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EASTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC OCEAN

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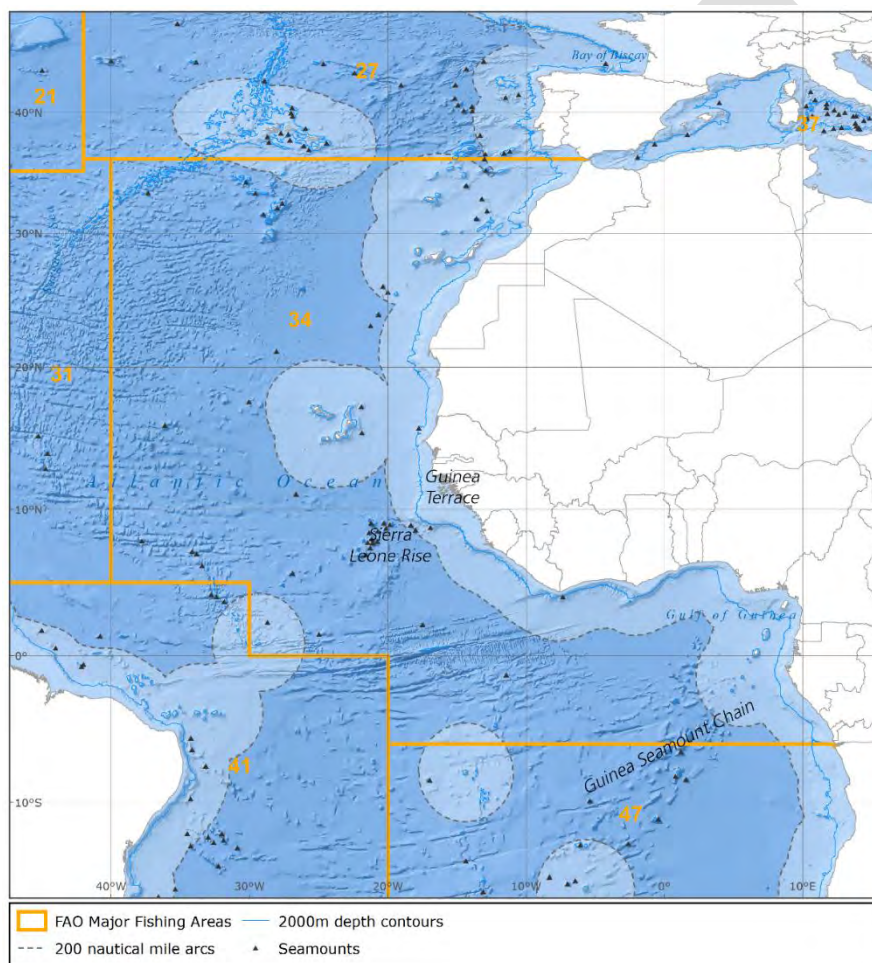
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REGIONAL GEOGRAPHY AND BATHYMETRY

The eastern central Atlantic Ocean is bounded by FAO Major Fishing Area 34 with its northern limit at 36°N (Cape Spartel, Morocco) and southern limit at 6°S (mouth of the Congo River on the Congo-Angola border). The area extends westwards to parts of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge and eastwards to the coast of continental Africa. The Canary Islands, Madeira, Cabo Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, and the islands of Bioko and Annobon (Equatorial Guinea) lie within this area. The EEZs of the Azores and Ascension Islands partly lie within the area (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: Eastern Central Atlantic Ocean. The map shows the FAO fishing major areas, larger seamounts, 2 000 m depth contour and 200 nmile arcs



In general, there is a narrow continental shelf that drops off rapidly to abyssal depths within the EEZs of the African countries. For most of the area, the seabed is very deep, at 5 000-7 000 m, with the main features being the east-west running fracture zones. The Mid-Atlantic Ridge just touches the northwestern and southwestern corners of the eastern central Atlantic Ocean. There are relatively few seamounts, and most of these lie within the EEZs of the Azores, Canary Islands, Madeira, and Cabo Verde. There is a chain of seamounts that extends southwest from the Guinea Terrace and into and around the Sierra Leone Rise with many being shallower than

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800 m. To the very southeast of the area lies part of the Guinea Seamount Chain whose seamounts are generally deep though some have summits that are less than 800 m below the surface. There are also seamounts in other areas, such as north of the Ascension Island and along the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, but these are generally deep and many are well below fishable depths. There are several large canyons along the shelf slopes off Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, but these are within EEZs.

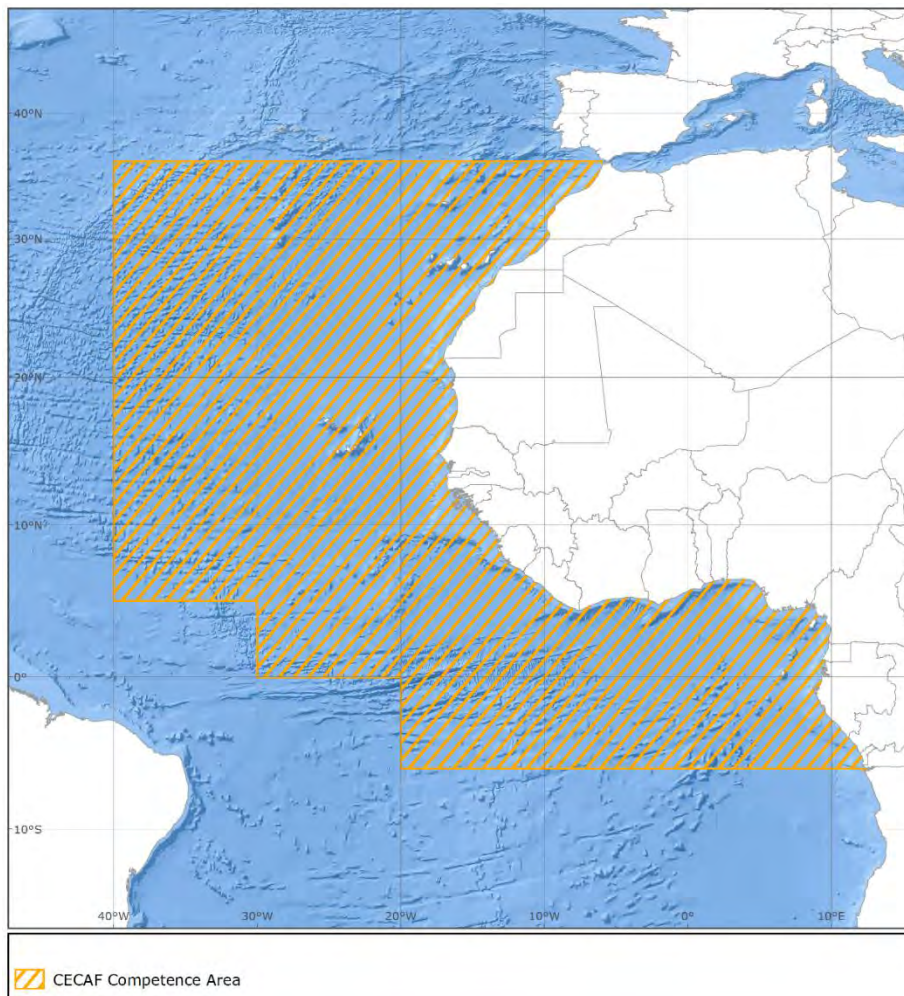
FISHERY COMMITTEE FOR THE EASTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC

Mandate

The Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic (CECAF) was established as an FAO Article VI regional fisheries body in 1967. Its statutes were amended in 1992 and 2003. FAO Article VI RFBs are advisory in nature and FAO supports the Secretariat function of CECAF. The Committee has a wide range of duties but in recent years focus has been primarily to keep under review the state of the fishery resources and the fisheries based on them. This includes promoting research, data collection and dissemination, establishing a scientific bases for management decisions, monitoring, training, among other activities. The area of the Committee is coincident with the FAO Major Fishing Area 34 (Figure 2). The work of the Committee also covers some of the marine waters off Angola for the purposes of shared stocks. Membership is open to coastal State and States (or entities) whose vessels fish in the area, or who undertake research in the area and contribute to the work of the Committee. Currently there are 34 members of which 21 are coastal states.

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FIGURE 2: CECAF area of application in the eastern central Atlantic Ocean



Regulatory capacity

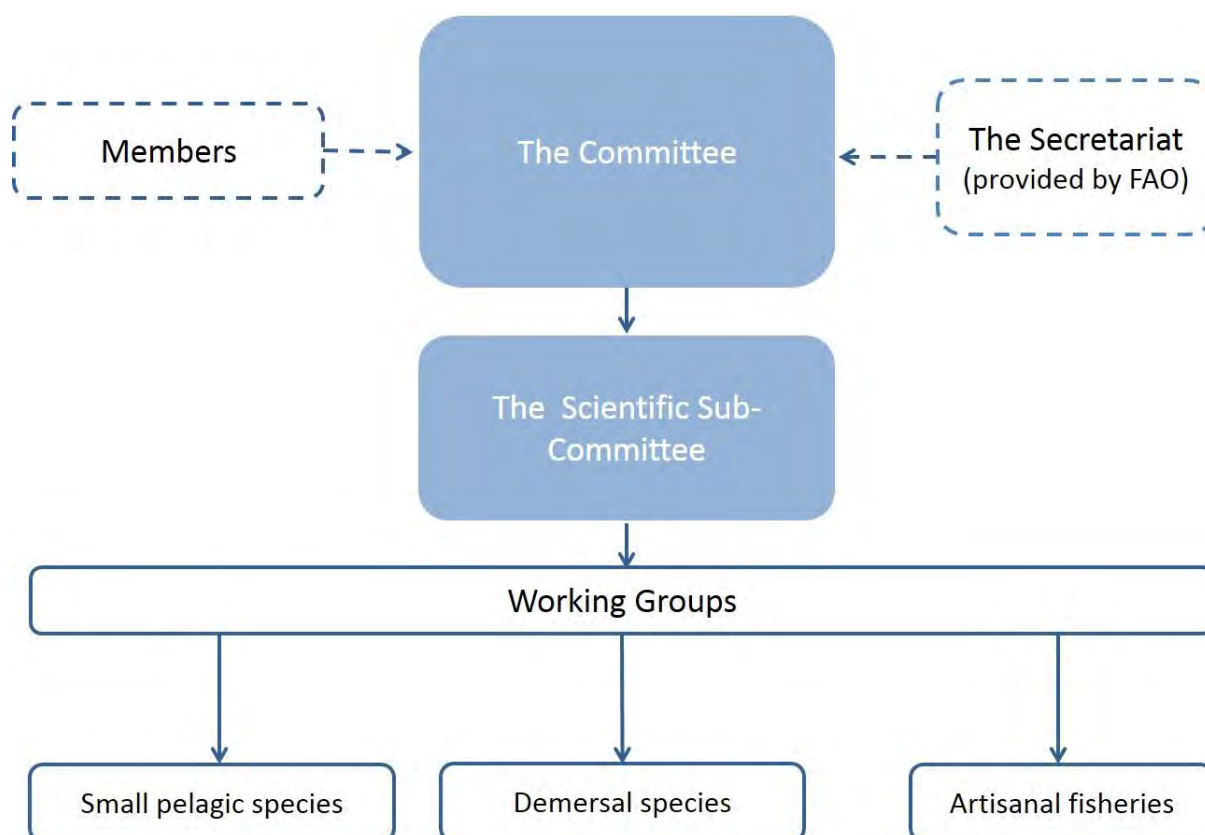
CECAF acts as an advisory body to its members and as an Article IV FAO body does not adopt management measures that are binding on its members.

Structure

The Committee, which is composed of all CECAF member States, is the central body in CECAF (Figure 3). Sessions of the Committee should normally be held every two years, although this has not been occurring in recent years. The last meeting of the Committee was in 2012 and the next is in 2016. According to the statutes, decisions of the Committee are taken by a majority of the votes cast, with each member having one vote. However, in practice most decisions are taken by consensus.

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FIGURE 3: Structure of CECAF



Subsidiary bodies may be established by the Committee subject to necessary funding requirements. The Committee established a Scientific Sub-Committee in 1998, which held their first meeting in 2000. The main function of the Scientific Sub-Committee is to provide appropriate advice to the Committee for fisheries management decisions. The Scientific Sub-Committee should also meet every two years, in alternate years to the committee, with options to hold additional meetings.

Three permanent working groups were established in 2000 by the Scientific Sub-Committee that address small pelagic species, demersal species, and artisanal fisheries. The pelagic and demersal species groups were later split into northern and southern sub-groups. The working groups meet as required and provided that funding is available through member countries or through external support. The small pelagic working group north meets annually, and the other groups every 2-4 years. The original Terms of Reference for these working groups is included in the meeting report of the first session of the Scientific Sub-Committee. These were preceded by a various *ad hoc* working groups and working parties that have met since at least 1978.

Requests for advice, recommendations and proposals

Communication during inter-sessional periods between members and the Committee is primarily through the Secretariat and FAO on exchanges in relation to working group activities or other technical activities.

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The Committee acts as the forum where members discuss matters of importance to the region. This includes recommendations endorsed by the Scientific Sub-Committee and on coordination with outside bodies. Any member can request items to be included on the agenda for the meeting. During sessions, any member may make interventions. The Scientific Sub-Committee reviews the reports of the working groups and endorses, modifies, or otherwise addresses their recommendations, and includes them in its own report. These are presented to the Committee. The Scientific Sub-Committee also sets the programme of work for the working groups.

The working groups undertake their assigned programmes of work, which often involves stock assessments and recommendations for management actions. These are documented in their reports and presented to the Scientific Sub-Committee for review. The working groups often suggest their own future programme of work to help guide the Scientific Sub-Committee in setting their priority tasks.

Relationship with other bodies

The principal international body working with CECAF is FAO, owing to CECAF being an Article VI FAO body. FAO hosts the Secretariat and provide technical support. The relationship is not of a supervisory nature, and the work of CECAF is governed by its Statutes and its members. However, certain items of business must be approved by FAO, though this normally only relates to matters that have budgetary implications.

There are other international maritime bodies that operate within the CECAF area. Some of these, such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO), The International Seabed Authority (ISA), the International Whaling Commission (IWC), and the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT), have the authority to adopt and enforce binding management measures appropriate to their responsibilities.

There are also several other regional and sub-regional fisheries bodies whose competence area fall within or shares common areas with CECAF, mainly related to the EEZs. These include: the Sub-regional Fisheries Commission (SRFC), the Fishery Committee for the Western Central Atlantic (FCWC), the Fishery Committee for the Central Gulf of Guinea (COREP), and the Ministerial Conference for African countries bordering the Atlantic Ocean (ATLAFCO).

The South East Atlantic Fisheries Organisation (SEAFO) has a small part of its Convention Area in the eastern central Atlantic just north of Ascension Island, which overlaps with the CECAF Convention Area (see south east Atlantic Ocean chapter).

SOUTH EAST ATLANTIC FISHERIES ORGANISATION

The South East Atlantic Fisheries Organisation (SEAFO) is described in the chapter “Southeast Atlantic Ocean” and is mentioned only briefly here as a small part of its Convention Area is within the high seas of the eastern central Atlantic Ocean (Figure 4). This part lies north of the Ascension Island EEZ between the equator and latitude 6°S and longitudes 20°W and 10°W.

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FIGURE 4: The overlap between the southern part of the CECAF area of application and the northern part of the SEAFO Convention Area in the eastern central Atlantic Ocean (in grey). The location of closure adopted by SEAFO in 2011 to protect likely VMEs on seamounts (in red)



OVERVIEWS

History of bottom fisheries

Given the limited extent of deep-sea fisheries in the high seas of the CECAF area, there are normally little information related to these fisheries in the CECAF reports and no assessments have been conducted for deep sea species in the context of CECAF. There are however deepwater fisheries for hake, shrimp and other species occurring within the EEZs. Catches of over 100 t of alfonsino (*Beryx splendens*), a typical fish of seamounts and ridges, has been reported to FAO by the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, and Spain, in recent years, with lower catches by Lithuania, Poland, and Portugal. It is possible that some of the EU catches are from within EEZs, but the other countries likely represent high seas catches (the Republic of Korea reported on such catches in 2013). High annual catches of 2 000-6 000 t of black Scabbardfish (*Aphanopus carbo*) have been reported by Portugal from this area, but these

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species though deep are quite widely distributed. No catches of orange roughy (*Hoplostethus atlanticus*) or armourhead (*Pantaceros* spp) have been reported (FAO FishStatJ, 2015).

The only detailed account identified of fishing on the high seas of the eastern central Atlantic Ocean was for an experimental (commercial) longline fishery for alfonsino on four seamounts in the Sierra Leone Rise. Fishing depths ranged from 200 m to 987 m (Salmerón *et al.*, 2015). No information is provided for the benthic habitats fished.

VMEs

There has been no discussion relating to the identification of VMEs within the eastern central Atlantic Ocean by CECAF until very recently. Most of the high seas region is very deep and the Mid-Atlantic Ridge only touches at the northeastern and southeast corners. There are no currently known or likely identified VMEs in the CECAF area.

SEAFO, who also manage fisheries in a small part of the eastern central Atlantic, have extensively discussed issue relating to the protection of benthic ecosystems and have closed an area to bottom fishing in 2011 to protect likely VMEs within this area (SEAFO, 2010).

VME AND RELATED REGULATIONS

Regulations/measures related to VMEs

CECAF have no recommendations or voluntary measures associated with the conduct of high seas bottom fishing for the protection of VMEs. At present the risks of significant adverse impacts to any VMEs in the high seas are probably low but more information on any deep sea fishery is needed to assess this.

SEAFO have regulations to manage bottom fisheries in the small part of the eastern central Atlantic within their Convention Area and these are described in the “Southeast Atlantic Ocean” chapter.

Other regulations that also protect benthic areas

There are no other regulations in effect to protect benthic areas in the high seas, except for the small portion that is also managed by SEAFO (see “Southeast Atlantic Ocean” chapter for details).

MANAGED BENTHIC AREAS

The portion of the eastern central Atlantic Ocean just north of Ascension Island has an area closed by SEAFO to protect likely VMEs that may occur on four seamounts reported to be shallower than 2000 m (Figure 4). There have been no benthos surveys in the area and it is believed that there has not been any fishing on these seamounts (SEAFO, 2010). Their summit depths of the seamounts are recorded as being between 1294 and 1749 m (NOAA, 2015), but these seamounts appear to be relatively unknown and the real depths may be different.

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SURVEYS

There appear to be few deep water high seas surveys relevant to the identification of VMEs. Some surveys using underwater cameras have been carried out on high seas seamounts of the southern Azores region (Pakhorukov, 2008) and Sierra Leone Rise (1999), but were mainly focusing on fish species. There have been a number of surveys within EEZs, for example, in the deeper waters of Mauritania and off the southwest coast from Sierra Leone to Ghana (Martos and Jiménez, 1991).

OTHER INFORMATION

There is no other relevant information for the high seas area.

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