes of SAGX, made available as WECAFC_XVII_2019_Ref.2, WECAFC_XVII_2019_Ref.3, and WECAFC_XVII_2019_Ref.4.

Suggested action by the Commission

The Commission is invited to:

1. consider and, as appropriate, to endorse the report of the Eighth, Ninth and Tenth SAG sessions and provide guidance with regard to issues discussed during the sessions.
2. particularly discuss, amend as appropriate and endorse the recommendations and resolutions therein

I. Issues covered in selected papers

1. Based on information of 33 species and species groups, **as of 2015 it is assessed that the status of populations of the Western Central Atlantic (FAO Area 31)** is: 12% overfished, 42% between overfished and fully fished depending on stocks or geographical location, and 36% fully fished. It was not possible to estimate the state of 9% due to lack of sufficient information (SAG 8).
2. For some stocks, such as bonito and king mackerel, the biological stock distribution remains unknown. On the other hand, although dolphinfish catches are continuously increasing, to date, this species has not been the target of any recent stock assessment or interdisciplinary evaluation. Only genetic work has been conducted and migratory behavior analyzed through satellite tags that indicate huge migration paths (SAG 8).
3. **SAG 9 reviewed again the state of fisheries in the region** with the following results: for 42 species or species groups and 74 stocks or management units in Area 31 (43 with formal stock assessments, and 31 based on landings history), 57% are fully fished, 38% overfished, and for 5% it was not possible to determine the current status. SAG however expressed concerns regarding the geographical coverage of the review, which does not include FAO statistical area 41, and particularly waters under Brazilian jurisdiction, which are under WECAFC competency.
4. **Progress achieved under the WECAFC-FIRMS collaboration:** it was noted that the lack of basic fisheries data and statistics is a central barrier to regional fisheries management. WECAFC-FIRMS provides a mechanism to reduce these data limitations and gaps, and to strengthen capacities for monitoring, management and stock assessment, enabling a Decision Support System (DSS) Framework for regional fishery authorities and initiatives (WECAFC, CRFM, OSPESCA, CLME+).

The Fisheries Data and Statistics Working Group reviewed on May 2018, the “Data Collection Reference Framework document (DCRF)”; the short term goal it is not to collect data from the WECAFC Member States, but to lay the foundation of a data collection mechanism in support of evidence-based policy making at regional level, especially for shared stocks.

A prototype regional data base (RDB) was developed with variables such as: vessel registry, logbook, artisanal statistics, landing sales, etc. It is planned to test it during 2019. Also, there are FIRMS inventories (<http://firms.fao.org/firms/search/institution/wecafc/en>); to date, there are 25 up-to-date fisheries reports for the region, 19 fisheries reports are currently in progress, and 50 published stocks reports are to be updated.

Funding for WECAFC-FIRMS phase 3, has been secured (EU DG-MARE) to support WECAFC members and the cross-cutting Fisheries Data and Statistics Working Group (FDS-WG) partners in the implementation of the recommendations of the first meeting (May 2018) and organization of the second FDS WG meeting (SAG 8 and 9).

5. Update on the **interim coordination mechanism** for sustainable fisheries of CRFM, OSPESCA and WECAFC (SAG 8).
6. **CLME+ “State of the Marine Environment and Associated Economies in the Caribbean and north Brazil shelf large marine ecosystems (SOMEE)”**: SAG encourages members to

support the development of their content regarding the WECAFC area of competence. SAG noted that there are other populations that should be reported (billfishes, tunas, sharks) with wider distributions than the CLME+ region and within the WECAFC region. The SAG therefore recommended that CLME+ SOMEE extend its geographical dimension, including the mentioned resources (SAG 8).

At SAG 9 an update of the SOMEE, and the CLME+ Strategic Action Programme (SAP) was presented, which has a strong focus on improving the governance framework of the region's shared living marine resources. The CLME+ SAP Interim Coordination Mechanism embeds eight intergovernmental organizations (UN Environment, FAO, UNESCO-IOC, CRFM, OSPESCA, CCAD, CARICOM and OECS) to enhance regional collaboration and coordination, support oversight and integration of actions for sustainable fisheries and the protection and sustainable use of the marine environment.

7. The SAG was provided with some information of the **economic and food security opportunities provided by lionfish fisheries in the Eastern Caribbean** as per findings of the FAO-CRFM study on the “Impacts of rising cost factors in fishing operations in the CRFM Member States” (SAG 8).

8. The SAG discussed the **increased pressure on sea cucumber stocks**. Review of existing studies shows that it is very likely that this fishery will collapse in the next few years. Similar exploitation patterns as in South East Asia, the Galapagos Islands, Honduras and Nicaragua, which led to depletion of sea cucumber stocks, are being found now in the Caribbean islands.

The same companies responsible for depletion of sea cucumber stocks elsewhere, are now active in the Caribbean. SAG recommends that all sea cucumbers fishing in the Caribbean be halted until adequate studies are conducted which should demonstrate sustainably harvestable quantities. Moreover, it is proposed that the industry should bear the cost for the necessary research (including stock assessments) and the management and conservation costs related to these fisheries (SAG 8).

9. At SAG 9, OSPESCA presented the “**Regional Caribbean Spiny Lobster (*Panulirus argus*) Fishery Management Plan – MARPLESCA**”, that was originally formulated for the SICA (Central American Integration System) countries between 2010 and 2012, then updated under the Ecolangosta+ sub-project of the CLME+ project, in the framework of the Strategic Action Program 2015–2025. The spiny lobster statistics 2007–2016 indicated that The Bahamas was the main producer, closely followed by Cuba, Honduras and Nicaragua.

The MARPLESCA general objective is that Caribbean spiny lobster fisheries management operates in a sustainable use framework, promoting ecological balance and social and economic benefits. The specific objectives are: 1) to strengthen effective enforcement of OSPESCA Regulation OSP-02-09, the CARICOM/CRFM St. George's Declaration, and the WECAFC recommendations. 2) to keep the regional scope in a coordinated and participatory way under the SICA/OSPESCA, CARICOM/CRFM and WECAFC governance model. 3) to promote adequate organization for institutionalized key stakeholders' participation in the management of the fishery and to provide conditions for the Plan adoption and implementation in the geographical distribution range under the CLME+ Strategic Action Program (SAP).

The Interim Coordination Mechanism for Sustainable Fisheries (WECAFC, CRFM, OSPESCA), seems to be the most viable mechanism to coordinate the MARPLESCA implementation. The Regional WECAFC/CRFM/OSPESCA/CFMC Caribbean Spiny Lobster Working Group can play a monitoring technical support role. If necessary, a regional advisory

committee will be formed, where key actors are represented, including native communities' leaders.

11. At SAG 9, CRFM presented the **status of the implementation of the CLME+ sub-project on the flyingfish fishery**. The advances on its specific objectives are: 1) improve the governance model in the Eastern Caribbean; 2) support adaptive management of the fishery by improving the stakeholder access to data and information through an online bibliographic database; 3) implement measures for stress reduction on the fishery by improving education and public awareness-building; 4) enhance stakeholder participation in flyingfish management, but the challenges of data collection, given the current capacity limitations, have led to focusing on strengthening capacity of governments and fisherfolk organizations; 5) improve data and information management with a value-chain analysis already conducted, although the report has not yet been prepared; 6) support long-term livelihoods and human well-being. It is expected that the implementation of the flyingfish subproject be completed by mid-2019, when a review of the management performance, management strategies and sharing of lessons learned will be carried out.

12. At SAG 9, FAO presented the **draft regional strategy on the management of bycatch and discards in Latin American and Caribbean bottom trawl (shrimp and groundfish) fisheries**. REBYC-II LAC project countries requested that WECAFC leads a strategy on bycatch management in trawl fisheries that ensure a common approach across borders. REBYC-II LAC partners also considered that this mechanism benefits as well countries not directly involved in the project, for consistency with a key recommendation of the FAO International Guidelines on Bycatch Management and Reduction of Discards.

The strategy objectives are: 1) apply an ecosystem approach for the management of bycatch and discards; 2) improve data collection and monitoring procedures; 3) reduce unsustainable bycatch with Turtle Excluding Devices (TED) and Bycatch Reduction Devices (BRD); 4) mainstream the use of spatial and temporal measures, 5) utilize sustainable bycatch; 6) strengthened communication, coordination and information sharing.

The WECAFC secretariat proposed that the next steps include regional and national review of this working document, as well as alignment with other regional initiatives.

13. At SAG 9 was presented an overview of **insurance needs and opportunities in the Caribbean fisheries sector**, based on a study carried out in 2015 by FAO, the U.S. Department of State and the World Bank in some CARICOM countries. The main findings were:

- 1) 97% of fishing vessels and assets are not insured, while in each country there is at least one local insurer offering marine insurance; 83% of fishers would purchase vessels insurance if it would be more affordable; only 17% of fishers have health insurance and 20% life insurance.
- 2) insurance is needed for: third party liability, coverage of damage and loss of infrastructure, fishing craft and gear, including damage and loss caused by natural calamities, coverage of medical expenses for captain and crew (not temporary) in case of accidents, and possibly theft.
- 3) The preferred fisheries insurance arrangement would be based on the existing locally systems, where fishers can buy marine insurance. This, together with the introduction of climate-smart practices (preventive measures and best practices), could reduce the risks of damages and losses by about 50%.

- 4) Climate smart practices advocated by fishers, include protected harbors and anchorages; proper, functional and easily accessible boat haul out and storage facilities; proper communication/navigation equipment; accurate weather forecast and safety at sea precautions; improved security/safety and reduced crime at landing sites through stricter laws, penalties and increased police controls.
 - 5) Fisherfolk organizations could negotiate on behalf of their members the insurance conditions, and fisheries authorities/regional organizations would promote the introduction of climate smart investments and monitor their application.
 - 6) Fisheries and marine authorities would gradually introduce vessel insurance as mandatory, starting with the larger vessels, through regulations on vessel registration and fishing licenses. Ministries of Finance would oversee the whole system and monitor the functioning of the insurance facility.
14. Two recommendations were made to SAG: 1) a Caribbean Fisheries Risk Insurance Fund (CFRIF), to be capitalized by donors with contributions from governments of participating countries, placed with and managed by a regional financial or global financial institution, i.e: the Caribbean Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank or the World Bank. 2) a special session at WECAFC 17, where above stakeholders could be invited to attend and to discuss how to proceed with the implementation of insurance arrangements.

SAG pointed out that insurance companies position regarding fisheries insurance, their view as a viable business opportunity and the best means for engaging them in providing insurance to the sector should be explored. About the need for similar arrangements for other Caribbean regions, as the proposed Caribbean Risk Insurance Fund for the CARICOM region, it was suggested that if donors could be encouraged to set up a fund, insurance companies might become interested in providing insurance, as a fund would serve as a sort of re-insurance.

15. **Reports from WECAFC partner agencies** were received, as follows: CRFM, OSPESCA, GCFI, NOAA and CNFO (SAG 8 and 9).
16. SAG identified **other emerging and continuing issues of concern, which should be brought to the attention of the Commission at WECAFC 17:**
- Research regarding ocean acidification and the impact on coral reefs and on fisheries targeting calcifier species, such as queen conch and oyster should be increased.
 - Research on marine debris, lost and derelict fishing gears, trap losses and fiber losses, is required.
 - Fisherfolk, represented in regional fisherfolk organizations, should be part of researches and activities mentioned above.

II. REVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESOLUTIONS FOR WECAFC 17

17. 20 recommendations and four resolutions applicable to the WECAFC area were prepared by the Working Groups and subject experts, which were subsequently reviewed by SAG 8, 9 and 10. The synoptic presentation of the recommendations and resolutions is the following.

I.1 Biological, Environmental and fishing related matters

18. Requests a more comprehensive and innovative review of fishery data by adopting a new format to include a description of marine resources and fisheries in the WECAFC area, as well as recreational fisheries and a synthetic graphical presentation of the state of stocks in future editions of the Review of the State of fisheries and fisheries resources (SAG9).
19. Foster research related to the challenges due to uncontrolled increase of FADs fisheries in the region and their suspected impact on resources sustainability, as well as the economics of FADs and associated traditional fishing methods (SAG 8).
20. Take action to support listing of commercially attractive Sea Cucumber species from the Caribbean in CITES Appendix II, to restrict trade in these highly vulnerable and often overexploited species, that urgently need control measures to protect the reproductive capacity of the stocks (SAG 8).

I.2 Socio-economic matters

21. Support fisheries and aquaculture communities affected by hurricanes and other natural disasters, through increased collaboration with national authorities in charge of disaster risk and emergency management (SAG 8).
22. Promote the use of fisheries sector censuses, or agriculture censuses with a fisheries/aquaculture module, to gain information on the participation of people in fisheries and aquaculture (SAG 8).
23. Supports the proposed Caribbean Risk Insurance Fund and stresses the need to extend it to other WECAFC members (SAG9).
24. Socioeconomic dimensions data (domestic and international trade, livelihoods dependence, employment generation along the value chain, and contribution to the national and regional economy) be considered alongside the biological data in the management of the queen conch fishery (SAG 10)

I.3 Institutional matters

25. Encourage members to incorporate in the agenda of the FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean an item on fisheries and aquaculture and participate in this meeting, as well as in the FAO Committee on Fisheries (SAG 8).
26. Support participation of fisherfolk organizations in the meetings of the Commission, the SAG and the Working Groups in alignment with capacity building efforts (SAG 8).

I.4 Other technical issues discussed by the SAG during its 8th and 9th sessions were:

27. WECAFC should continue monitoring the parrotfish fishery in the Caribbean, as well as strengthening the governance capacities for these fisheries in the countries, as also indicated in the WECAFC 16 report (SAG 8).
28. Support the outstanding FAO commitment with the compliance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly with the following indicators over which FAO is custodian: 14.4.1 (state of stocks), 14.6.1 (combatting IUU), 14.7.1 (contribution of sustainable fisheries as percent GDP), 14.b.1 (access to markets and resources for small-scale fisheries) (SAG 8).
29. The particularities of the region regarding assessment of IUU fishing were discussed. It was suggested to use the FAO “Technical guidelines on methodologies and indicators for the estimation of the magnitude and impact of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing” (SAG 8 and 9).

I.5 On the operation of SAG and joint working groups:

30. Requests that the next SAG session’s invitations be extended to Working Groups conveners in order to present the recommendations, or alternatively they should prepare in advance a summary in support of the recommendations to be reviewed by SAG (SAG 9).
31. Maintain all eleven joint Working Groups and endorse their updated terms of reference. The Working Groups effectiveness will be evaluated through periodic reviews (SAG 8).
32. Approves the concept and structure of the Fishery Data and Statistics Working Group created by WECAFC 16, the Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF), and the final version of the appendix "Species priority list", updated by this Working Group and presented to the virtual SAG10 in June 2019 (SAG 9).
33. SAG requested the Secretariat to consider in the intersessional period the review of the terms of reference of all 11 working groups of WECAFC for a consistent and standardized format (SAG10)

III. DETAILED LIST OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

34. 20 recommendations and four resolutions applicable to the WECAFC area were prepared by the Working Groups and subject experts, which were subsequently reviewed by SAG 8, 9 and 10.

III.1 Recommendations at SAG 8

- a) WECAFC/XVII/2019/1 “on the marking and identification of fishing vessels in the WECAFC area”.

- b) WECAFC/XVII/2019/2 “on the establishment of a WECAFC record of fishing vessels over 12 meters authorized to operate in the WECAFC area”.
- c) WECAFC/XVII/2019/3 “on the establishment and maintenance of lists of vessels presumed and/or confirmed to have carried out IUU fishing in the WECAFC area”.
- d) WECAFC/XVII/2019/4 “on billfish management and conservation in the WECAFC area”.
- e) WECAFC/XVII/2019/5 “on the fisheries management and conservation of sharks and rays in the WECAFC area”.
- f) WECAFC/XVII/2019/6 “on the removal of fins of sharks on board by vessels fishing in the WECAFC area”.
- g) WECAFC/XVII/2019/7 “on applying a precautionary approach to fishing of threatened species of sharks and rays”.

III.2 Recommendations at SAG 9

- a) WECAFC/XVII/2019/9 “on the management of the Caribbean Spiny Lobster in the WECAFC area”.
- b) WECAFC/XVII/2019/10 “on the regional data access and sharing policies”.
- c) WECAFC/XVII/2019/11 “on the management of shrimp and groundfish resources of the North Brazil-Guianas Shelf in the WECAFC area”.
- d) WECAFC/XVII/2019/12 “on improved compliance with trade measures for Queen Conch.”
- e) WECAFC/XVII/2019/13 “on Queen Conch conversion factor”.
- f) WECAFC/XVII/2019/14 “on IUU in Queen Conch fisheries”.
- g) WECAFC/XVII/2019/15 “on the monitoring and control of transshipment at sea”.
- h) WECAFC/XVII/2019/16 “on the application in the region of the technical guidelines on methodologies and indicators for the estimation of the magnitude and impact of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing”.
- i) WECAFC/XVII/2019/17 “on the marking of fishing gear”.

III.3 Recommendations at SAG 10

- j) WECAFC/XVII/2019/21 amendment to Recommendation WECAFC/15/2014/2 “on the sustainability of fisheries using fish aggregating devices in the WECAFC area”
- k) WECAFC/XVII/2019/22 “on WECAFC data collection reference framework”
- l) WECAFC/XVII/2019/23 “on the list of priority species in the WECAFC area”
- m) WECAFC/XVII/2019/24 “on the sustainable management of spawning aggregations and aggregating species”

IV.4 Resolutions at SAG 8 and at SAG 9

- a) WECAFC/XVII/2019/8 “on the WECAFC-FIRMS partnership” (SAG 8).
- b) WECAFC/XVII/2019/18 “on the institutionalization of the CLME+ SAP M&E and SOMEE reporting mechanism within WECAFC” (SAG 8 and 9).

- c) WECAFC/XVII/2019/19 “on the proposed permanent coordination mechanism and associated sustainable financing plan for enhanced integrated ocean governance in the CLME+/WECAFC/Wider Caribbean Region” (SAG 9).
- d) WECAFC/XVII/2019/20 “on the sustainable fisheries interim coordination mechanism and interim coordination mechanism for the sustainable management, use and protection of shared living marine resources in the CLME+ region” (SAG 9).