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de las  
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Unidas  
para la  
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y la  
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**FISHERY COMMITTEE FOR THE EASTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC  
Scientific Sub-Committee**

**Seventh Session**

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**REPORTING ON THE STATE OF RESOURCES IN THE CECAF AREA**

**SUMMARY**

One of the key roles of CECAF has been to provide advice on the living marine resources in the CECAF Area, with focus on transboundary demersal and small pelagic resources<sup>1</sup>. Between all of the working groups, advice have been provided for around 100 stocks or units<sup>2</sup> on more or less regular intervals since the year 2000, although the regularity of the advice varies between the different groups.

The working groups report their findings to the scientific SSC which should meet every two years, in alternate years to the committee. However for various reasons this has not been the case in recent years, and the last meeting of the SSC was in 2011. This gap in meetings has also impacted the reporting of the working groups, and several reports have been pending finalization for a long period.

The northern and southern sub-groups of the small pelagics and demersal resources working groups have met at several occasions over the last decade and much experience has been gained both with respect to data constraints and opportunities for the assessments. At the same time the working groups are at a stage where it was thought they could benefit from external advice with respect to the assessments conducted. With this in mind external technical reviews of the reports were initiated in 2014, with the ultimate to strengthen the work of the groups in the future. This summary report aims to provide an overview of the main outcomes of the review process and also to provide some suggestions as regards how reporting from the working groups can be streamlined, ensuring that the reports of the working groups are available in a timely manner even if similar problems with regards to the organization of the SSC should repeat itself in the future.

<sup>1</sup> The Southern sub-groups also provide advice on the state of stocks and fisheries for certain resources that are shared between Angola and its neighbours to the north.

<sup>2</sup> Stock identity is uncertain in many cases, and the "stock" is often referred to as a unit for which advice is provided

## INTRODUCTION

1. One of the key roles of CECAF has been to provide advice on the living marine resources in the CECAF Area, with focus on transboundary demersal and small pelagic resources<sup>3</sup>. When the Scientific Sub-Committee (SSC) was established in 1998 with the main function to provide appropriate advice to the Committee for fisheries management decisions, the SSC originally established three Working Groups (WGs):
  - Working Group for Small Pelagics;
  - Working Group for Demersal species; and
  - Working Group for Artisanal Fisheries
  
2. For practical reason the two first working groups were subsequently reorganized into sub-groups as follows:
  - Small Pelagic North and Demersal North (covering the areas from Morocco in the North to the Southern area of Senegal in the South)
  - Small Pelagic South and Demersal South (Guinea-Bissau to Angola, including the island states of Cabo Verde and Sao Tome and Principe).
  
3. The overall objective of the WGs is to assess the state of the small pelagic and demersal resources in the respective sub-regions and make recommendations on fisheries management and exploitation options aimed at ensuring optimal and sustainable use of resources for the benefit of coastal countries. Between all of the working groups, advice have been provided for around 100 stocks or units<sup>4</sup> on more or less regular intervals since the year 2000, although the regularity of the advice varies between the different groups. With the exception of the small pelagic working group, sub-group North, which meets annually and for which participation is supported by the member states, the other working groups should ideally meet every to three years, however in reality the timing and organizations of the meetings depends on the funding support available at any time. Recent meetings of the CECAF working groups are:
  - i. CECAF Pelagic North (annual meetings)
    - Total 14 meetings
    - Last meeting, July 2015 (Morocco)
  - ii. CECAF Demersal North
    - Total 4 meetings
    - Last meeting, November 2013 (Spain)
  - iii. CECAF Pelagic South
    - Total 3 meetings
    - Last meeting, March 2014 (Congo)

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<sup>3</sup> The Southern sub-groups also provide advice on the state of stocks and fisheries for certain resources that are shared between Angola and its neighbours to the north.

<sup>4</sup> Stock identity is uncertain in many cases, and the “stock” is often referred to as a unit for which advice is provided

- iv. CECAF Demersal South
  - Total 3 meetings
  - Last meeting, November 2011 (Ghana)
- 4. The working groups report their findings to the scientific SSC which should meet every two years, in alternate years to the committee. However for various reasons this has not been the case in recent years, and the last meeting of the SSC was in 2011. This gap in meetings has also impacted the reporting of the working groups, and several reports have been pending finalization for a long period.
- 5. As can be seen from the above quite some sessions of the different working groups have taken place over the course of the last decade, and much experience has been gained both with respect to data constraints and opportunities for the assessments. At the same time the working groups are at a stage where it was thought they could benefit from external advice with respect to the assessments conducted. With this in mind external technical reviews of the reports were initiated in 2014, with the ultimate to strengthen the work of the groups in the future.
- 6. This summary report aims to provide an overview of the main outcomes of the review process and also to provide some suggestions as regards how reporting from the working groups can be streamlined, ensuring that the reports of the working groups are available in a timely manner even if similar problems with regards to the organization of the SSC should repeat itself in the future.

## **INDEPENDENT TECHNICAL REVIEW OF THE ASSESSMENTS AND WORKING GROUP REPORTS**

### **Background**

- 7. In 2014 and 2015, three independent expert reviews of the work of the CECAF working groups were requested. The background to the technical reviews was that given that some working groups have been meeting at regular intervals since 2000, it was felt that the working groups could benefit from external independent advice on the work carried out so far in order to strengthen and focus future work.
- 8. The reviewers were to provide technical support to the Working Groups to further develop their assessment methods, provide advice on current assessments, advice on potential alternative assessment methods to be applied for future Working Groups, as well as on key data weaknesses and gaps. As such they were asked to: advise on the assessments made, considering the data that has been available to the group and prepare a report on the findings; advise on possible improvements, and prepare an inventory and guidance on appropriate reference material for proposed methodologies, including on methodologies for data poor fisheries.
- 9. Subsequent to the reviews an CECAF Expert Group meeting on stock assessment methods and review of the small pelagic and demersal assessments carried out in the CECAF area

was called, which took place at FAO Headquarters in Rome, Italy, from, 24 to 26 June 2015. Both the reviews and the Expert group were implemented with the financial support from the Nepad-FAO Fish project (NFFP). A total of 13 participants attended the meeting in their capacities as Chairs of the CECAF assessment working groups, Chair of the Scientific Sub-Committee, regional and independent experts and FAO. The Expert Group discussed technical reviews of working group reports carried out by three independent experts during the course of 2014 and 2015 with the aim to provide technical support and guidance for the CECAF stock assessment working groups on the work carried out thus far including clarity of reports and stock assessment methods used. The independent experts were also asked to reflect on possible alternative assessment methods that can be of use to the different working groups in the future. The technical reviews are attached to the Expert group report for which an advance copy is provided as a reference document ( ).

### **Recommendations and general conclusions**

10. While many of the conclusions and recommendations are specific to the different working groups among the 3 independent reviewers, there were some common recommendations:
  - Improved data and access to existing data, as recommended in the WG reports, is generally a priority over the development and application of more statistically advanced modelling approaches. The information available for stock assessment (e.g., species-specific catch and effort statistics from all fleets, representative biological sampling, and representative resource surveys) vary greatly by area and fishery, and technical support may be needed for some data problems. In general, traditional modelling approaches (survey trends, length-based mortality estimates, yield per recruit, dynamic production models) are appropriate for the available data. However, short lived species may require non-conventional stock assessment approaches (e.g., depletion models). More advanced approaches are available, but would not be appropriate for the WG process (focus on data preparation) and expertise of the membership.
  - Management procedures that are consistent with the information available should be encouraged. For example, determining stock status on the basis of the proportion of the current stock to the unfished stock size is much less certain than determination of stock status based on yield per recruit.
11. The expert group meeting concluded that the WG 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. However, many investigations that explored alternative stock assessment approaches were considered by the WG, but they were not documented in the WG reports. The WG is encouraged to document all explorations, discussions and technical choices so that they are available for future technical reviews and other purposes, even if these are not all included in the reports. For the purposes of technical review, some details (justification for choices, selection of data in

the assessment, model output, basis of stock identity) were insufficient in the report. More attention to documentation would help for quality control, transparency and continuity during changes in WG membership.

12. Documenting the WG's evaluation of reliability for each data source and all exploratory analyses would help to support the determination of stock status and management advice. Re-organizing the report by assessed stock (i.e., compiling information by stock rather than by species or species group) may improve the consideration of all information for stock status and reduce inconsistencies between data sections and assessment sections. Although some benefits of the current presentation and constraints associated with the implementation of such an approach was noted.

### **Suggested next steps**

13. The expert group considered that the next steps would include:
  - the appropriation by the different working group's members during their next meeting sessions on the outcome of the reviews and the Expert groups conclusions,
  - testing of alternative assessment methods (or apply other alternative approaches) during upcoming meetings
  - seek means to conduct training of WG 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 consideration of the development of a decision tree approach based on information is needed, the data available, and the results of the data analyses. (e.g. ICES framework page 25, ICES 2012).

### **WORKING GROUP REPORTING**

14. The main outputs of the Working Groups (WG) include: advice on the state of stocks and fisheries, science based recommendations for management, advice on limitations, needs and gaps and formulation of recommendations on future research and training. The work of the working groups are documented in Working group reports that are submitted to the SSC for discussion. The SSC use the work of the working groups for the formulation of the final advice and recommendations for the consideration of the Committee. Normally the working group reports are made available to the working group members in draft format after the meeting, whereas the final report will be subject to internal technical editing and finalized in English and French.
15. Given that the technical support and budget for this work in recent years have been limited and the time and costs involved with the translation, some reports have had considerable delay in being finalized. Furthermore a problem has arisen as regards the final publishing and distribution of the reports in the absence of a meeting of the SSC, as questions has arisen as to whether or not these reports can be finalized before they have been discussed at the SSC. Hence reports that are finalized have not been made available

formally. This delay in publishing the working group's assessments is of course problematic, as assessment and management advice are time bound and needs to be circulated rapidly for uptake and consideration by the competent authorities. This is of particular pertinence to the small pelagic working group, sub-group North that meets annually, and thus in this case have met four times and prepared four reports since the last meeting of the SSC in 2011.

16. To address some of these issues, the small pelagic North working group has in recent years prepared a "management" summary that has been circulated soon after the meetings, highlighting the main results. The format suggested is similar to that of the Summary presented to SSC this year, including the assessment summary but excluding graphs.
17. Furthermore it is suggested that a first draft of the working group reports can be published in a single language only and that the final report in the two languages can be made available as soon as possible after the meeting with an added disclaimer referring to the status of the working group vis- a -vis the responsibility of the SSC. To reduce costs it is suggested that the reports are provided as an online version, and that only a few copies are printed if requested.
18. The Small Pelagic North working group at its last session in July 2015 discussed an updated the terms of reference for the chair of the working groups, where also the responsibilities of the chair to contribute to a first draft was included. The TORS are attached in Appendix 1.
19. The SSC may also wish to discuss the option on how to provide feedback online, in the case a physical meeting of the SSC cannot be organized.

## **CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE SSC**

20. The SSC members are asked to:
  - Consider the outcome of the technical reviews and the recommendations for next steps resulting from the CECAF Expert Group meeting on assessment methods and review of the small pelagic and demersal assessments carried out in the CECAF area (Rome, Italy, 24 – 26 June 2015) and advice on a way forward.
  - Consider the suggestions made for streamlining the reporting flow, including the different constrains and benefits to what is being discussed and suggest the best way forward.

## **Appendix 1: TERMS OF REFERENCE CHAIRS WORKING GROUPS**

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

#### **Appointment of Chair**

21. 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.
22. The period of tenure of Chairs is three year (or after three meetings when meetings are biannual).
23. Chairs should be appointed on the basis of merit, leadership, and scientific excellence.
24. 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.
25. 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.
26. 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**

27. The main responsibility of a Chair is to, in close consultation with FAO scientific support officer responsible for scientific support to the CECAF Secretariat and the Working group members, 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's report and ensuring that a first draft is available at the end of the meeting and that a finalised 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 SSC and present the report to the Scientific sub-committee and
- in cooperation with the FAO/CECAF prepare eventual draft resolutions or other communication from the working group, as appropriate

28. 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 organisations 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.