



WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION Tenth Session
WECAFC LESSER ANTILLES FISHERIES COMMITTEE Seventh Session
Bridgetown, Barbados, 24-27 October 2001
THE DRAFT STRATEGY OF WECAFC - Background elements -

Summary

This document presents a number of ideas of national, regional, and international nature that could be useful background information for stimulating discussions in pursuing a strategic vision for WECAFC and the emergence of proposals from the Commission on the subject.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The fisheries sector is an important contributor to the economy of the member countries of the Western Central Atlantic Fisheries Commission (WECAFC) in terms of food supply, food security, foreign currency earnings, employment and rural and coastal development. In overall terms, this contribution has shown remarkably stable during the last decade. WECAFC fisheries are complex production system that includes small and industrial scale ventures as well as subsistence activities. It comprises extractive, processing and marketing and distribution activities under various modalities that are closely related to domestic and international markets. Furthermore, fishing has firmly established strong social and cultural roots in large segments of the society, particularly along coastal areas. It is of utmost interest of WECAFC member countries to look forward to identify a strategy and options to consolidate and increase the importance of the fisheries sector contribution to the economy and society. A number of ideas, policy elements and statements relevant in various ways to WECAFC fisheries that have been drawn from various national, regional and international documentary resources. have been assembled in this document. The main purpose was to facilitate the discussion and comments and stimulate proposals in relation to the development of a strategic vision for WECAFC.

II. BACKGROUND ISSUES UNDERLYING THE NEED TO REDEFINE WECAFC APPROACHES TO PRESENT NEEDS

The new external environment

2. The widespread introduction in the mid-seventies of exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and the adoption in 1982, after long deliberations, of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea provided a new framework for the better management of marine resources. The new legal regime of the oceans gave coastal States rights and responsibilities for the management and use of fishery resources within their EEZs, which embrace some 90 percent of the world's marine fisheries. Such extended national jurisdiction was a necessary but insufficient step towards the efficient management and sustainable development of fisheries.

Many coastal States continued to face serious challenges as, lacking experience and financial and physical resources, they sought to extract greater benefits from the fisheries within their EEZs.

3. In recent years, world fisheries have become a market-driven, dynamically developing sector of the food industry and coastal States have striven to take advantage of their new opportunities by investing in modern fishing fleets and processing factories in response to growing international demand for fish and fishery products. By the late 1980s it became clear, however, that fisheries resources could no longer sustain such rapid and often uncontrolled exploitation and development, and that new approaches to fisheries management embracing conservation and environmental considerations were urgently needed. The situation was aggravated by the realization that unregulated fisheries on the high seas, involving straddling and highly migratory fish species in some cases, which occur within and outside EEZs, were becoming a matter of increasing concern.

4. The Committee on Fisheries (COFI) at its Nineteenth Session in March 1991 called for the development of new concepts, which would lead to responsible, sustained fisheries. Subsequently, the International Conference on Responsible Fishing, held in 1992 in Cancun (Mexico) further requested FAO to prepare an international Code of Conduct to address these concerns. The outcome of this Conference, particularly the Declaration of Cancun, was an important contribution to the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), in particular its Agenda 21. Subsequently, the United Nations Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks was convened, to which FAO provided important technical support. In November 1993, the Agreement to Promote Compliance with International Conservation and Management Measures by Fishing Vessels on the High Seas was adopted at the Twenty-seventh Session of the FAO Conference.

5. The FAO Governing Bodies, in noting these and other important developments in world fisheries, recommended the formulation of a global Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries which would be consistent with these instruments and, in a non-mandatory manner, establish principles and standards applicable to the conservation, management and development of all fisheries. The Code, which was unanimously adopted on 31 October 1995 by the FAO Conference, provides a necessary framework for national and international efforts to ensure sustainable exploitation of aquatic living resources in harmony with the environment. In this regard, a more important and effective role of regional fishery management bodies it was also envisaged. The Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission decided during its Ninth Session (Castries, St. Lucia, 27-30 September 1999) to design and implement an approach that could lead to achieve such importance and efficiency in its jurisdiction.

WECAFC internal strengths and weaknesses

6. By virtue of their geographic position, the large number of countries situated around the Western Central Atlantic are neighbors and need to coexist harmoniously, since this region is actually a sort of basin or semi-enclosed sea. All the countries whose shores are bathed by this ocean have a common interest in protecting the ecosystem, conserving its resources and managing its use.

7. The countries of the Western Central Atlantic are characterized by their diversity: diversity in terms of their levels of economic and social development and their natural resource endowments, historical, cultural, linguistic and racial diversity, etc. Diversity in the fishery sector - within the framework of the maritime-geographic community of which the countries are unavoidably a part - should, given the presence of a suitable institutional structure, provide a solid foundation for a flourishing and extensive form of cooperation among the countries of the region (Strength in Diversity).

8. Given the countries' firm commitment to pursuing the sustainable development of fisheries resources based on the application of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, opportunities for technical cooperation and exchange also constitute a shared need. Given the area's diversity, such opportunities are mutually enhancing. The opportunities for technical cooperation may include activities that can be combined with one another at different levels of cooperation in terms of both geographic units (regional, sub-regional, bilateral, global levels), subject areas (e.g., trade and the environment, training, implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, etc.), and taxonomy (e.g. Caribbean Spiny Lobster, Queen Conch).

9. Because of the region's geographic characteristics and the development diversity of the countries located within it, various types of south-south and north-south forms of cooperation among these countries are possible. This broadens the range of opportunities and benefits that technical cooperation can offer. Countries of the Western Central Atlantic have been very active in building several regional and sub-regional bodies to build up a cooperative institutional framework with ambitious objectives ranging from the formulation of common fisheries policy to the implementation of important technical activities. Of all these bodies, WECAFC is the only regional cooperation agency whose geographic jurisdiction embraces the entire area covered by this marine region and whose membership includes all of the countries bordering it. At the same time, there are a number of regional bodies with more limited geographic coverage and membership whose specific spheres of activity include technical cooperation activities of a similar nature, in many cases, to those pursued by WECAFC.

10. The reinforcement of the regional fisheries framework in the direction pointed out would enable the member countries take advantage of the main positive features in favor of sustainable development and to overcome, at the same time, the two main weaknesses affecting the work of the Commission under the traditional approach. The two main weaknesses are its difficulties to attract the necessary financial resources to support the implementation of its technical cooperation programs, and the limited participation and commitment of its member countries in supporting technically and financially such programs.

III. THE NEW APPROACH AND PRELIMINARY RESULTS OBTAINED

11. The continuity of the Commission's work over time and the innovative technical cooperation initiatives that it has undertaken constitute a tangible and readily available asset for its member countries. An assessment of the future scope for technical cooperation in the region suggests that one of the highest-impact scenarios would involve a larger role for existing regional bodies and a leadership role for WECAFC in those spheres of cooperation where its broad coverage is vital. WECAFC would thus play a pioneering role in fields where its importance as a representative body and its prestige as a forum for discussion would enable it to set processes into motion that, as circumstances permit, can later be handed over to other organizations. Another highly important function would be to complement the specific activities of other technical cooperation agencies while coordinating its work closely with them and with the member countries. In view of the above, it is difficult to conceive of how the region would fare without WECAFC.

12. It was considered that in the medium term, the actions oriented to achieve these objectives, to be effective and feasible, should be undertaken based on a more independent technical and financial action of the Commission. This more independent status was being pursued through stimulating a more active role of member countries in the planning, implementation and financing of the cooperative activities of the Commission.

13. To initiate the effective implementation of the approaches mentioned above, the Commission decided, during its Ninth Session held in St. Lucia in October 1999, the following:

- The Commission unanimously agreed that WECAFC should continue its activities in assisting the Members to move closer towards self-reliance in sustainable fisheries development and management.
- The Commission requested FAO to maintain its support to WECAFC, at least at the present level. The Commission also abolished the two Working Parties (on Marine Fishery Resource Assessment and on Economics and Planning) of WECAFC, as recommended by Conference Resolution 13/97.

- The Commission agreed to have a simple structure, consisting of the Secretariat, a Scientific Advisory Group which will act as an advisory body to the Commission and *ad hoc* working groups with clearly defined Terms of Reference and time bound clauses, established as and when required.

14. The Commission's decision to abolish the permanent Working Parties and their replacement through the establishment of a Scientific Advisory Group and *ad hoc* technical Working Groups were expected to provide the necessary technical flexibility and financial pragmatism to pave the way to gradually achieve the advocated greater independence of the Commission. This approach should contribute:

- To raise the awareness of member countries on the potential benefits of taking advantage of the unique features offered by WECAFC in relation to regional cooperation and responsible fisheries, taking into account the existing foundations for technical cooperation among countries bordering the Western Central Atlantic.
- To build up the confidence of member countries on the benefits of their gradual direct technical involvement and financial contribution on activities of measurable impact related to their direct and more pressing interests in the field of fisheries. Making the most of its broad geographic coverage and policy scope, WECAFC is promoting technical cooperation processes relating to straddling stocks and resources through the creation of *ad hoc* groups for research and management of straddling stocks such as shrimp in the Brazil-Guianas areas, lobster and flying fish. It has also promoted technical cooperation in the fields of institution building, policy design, and harmonization of legislation, technology transfer and others.

15. Preliminary results indicate that the approach recommended in the Ninth Session of WECAFC and implemented by the Secretariat seems to be suitable to strengthen fisheries management among member countries in the Brazil-Guianas sub-region as well as in other fisheries of the region where similar conditions prevail. In addition, in the same direction, the intention and related actions to promote a more self-supportive and independent activity of the Commission seems to be bearing some fruits. The work of the WECAFC *ad hoc* Working Groups have a demonstration effect on fishery officers who perceive the importance of the results accomplished compared to the modest means available to the Secretariat. There are also recent signs and actions taken by stakeholders that indicate their will to get more involved and committed in these WECAFC initiatives. Some Governments have expressed their willingness to increase their support, including a financial contribution, to the work of the *ad hoc* Working Groups.

IV. THE WAY AHEAD: 2001-2003

Strategic vision

16. The WECAFC region is a highly integrated marine ecosystem shared across a large number of political boundaries and with a growing number of intergovernmental regional and sub-regional institutions and policies. The WECAFC is probably the only UN intergovernmental organisation in the region that has the potential to bring all the countries and institutions under its umbrella for a more measured, co-ordinated and strategic approach to programming in fisheries, according to the principles of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. It is apparent that this approach is shared by the member countries of WECAFC based on the outcome of the Ninth Session of the Commission and the decisions taken for the restructuring of the Commission.

17. Regional, sub-regional and national initiatives in responsible fisheries would be more effective within an overall framework for the region and would allow member countries of WECAFC to capture synergies to achieve national, regional and international goals in terms of sustainable fisheries development. It is important to note that the international fisheries policy setting, established through the adoption of several mandatory and voluntary international instruments¹ is also very relevant to the WECAFC area, given the integrated

¹ United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982); the International Conference on Responsible Fishing and the Declaration of Cancun (1992), United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), in particular its Agenda 21 (1992); the Agreement to Promote Compliance with International Conservation and Management Measures by Fishing Vessels on the High Seas (1993); the United Nations Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks (1994); the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (1995).

nature of the marine and coastal ecosystems of the region as well as the terrestrial-marine interface of the insular Caribbean and the continental watersheds and large rivers.

18. WECAFC should increase its overall unique and central role as a neutral, coordinating forum at regional level and, with the benefits of its linkages with FAO, should become more self sufficient in technical and financial terms. It should also become the regional reference institution in terms of collaboration and coordination with other specialized regional and national agencies, and serve as a suitable conduit to channel technical and financial flows to support the promotion of responsible fisheries in the region. This approach envisages a larger and more responsible role for national, sub-regional and regional institutions. Effective implementation of this approach should be reflected in related WECAFC programs of activities in the region.

19. As referred in detail in paragraphs 11, 12 and 13 of this report the Ninth Session of WECAFC unanimously expressed strong support for WECAFC and recommended related practical actions to strengthen its coordinating role at regional level and its effectiveness in providing fisheries management advice to member countries. With regards to strengthening its role as fishery management advisory body, the Commission discussed and evaluated the available statutory options and recommended that it should be maintained under Article VI of the FAO Constitution. However, since that decision, the international fisheries technical and policy setting, as referred in paragraph 17, has continued to evolve, and very recently, most of the international fishing community meeting at the Reykjavik Conference on Responsible Fisheries in the Marine Ecosystem, (Iceland, October 1-4 2001) adopted the Reykjavik Declaration on Responsible Fisheries in the Marine Ecosystem². In the light of the challenging recommendations put forward by the above mentioned Declaration and taking into account the highly integrated marine ecosystem nature of the WECAFC region it could be foreseen that in applying effectively ecosystem approaches it will be needed a substantive improvement in fisheries governance at the various levels. In this regard, and bearing in mind the discussion proposed at present regarding the WECAFC Strategic Vision it could be useful for member countries to revisit the relevant discussions held at the Ninth Session and reconsider the available statutory options, in particular those under Article XIV of the FAO Constitution.

V. Suggested Action by the Commission

20. The Commission is invited to review, discuss and comment on the information presented with a view towards providing elements that could be used in the formulation of a strategic vision of the future role and related work of the Western Central Fishery Atlantic Commission. The Commission may wish to suggest that the Scientific Advisory Group prepare a draft strategy for WECAFC by taking into consideration these inputs.

² Among several important considerations, the preambular section of the Declaration reaffirms “that the 1982 United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea sets out the rights and duties of states with respect to the use and conservation of the ocean and its resources, including the conservation and management of living marine resources.” It also recognizes “that sustainable fisheries management incorporating ecosystem considerations entails taking into account the impacts of fisheries on the marine ecosystem and the impacts of the marine ecosystem on fisheries, and confirms “that the objective of including ecosystem consideration in fisheries management is to contribute to long term- food security and to human development and to assure the effective conservation and sustainable use of the ecosystem and its resources.” The Reykjavik Declaration states that “in an effort to reinforce responsible and sustainable fisheries in the marine ecosystem, we will individually and collectively work on incorporating ecosystem considerations into that management to that aim.” It further declares (art.3) that “It is important to strengthen, improve, and where appropriate establish, regional and international fisheries management organizations and incorporate in their work ecosystem considerations and improve cooperation between those bodies and regional bodies in charge of managing and conserving the marine environment.”