

Port of Spain, 26 February 2016

Subject: Findings of the independent cost-benefit assessment of the options for strategic re-orientation of WECAFC

Dear colleague,

Over the last decade we have seen the fisheries production in the Western Central Atlantic decline to levels that are 30% below the 30 year average. Our fisheries sector is suffering from illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Foreign fishing vessels are depleting our fisheries resources and individually our countries are unable to eliminate illegal fisheries. Our people are more and more dependent on imports of fish from elsewhere if they like to eat fish.

In such a grim situation we can stand together, join our forces and take decisive action for the future of our fisheries. Together we can rebuild overexploited shared stocks. Together we can effectively combat IUU fishing. Together we can lay a claim on the fisheries resources of the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ) in the Western Central Atlantic. Together we can build our capacity, manage our shared fisheries resources and develop our fisheries sector.

We have been participating in many excellent activities organized by WECAFC, but also by the Caribbean Regional Fishery Mechanism (CRFM) and the Organization for Fisheries and Aquaculture of Central America (OSPESCA). Our national capacities to manage our coastal fisheries are growing. We are improving our policies, management plans, laws and regulations and enforcement capacities in our countries. The regional fisheries bodies are supporting us through information and advice.

Following our joint recommendations the CRFM, OSPESCA and FAO-WECAFC signed in Cartagena, Colombia, in January 2016, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to facilitate, support and strengthen the coordination of actions among them and to enhance regional governance for sustainable fisheries. We are all pleased with the active working groups and joint projects that are supporting information and experiences exchange and the development of harmonized management advice on a wide range of fisheries subjects.

At WECAFC 15 we all agreed that an independent cost-benefit assessment of the options for Strategic Reorientation of WECAFC would be necessary. We recognized that it may be valuable for the region to establish a Regional Fisheries Management Organization (RFMO), but wanted to know more about the costs of such organization and the benefits it could accumulate for us.

An independent expert, Dr. Kjartan Hoydal, drafted an assessment, which was discussed and commented upon by many of us at the 2nd WECAFC Strategic Reorientation Workshop in Trinidad and Tobago on 1-2 December last year. Attached you will find the final version of his encouraging report, called "Findings of the independent cost-benefit assessment of the options for strategic re-orientation of WECAFC".

The report gives us valuable insights into what can be expected if we go forward with the establishment of an RFMO in the region. It gives us an indication of how an RFMO can help our fish harvests grow sustainably with only a minor investment.

To protect our regional fisheries resources for our people, we must make sure that distant water fishing fleets are not undermining what we try to rebuild. The shared fish resources should be for us to manage and conserve for the future. We can only do so if we build our own RFMO and decide ourselves about the future of our fisheries.

Following the recommendations by the 2nd WECAFC Strategic Reorientation workshop, the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem (CLME+) project is helping us with an additional study that will add to the cost-benefit assessment outcomes. The additional study will present the joint achievements of CRFM, OSPESCA and WECAFC in recent years and provide options for designing an RFMO institutional structure that fits our needs.

This is to encourage you to share the report of the cost-benefit assessment with all fisheries decision makers and managers in your country.

Please discuss the outcomes and make sure that your delegate to WECAFC 16 (Guadeloupe, 20-24 June 2016) is fully informed.

At WECAFC 16 we have an opportunity to decide on a "Way forward in the process of strategic reorientation of WECAFC"; a way forward that can safeguard our fisheries resources to perpetuity.

Let us seize this opportunity and take responsibility for rebuilding fisheries in our Western Central Atlantic ocean for the better good of all of us.

I look forward to seeing you in Guadeloupe.

With kind regards



Christine Chan A Shing

WECAFC Chairperson

Director of Fisheries of Trinidad and Tobago

Cc: WECAFC Secretariat