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Food
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Продовольственная и
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организация
Объединенных
Наций

Organización
de las
Naciones
Unidas
para la
Agricultura
y la
Alimentación

WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION (WECAFC)

SIXTEENTH SESSION

Guadeloupe, 20-24 June 2016

Report

1. The Sixteenth Session of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission was held in Guadeloupe, France, from 20 to 24 June 2016. The meeting was kindly hosted by the Government of France and the Préfecture de Guadeloupe. The meeting received generous support from the European Union (Member Organization), the Government of France and the Regional Council of Guadeloupe. The meeting was officially opened by H.E. Jacques Billant, Préfet of the Region Guadeloupe.
2. The following 28 Members attended the Session: Antigua & Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Commonwealth of Dominica, Dominican Republic, European Union, France, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Japan, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Panama, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, United Kingdom, United States of America and Venezuela. Apologies were received from Nicaragua and Trinidad and Tobago. The list of participants, including observers and other participants is in Appendix B.

Election of chairperson and two-vice chairpersons for the Commission

3. Mr. Lionel Reynal (France) was elected chairperson of the Commission. Mr. Raul Gonzalez Pantaleon (Dominican Republic) and Ms. Joyce Leslie (Barbados) were elected respectively as first and second Vice-Chairperson.
4. The Commission adopted the agenda as shown in Appendix A. The order in which agenda items were taken was adjusted to accommodate the late arrival of some delegations.

Review of the State of Fisheries in the WECAFC region

5. The Commission considered the review of the state of fisheries and aquaculture in the WECAFC region in document WECAFC/XVI/2016/2. Members appreciated the report, but asked FAO to make it available earlier before the next session.
6. Members requested that in future status reports metadata be included, as well as more recent information from ICCAT stock assessments and the latest work under the FIRMS partnership. It was further noted that some Members would like to see the current status report updated on the following matters: inclusion of the interim collaborative arrangement for sustainable

fisheries between CRFM, OSPESCA and WECAFC, reference to the latest Albacore tuna information and adjustment of information on the exploitation levels of Queen Conch in Jamaica and Belize.

7. The Commission agreed that statistical information is essential for the functioning of a regional fishery body (RFB) and that a future regional fishery management organization (RFMO) in the WECAFC region will have serious challenges if Members pay insufficient attention to stocks and fisheries data and statistics, including the quality of information.

Main decisions and recommendations of the thirty-first session of COFI and the fifteenth session of WECAFC

8. The Commission took note of the decisions and recommendations of the Thirty-first Session of COFI and the Fifteenth Session of WECAFC, set out in WECAFC/XVI/2016/3.
9. The attention of the Commission was drawn to the importance to establish an appropriate mechanism to enable the Commission to monitor the implementation of its decisions and recommendations and to the problem of limited information available on the fisheries in the Commission competence area.
10. In light of requests for training and capacity building from Cuba and Venezuela related to the 2009 FAO Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA), the Secretary recalled also the currently available capacity building opportunities within FAO in support of the implementation of the 2009 FAO Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA).

Intersessional activities of Working Groups and other matters referred to the attention of the Commission

11. The Commission considered the intersessional activities of the Working Groups, Commission and FAO in the WECAFC region as reported in WECAFC/XVI/2016/4. The Commission thanked the Secretary for his efforts made and applauded the achievements by Working Groups and outcomes described.
12. While the Commission considered the WECAFC Working Groups (WGs) to be an essential tool for implementing the Programme of Work of the Commission, it debated whether current WECAFC WGs, including the joint WGs with CRFM, OSPESCA, IFREMER and CFMC, should be maintained or abolished and new working groups should be created.
13. The Commission observed that none of the current WGs should be abolished. Their terms of reference should be reviewed by each session and re-focused (as necessary) with a view to broaden their scope and encompass cross-cutting issues. The possibility of organizing virtual WG meetings should be considered to reduce costs and enable wide participation of experts.
14. The Commission was informed that funds were secured for most of the WGs. The Secretariat called on the Members to budget for their active participation in the relevant WGs and underscored that each WG requires a dedicated and motivated coordinator.

Report of the Seventh Session of the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) of WECAFC

15. The Commission thanked the chairperson and members of the SAG for their work and endorsed the report of the Seventh session of the SAG, including its conclusions and recommendations, as presented in WECAFC/XVI/2016/5.

16. The Commission requested the Secretariat to send invitations for future SAG sessions to all Members, to allow the Members to participate as observer in the session, if they so desire.

Report by the Secretary on the financial and administrative affairs of the Commission

17. The Commission thanked the Secretariat for the preparation of the second financial and administrative report, presented as WECAFC/XVI/2016/6, and welcomed the additional project funded staff at the WECAFC Secretariat in Barbados.
18. The Commission endorsed the report.

Update on progress made under the WECAFC-FIRMS Partnership

19. The Commission thanked Ms Nancie Cummings (NOAA), WECAFC's FIRMS focal point, and the FIRMS Secretariat for the progress made under the WECAFC-FIRMS partnership, and appreciated the support received from the European Union to the collaborative fisheries statistical work in the region.
20. The Commission was requested to express an opinion on the relevance of a regional database supporting the implementation and monitoring of regional (and national) fisheries management plans, especially for Queen conch, spiny lobster, flying fish and billfish. It was noted that Members are facing problems regarding the collection of statistical data, because of limitations in human and financial resources. It was also underlined that in several countries there is a need to invest in data collection and sharing and that there is a great need for raising awareness on the importance of data collection and sharing through joint databases, as these are instrumental for sound fisheries management.
21. The Commission agreed to establish a working group for fisheries data and statistics matters, based on the ongoing work of the WECAFC-FIRMS partnership and supported the development of a regional database in collaboration with the Members and partners in the region.
22. Members welcomed the FIRMS inventories. Some of them requested further clarification on the purpose, content and indicators of the ongoing WECAFC-FIRMS work and to address explicitly the data sharing policy in order to increase Member engagement. Moreover, it was requested that social and economic information be included in the databases and to broaden the participation of social scientists and economists in the work so as to develop data collection forms that are understandable by a wide audience and not only fisheries biologists.
23. Reference was made to the WECAFC-FIRMS Data Workshop, held in Barbados in January 2016 and the Commission was informed that because of limited funding the workshop covered only some of the WECAFC Members. It is foreseen to widen the coverage in the near future pending available resources, and in close cooperation with CRFM and OSPESCA.
24. The Commission was informed of possible synergies with other existing initiatives and ways to build on past projects. For example, the IUCN-EU BIOPAMA Project was mentioned as a potential partner for exchange of information and experience. Good practices such as the FISMIS system recently introduced by an FAO TCP project in the Bahamas were also referred to as having the potential to replicate in more Member States. It was indicated that the BlueBridge initiative can provide useful technologies for data and information sharing. It was noted also that the CLME+ project provides an excellent opportunity to contextualize the efforts made in the region on data collection and sharing, not only through the main project and its three sub-regional projects on flying fish, Spiny lobster, and shrimp and groundfish, but also through a communication strategy that will address awareness raising.

Recommendations and resolutions on fisheries management

25. The Commission thanked the Working Groups and SAG members for the scientific research undertaken and the preparation of fisheries management advice, as were presented in Working Document WECAFC/XVI/2016/8.
26. The Commission discussed and adopted the following recommendations, which appear in Appendix C to this report:
- **Recommendation WECAFC/16/2016/1** “on the regional plan for the management and conservation of Queen conch in the WECAFC area – *addendum to recommendation WECAFC/15/2014/3*”
 - **Recommendation WECAFC/16/2016/2** “on spiny lobster management and conservation in the WECAFC area”
 - **Recommendation WECAFC/16/2016/3** “on the sub-regional fisheries management plan for flyingfish in the Eastern Caribbean”
 - **Recommendation WECAFC/16/2016/4** “on the management of deep sea fisheries in the high seas”
 - **Recommendation WECAFC/16/2016/5** “on the management of shrimp and groundfish resources in the WECAFC area”
27. The Commission requested all Members to inform the Secretariat soonest on the start and end dates of their closed season for lobster fisheries and the period of peak reproduction identified, in order to allow inclusion of this information along with the Recommendation WECAFC/16/2016/2 on the web, with a view of working towards regional or sub-regional harmonization of the closures. In addition, it was agreed to include in an annex to the same Recommendation a table with the different conversion factors regarding length and weight,
28. The Commission discussed and adopted the following resolutions, which appear in Appendix C to this report:
- **Resolution WECAFC/16/2016/6** “on sea cucumber fisheries management and aquaculture”
 - **Resolution WECAFC/16/2016/7** “on Marine Protected Areas as fisheries management tool in the Caribbean”

Programme of Work of WECAFC (2016 -2017)

29. The Commission considered the Draft Programme of Work of WECAFC (2016-2017) set out in WECAFC/XVI/2016/11. The Commission emphasized the importance of a good WECAFC website in support of communication with Members and stakeholders. The Commission gave the Secretariat more flexibility in deciding whether documents produced by working groups and projects should be made available in hard copy or on-line only. Members were encouraged to nominate a national focal point for WECAFC to further facilitate communication and information sharing.
30. The Commission approved the Programme of Work shown in Appendix D.

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31. The Commission reviewed and endorsed the updated Terms of References of the Working Groups, as presented in working document WECAFC/XVI/2016/15, with minor amendments to the RWG on IUU fishing and the WG on sharks. The CRFM representative informed the meeting that CRFM would continue to coordinate the RWG IUU and the WG on flying fish. The OSPESCA representative reiterated its coordinating role for the WG on spiny lobster. Mr Mauro Gongora (Belize) kindly offered to convene the WG on sharks. The United States of America offered Mr Eugenio Piñeiro to convene the FADs WG.

Consideration of extra-budgetary funding

32. The Commission expressed appreciation for the efforts of the WECAFC Secretariat, with support from FAO, the WECAFC Executive Committee and Members of various WGs, in mobilizing resources in support of WECAFC's Programme of Work.
33. The Commission noted and commended the countries and institutions for the financial and technical support received from the European Union, CERMES, CLME+, GEF, NOAA/USA and the World Bank that allowed WECAFC to carry out a number of essential activities. The delegates from the EU and USA indicated that financial commitments are tied to the development and agreement of their respective internal processes. Support would be considered particularly for activities in relation to a transition of WECAFC into an RFMO.
34. The CLME+ Regional Project Coordinator encouraged the Members to make use of the CLME+ SAP as a document that was endorsed at ministerial level by a large number of countries in the region to leverage additional resources and as a means to get facilitate access to additional funds from GEF.
35. The Commission endorsed the document WECAFC/XVI/2016/7 and requested the Secretariat to continue the search for funding for the project proposals and particularly in support of the RFMO establishment process.

Regional collaboration in addressing IUU fishing

36. The Secretariat presented an overview of the FAO Port State Measure Agreement (PSMA). Some Members voiced their concern on the effectiveness of PSMA to fight against IUU fishing. The Commission reiterated that IUU fishing is still a major challenge affecting fisheries sustainability in the region, and concurred on the main scope of the PSMA which is to undermine the economic gain a vessel can have from landing its IUU catch. The PSMA will improve its success to deter and eliminate IUU fishing as the number of parties to the Agreement will increase and, as a consequence, increasingly precluding landing of IUU catch in ports.
37. The Commission congratulated the Members that acceded to the PSMA in the intersessional period and appreciated the work undertaken by FAO and its WECAFC Secretariat in terms of awareness raising and capacity building for implementation of the PSMA in the region.
38. Members agreed that the successful implementation of the PSMA requires the adoption of proper legal frameworks, the establishment of effective national cooperation among relevant stakeholders as well as international cooperation among countries, whether coastal, port or flag States, and regional fisheries bodies and management organizations. The Commission commended FAO for its efforts to establish a global capacity development programme

particularly focused to support developing countries and Small Island Developing States that are party to the Agreement.

39. The Commission agreed that IUU fishing is a serious issue that undermines current efforts of achieving sustainable use of fisheries resources in the region. The Commission welcomed the initiatives aiming at combatting IUU as described in document WECAFC/XVI/2016/9 and agreed that IUU fishing should be addressed in a comprehensive way, including by linking IUU to organized crime such as trafficking in the proceeds of crime, money laundering, human trafficking, illegal arms trafficking and drugs trade. Reference was made to the recent legal opinion of the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea in Case 21 which elaborates on the rights and duties of flag States vis-à-vis their fishing vessels, and the circumstances in which the flag State may be held liable for IUU fishing conducted by its vessels.
40. Some Members noted that within the OSPESCA framework it was agreed to introduce Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) widely, but that efforts to implement the regulation on VMS have been inadequate so far and require closer inter-sectoral collaboration in order to make progress on this important tool to combat IUU fishing.
41. The Commission was supportive of WECAFC entering into a collaboration with TM Tracking, to participate in the IUU fishing vessel list and carry out further research on IUU fishing activities in the region.

Capacity building for regional fisheries governance

42. The Commission thanked the representatives from the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM), Caribbean and North Brazil shelf Large Marine Ecosystem Project (CLME+), Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) and the Central American Organization for Fisheries and Aquaculture (OSPESCA) and FAO staff, for their presentations on aspects related to international and regional fisheries policy and legal frameworks, fisheries governance in the WECAFC area and the lessons from elsewhere.
43. The Commission welcomed the interim coordination arrangement for sustainable fisheries between CRFM, OSPESCA and WECAFC, which was formalized in Cartagena, Colombia in January 2016.
44. The Commission took note of the work of CBD on conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity. Members appreciated the opportunity to develop effective complementarity and synergies between regional fisheries bodies and CBD including for the achievement of Aichi targets. Members noted the collaborative efforts by Parties, other Governments and relevant organizations in implementing the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets in marine coastal areas, in particular target 6 on sustainable fisheries; progress made by CBD in describing Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) was acknowledged. The Commission recognized the Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs) identified by the WECAFC Deep Sea Fisheries WG are all located within the described EBSAs in this region and that the EBSAs provide useful scientific information for the identification of potential VMEs.
45. The Commission welcomed the existing collaboration between CBD Secretariat and FAO, which can benefit the work of WECAFC, in particular a joint organization of an Expert Meeting on Improving Progress Reporting and Working Towards Implementation of Aichi Biodiversity Target 6 (9-11 February 2016) and a forthcoming Sustainable Ocean Initiative Global Dialogue with Regional Seas Organizations and Regional Fisheries Bodies on

Accelerating Progress Towards the Aichi Biodiversity Target, being convened by the CBD Secretariat in collaboration with FAO and UNEP, and hosted by the Government of the Republic of Korea (Seoul, Korea, 26-29 September 2016).

46. The Secretariat made a presentation on the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, its guidelines and International Plans of Action (IPOAs). The Commission recalled the 20th anniversary of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and took note of some examples of current progress in the implementation of the Code and related IPOAs as reported to FAO by its member countries, RFBs, and NGOs at the global and regional level (i.e. the Latin America and the Caribbean). Members noted the consideration given to aquaculture development by an increasing number of RFBs.
47. The Commission, while recognizing the voluntary nature of the Code, concurred on the continuing central role of the Code to promote sustainable fisheries management and aquaculture development. The Commission commended FAO's work to support and monitor the implementation of the Code.
48. The Commission was informed of the ICCAT governance process and recommendations relevant for the WECAFC region. The Members learned and discussed about the functioning of ICCAT, and in particular, its compliance scheme, the activities of its scientific committee, the status of cooperating non contracting parties, cost of membership and the extensive technical assistance to developing countries. Reference was made to the duty of States that have ratified UNCLOS and/or the UNFSA to collaborate in the management and conservation of fish stocks in the ABNJ.
49. The Commission was also informed that the scope of the ICCAT Convention was currently under review and that amendments to the Convention may be finalized at the next ICCAT session. Members of WECAFC that are not (yet) contracting party of ICCAT were encouraged to become party. Various Members informed the Commission that they were in the process of becoming party to ICCAT.
50. The Commission was informed of CITES developments relevant to the WECAFC Members, including on Queen Conch, sharks and proposals for new listing of various species in Appendix II of CITES. Members raised concern on IUU fishing for Queen Conch in some areas and on the long-term use of scientific quota, following the 2nd review of significant trade of Queen Conch. It was noted that the range States determine their annual quotas themselves and that CITES Secretariat does not have a mandate to set any quotas for Queen Conch trade. Members raised concerns on the accuracy of the Queen Conch production data submitted by some countries for publication in FAO and CITES reports. The information published by FAO and CITES on Queen Conch is provided by the range States themselves, who have reporting obligations to FAO and CITES.

Strategic Re-orientation of WECAFC (Findings of the cost benefit assessment)

51. The Commission thanked posthumously Mr Kjartan Hoydal for the independent cost-benefit assessment of the options for strategic reorientation of WECAFC, of which the summary was presented in WECAFC/XVI/2016/12.
52. The Commission endorsed the outcomes of the 2nd WECAFC strategic orientation workshop, which was kindly hosted by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, on 1-2 December 2015 and was generously supported by the European Union.

53. The Commission appreciated the financial support received from the CLME+ project for the additional study: an assessment of the recent activities of CRFM, OSPESCA and WECAFC, including options for a regional institutional collaborative structure within an RFMO framework, as prepared by Ms Helga Josupeit with inputs from the secretariats of the three Regional Fishery Bodies (RFBs) and presented in working document WECAFC/XVI/2016/13. The Commission recognized that the document advanced the discussion and that there were some gaps in the document that still need to be addressed.
54. The Commission took note of the discussions held on WECAFC transformation process at the 34th FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Mexico in February 2016.
55. The Commission agreed to launch a process to establish a Regional Fisheries Management Organization (RFMO) and to clarify issues in relation to competency area, stocks coverage, budgetary implications for Members, institutional structure, membership, decision making processes, national sovereignty aspects, its objectives and any other relevant matters that the Members may wish to consider.
56. The Commission noted the importance of taking into account the sub-regional and local peculiarities. In this respect the Commission noted that such an RFMO should not replace existing RFBs, but instead establish functional ties and formal relationships with CRFM, OSPESCA and ICCAT. The Commission considered it important to build on the positive momentum created by WECAFC and sub-regional partners in recent years.
57. Given the efforts made by the Members in establishing co-management and participatory approaches to fisheries management, the Commission agreed that the process towards the establishment of an RFMO should ensure effective stakeholder participation and capacity building, as well as a mechanism for effective stakeholder participation in decision making once the RFMO is established.
58. The Commission recognized the value of establishing an RFMO in the WECAFC area of competence, being the Western Central Atlantic (area 31) and the Northern part of the South West Atlantic (area 41) to collaborate in fisheries management and conservation in the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ) of straddling stocks, deep sea fish stocks and highly migratory species that are not under the mandate of ICCAT.
59. The FAO legal office informed the Commission regarding Conference Resolution 2015/11 “Review of Statutory Bodies”, in particular with reference to Article XIV Bodies. Some of the challenges and experiences with RFMOs established under FAO’s Constitution were highlighted to the Commission.

Way forward in the process of strategic re-orientation of WECAFC

60. The Commission took note of the road map options provided and recognized that the timeframe presented would require adaptation and flexibility.
61. It was agreed that a 1st preparatory meeting of the Members would be held in 2017. In view of this meeting the Members and observers were requested to submit technical, legal and stakeholder questions and areas of concern to be addressed at the preparatory meeting to the Secretariat. Members and observers were requested to endeavor to have participation by relevant experts in the 1st preparatory meeting.

62. The European Union and the CLME+ Project Coordination Unit indicated that they would explore the possibility to support the organization of this meeting.
63. FAO indicated its availability to assist and facilitate the transformation process of WECAFC into an RFMO.

Any other matters

64. The Members expressed warm appreciation to the Government of France and the people of Guadeloupe for their excellent organization and hospitality that contributed to the success of the session.
65. The issue of Parrotfish fisheries was raised by various Members, noting that parrotfish (Scaridae) and associated herbivorous fishes is an important component of the commercial and subsistence fish catch of several Caribbean States. In recent years there have been increasing calls and public awareness campaigns by environmental conservation groups for a total prohibition on fishing for parrotfish in the region as a way of protecting coral reefs. To date there has been little consideration of the matter by regional or national fisheries authorities and stakeholders in the region. The Commission noted the current initiative to prohibit fishing for parrotfish and the negative repercussions that a ban could have on food and nutrition security, employment and livelihoods in coastal communities in some countries in the region.
66. The Commission expressed concern about the limited consultation with stakeholders in the fisheries sector regarding the plans for banning of parrotfish fisheries. WECAFC was requested to assess the state of the parrotfish stocks and their relationship with the health of coral reefs.
67. Belize noted that it does not have a commercial fishery for parrot fish and has legislation in place that protect all species of parrotfish from commercial fishing and there is draft legislation to prohibit the harvesting of other herbivorous species associated to the coral reef ecosystem.

Date and Place of the next session

68. The Commission was informed that the United States of America were considering the possibility of hosting the 17th session of WECAFC. Confirmation would be provided in due time.

Adoption of the report

69. The report was adopted on Friday 24 June 2014 at 11 AM.