



WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION Tenth Session
WECAFC LESSER ANTILLES FISHERIES COMMITTEE Seventh Session
Bridgetown, Barbados, 24-27 October 2001
MODALITIES FOR CO-OPERATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING FOR RESPONSIBLE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT IN THE WECAFC REGION

I. Introduction

1. The Ninth Session of the Commission agreed that the Commission should operate through *ad hoc* working groups with clearly defined Terms of Reference. In agreeing to the new mode of operation, the member countries committed themselves to participating actively in the working groups since it would become an integral part of their fisheries management process. The working group mechanism provides member countries, through their participation, with more responsibility in decision-making and in the implementation of activities that are of priority and of direct benefit to them, especially with regard to shared and highly migratory fish stocks. Member countries would use the working groups for technical support and for providing scientific advice with respect to fisheries management.
2. The Commission observed that, given the geography and characteristics of the fisheries resources in the WECAFC region, responsible fisheries management required regional and sub-regional co-operation, as a principal means for the application of the precautionary approval to fisheries in the region. The *ad hoc* working groups provided a useful model for such co-operation.
3. This paper is aimed at contributing to the discussion on improving the effectiveness of the working group model, which is intended to become an integral part of the fisheries management process in the region. The paper draw on the experiences of the following three *ad hoc* working groups:
 - WECAFC *ad hoc* Working Group on Shrimp and Groundfish Resources in the Brazil-Guianas Shelf;
 - WECAFC *ad hoc* Working Group on the Caribbean Spiny Lobster, *Panulirus argus*; and
 - WECAFC *ad hoc* Flyingfish Working Group of the Eastern Caribbean.

The paper also draws on the conclusions and recommendations of the above-mentioned working groups on the subject.

II. The Process

4. It was of the view that substantial progress was made in building capacity in the participating fisheries departments for stock and fisheries assessment and the use of scientific information in the provision of management advice. This was apparent from the increasing information content and sophistication in assessment approaches of successive Working Group reports. However, a concern was shared that the capacity building had been mainly at the level of the individuals and had not been adequately transferred to the institution as a whole, despite the initiatives to involve managers in workshops. Several approaches were considered necessary to address this shortcoming. These included-:
 - a) In subsequent working groups, managers and politicians (ministers/decision-makers) should be brought into the process from the beginning. They should be informed of the aims and rationale of

the groups and should be involved in the setting of priorities and, in particular, in the elucidation and development of the objectives for each fishery, which will guide the nature of the scientific advice to be provided.

- b) In order to develop a broad base of political support for the activities of the group, consideration should be given to addressing, for example, national assemblies or the equivalent and appropriate forum, on: the nature and importance of their nation's fisheries; the need for effective management; the need for appropriate legislation for effective fisheries management; and the expected scientific contribution of the group to facilitating such management. This should be done early in the life of the group.
- c) Training of resource managers should be given similar priority to the training of scientists. Many fisheries managers could benefit from training in the complex task of fisheries management and especially the need to be proactive rather than purely reactive in fisheries management. Management training workshops, designed to complement and be complemented by the assessment workshops, would help to prepare the managers to use and direct their scientific staff more effectively, and to make the full use of the information they were provided with.

III. Contribution of Political Will to Effective Fisheries Management

5. For the purposes of this document, political will was considered to be an underlying determination by the political decision-makers and those responsible for the implementation of policy and decisions, to achieve a given goal. Within the context of WECAFC, this goal is best defined as the realisation of responsible (and hence by definition, sustainable) fisheries as described in the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. It was recognised that, in many cases, the decisions and actions necessary to manage fisheries sustainably and responsibly would not be taken because of a lack of such political will in the countries.
6. The absence of political will arose from several, complex factors, such as a reluctance to make decisions that would be unpopular with many stakeholders; knowledge that the required actions often have immediate negative social and economic consequences; a scepticism of the validity of the scientific information; lack of awareness of the potential resource rent from fisheries; and, in some instances, a relatively low priority given to fisheries in relation to other national issues. Two primary activities designed to strengthen the will to manage fisheries responsibly were suggested.
 - a) All interest groups in the fisheries need to be informed of the social and economic value of their fisheries and of the need to practice effective management if these benefits were to be sustained. The transition to responsible fisheries and the full achievement of these benefits will usually require social and economic sacrifices and it is only with good understanding of the real and full benefits that are and can be derived from a nation's fisheries, that the interest groups will be able to understand and therefore support these costs. This understanding of benefits and costs needs to be promoted from the beginning and at all levels: scientific, management, political and users.
 - b) In general, scientific recommendations alone were unlikely to have much political impact, especially if they were seen to be in opposition to the needs and desires of the other stakeholders. Major decisions were only likely to be made if there were strong calls for change from a substantial group or groups of stakeholders. As the fishers and fishing industry were the ones who will be most directly and heavily affected by problems in the management system, it was in their long-term interests to ensure that effective management is in place. They also have unique and important knowledge of the state of fisheries on which they depend and this knowledge should be utilised. In the WECAFC area, as in many parts of the world, the fishers usually did recognise that they were in a state of crisis that might be adversely affecting their living standards and, in some cases, that their livelihoods might be threatened. However, they were frequently inadequately informed to be able to evaluate how to contribute to resolving this crisis. The fishers need to be involved in the management process and be assisted to do so, as necessary. Bringing together the fishers, other stakeholders and the management agencies (including scientists) is far more likely to lead to identification and acceptance of major problems facing the fisheries, and to appropriate action being taken. It was therefore essential to involve the fishers in the process from the beginning and to elicit their cooperation and support. This could be done through national workshops, such as those undertaken in the WECAFC area by the *ad*

hoc Working Group on Shrimp and Groundfish in the Brazil-Guianas Shelf in 2000, with the purpose of informing and consulting on the working group's activities and on the status and objectives of the fisheries. These national workshops should be undertaken as joint activities between the fisheries management agency and the fishers. While recognising that some degree of conflict was almost inevitable in fisheries, the approach of the management agency, in all their activities, must be to foster a philosophy of partnership amongst all the stakeholders rather than confrontation.

IV. Institutional Deficiencies

7. The experiences of the working groups have highlighted the problems existing with the institutional structures in many of the participating countries and which were probably shared by many other countries. These problems included the following:
 - a) Small staff, often with limited experience and high turn-over rates;
 - b) Possibly arising from the previous point, a lack of confidence by the managers/decision-makers in the scientific staff;
 - c) An unwillingness by the managers/decision-makers to consider or take seriously the scientific advice and information they receive. Amongst other reasons, this can be caused by the lack of confidence referred to in the previous point but, in some cases, also reflect a concern about being constrained in their actions by scientific advice, which can be seen as reducing their discretionary powers;
 - d) Poor communication between scientists and managers, managers and political decision-makers, and state authorities and fishers;
 - e) No clear decision-making procedures and responsibility;
 - f) Confusion or conflict over responsibility for fisheries management, especially where more than one government department or agency share responsibilities for fisheries management;
 - g) Absence of a critical mass of staff in specialised functions, which resulted in an absence of essential back-up, mutual support and stimulation, and exchange of ideas and skills. This was most obvious in the fishery assessment groups and at the level of decision-making; and
 - h) It was recognised that several of the problems above are caused or exacerbated by inadequate funding to the management agency.

8. A number of suggestions were put forward for addressing institutional deficiencies in the countries. Most important amongst these was that a generic model of a minimum required institutional structure should be developed and then presented to and discussed with fisheries agencies and political decision-makers in each country. This generic model should contain the key functional units and channels of communication and responsibility in a fisheries management agency but would not attempt to prescribe the political details, which could vary from country to country. The key functional units in such a model should include the following units or institutions:
 - a) An individual, for example the appropriate Minister, or a body delegated responsibility by the appropriate Minister, which is responsible and accountable for decision-making and the implementation of responsible fisheries management;
 - b) An administrative unit responsible for permits and other access arrangements, liaison with the industry and fishers and the general administrative duties associated with fisheries management and execution;
 - c) An advisory body, reporting to the responsible authority described in a). This should preferably be composed of members (not necessarily representatives) of the key stakeholders in the fishery. In the formulation of its advice it should consider the relevant information (biological, economic and social) generated by the fisheries assessment unit, as well as considering formal input from other relevant sources;
 - d) An effective enforcement agency.
 - e) A data collection and monitoring unit; and
 - f) A fish biology and fisheries assessment unit, including expertise in stock assessment and social and economic analyses;
 - g) A consultative institution which would be responsible for on-going consultation and information dissemination amongst all the stakeholders;

9. It should be noted that some of these, for example the advisory and consultative units, do not necessarily require full-time staff and infrastructure and could be sub-functions within one of the other units. However, they should be formal, with an established and regular programme of activities and should be responsible and accountable for performing their duties.
10. It was also recommended that any future project undertaken by a working group to facilitate responsible management should investigate the existing institutional structures in the countries included in the group, identify deficiencies and, assuming the political will, assist the relevant agencies, as requested, in developing an appropriate institutional structure.
11. The general approach of the working groups should not be one of transfer of technical skills, but should aim for a participatory and self-help approach, designed to develop sustainable skills and institutions with a broad-base which are therefore less dependent on a few individuals who may subsequently be lost to the system. This approach would still include formal training, particularly in analysis and fisheries assessment and management, but would also, whenever possible, encourage the local participants to take control of the activities within the project, under the guidance of the project staff. The 2000 National Workshops in Brazil, French Guiana, Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela were seen as a good example of such a self-help approach.
12. Structures and processes should be put in place to facilitate the transfer of skills from participants in the training workshops to their colleagues in the management agency. A minimum goal in this should be to ensure that there is at least one back-up person for every technical function essential to the fishery management process.
13. These units must be linked by clear and appropriate channels of communication to ensure that all decisions and actions occur in a fully informed environment and are transparent. These channels should be formalised but not unnecessarily rigid.

V. Funding

14. In relation to the need for greater funding, two approaches were suggested. The first was, as discussed above, to demonstrate to the political authorities the social and economic importance of their fisheries, including as a potential source of rent to government. The need to manage the resources responsibly, if these benefits were to be sustained, and in many cases the opportunity to increase benefits where stocks are being over-fished needs to be conveyed to the political authorities. This should encourage them to provide the funds to develop the necessary capacity and institutional structure.
15. A second avenue for improved funding is to promote the concept of “user pays” amongst the management agencies and fishing industry. Under this model, the major financial beneficiaries from the fishery, and hence from effective fisheries management, should be expected to contribute a significant portion of the costs of implementing responsible management. Where commercial interests are the sole beneficiaries, they could be expected to contribute all these costs. A “user pays” approach would require a high degree of consultation between government and the fishing groups on management of the resource, perhaps reaching the point of co-management. However, it should not be seen as automatically leading to privatisation of fisheries and in most cases it is essential that the state retains ultimate control over the nation’s fishery resources.
16. The importance of regional cooperation as a means of optimising the use of limited financial resources and human expertise was emphasised. Many member countries of WECAFC have limited capacity for the difficult and demanding task of fisheries management. This capacity could frequently be used most efficiently through cooperation and sharing between countries within the region. This could include cooperation in research, monitoring, enforcement, and control and training. The greater use of electronic media would substantially enhance the opportunities for such cooperation. Such co-operation is utilised and being promoted through the *ad hoc* working groups.

17. In addition meetings should be held with the different interest groups, the different levels and units within the management agency, and with the highest relevant political authorities, to discuss the objectives, rationale of the work plan of the fisheries management agency, to ensure full support. The work plan of the working group, which would have been developed by the participating countries, should be part of this work plan.

VI. Modalities of Co-operation

18. The groups agreed that it was essential for them to continue their work in order to maintain and increase the momentum generated over the past years for a number of reasons. These included:

- the dynamics of the working group process which has contributed to capacity building in the participating countries, the development of preliminary standardised stock assessment methodologies for various species and species groups in the region and stock assessment reports for management purposes;
- the creation of a more focussed approach to stock assessments in the countries and enabling the participants to concentrate their efforts and obtain the necessary support at the national level;
- the generation of an information bank to support fisheries management decision-making which was already being used in some countries (e.g. Brazil, French Guiana, Suriname) for making fishery management decisions;
- provision of a mechanism for interaction at the biological (stocks), technological (fleet), and human (experts) levels that provide a regional perspective of the various commercially important fisheries in the region;
- the provision of a mechanism for the sharing of data and information for stock assessment and management purposes, which had not occurred even where governments had agreed to such co-operation (bilateral and multilateral), and that would not have been possible otherwise; and
- member countries of the *ad hoc* working groups were using these groups for technical support and were making attempts to assimilate the activities of the working groups in their national work programme.

19. The following modalities for future work were suggested providing that countries were committed to maintaining and improving their fisheries data collection programmes and to using the scientific advice that would have been derived from the analyses of the data in determining sustainable management strategies:

- the working groups should meet for one week every two years providing that stock assessments were done during the inter-sessional period. The meeting should concentrate on reviewing and finalising these stock assessment reports and in making fisheries management recommendations;
- countries would undertake more inter-sessional work that would be supported by electronic (listserv) workshops which should be moderated by stock assessment experts;
- the holding of one electronic (listserv) workshop for a specific period every year. In the year that the group would meet the electronic workshop should be held not less than three months before the meeting of the *ad hoc* working group;
- increased electronic communication among the participants during the inter-sessional period; and
- creating opportunities for bilateral and multilateral co-operation, especially in areas with overlapping stocks.

20. In agreeing to the need for this new modality of co-operation the working groups agreed that the costs involved in organising meetings of the group should be shared. In this regard the groups agreed to the following:

- that their costs of attending meetings of the group would need to be covered by their respective countries;
- that the host country would need to bear all local costs (provision of computers and other equipment necessary for the meeting, stationery, meeting room, local transport, secretarial support, etc.); and

- that efforts should be made to secure the support of the fishing industry.
21. In agreeing to the need for this new modality of operation and in sharing the costs involved in organising meetings of the working groups, it was recognised that they would require the technical assistance of FAO. In this regard the group requested FAO to seriously consider maintaining the current level of technical support to the working groups.
 22. The working groups emphasised that the activities of the groups did not preclude countries from undertaking bilateral or multilateral work through formal or informal agreements and that these activities would compliment the work of the working groups. The groups encouraged such work especially during the inter-sessional period, and agreed that it was essential in cases where the stocks were overlapping.

VII. Priorities for future work

23. The working groups agreed that there was a need to develop sustainability criteria for managing the different fisheries. For this purpose the countries should facilitate discussion groups at the national level to define the terms of reference and objectives that would frame the long-term goals of fishery management.
24. The working groups agreed that the standardisation of data collection systems would facilitate the work of the group, especially for regional (bilateral and multilateral) stock assessments. This would also facilitate the work of the group through the use of electronic communication, which was one of the modalities for future work.
25. The working groups suggested that fisheries administrations should establish partnership arrangements with the fishing industry in order to obtain their support for fisheries research and in the implementation of management measures, based on this scientific research, for the conservation and sustainable use of the fisheries resources.
26. The groups recommended the holding of national stock assessment workshops using the process adopted by the WECAFC *ad hoc* working groups as a guide. Such workshops would assist countries in preparing for bilateral and multilateral assessments, and in developing national skills in stock assessment. The organisation of these workshops was a national responsibility and should preferably be held before the meeting of the working groups.
27. The groups noted that the skills of the participants of the working groups have improved significantly over the last five years and suggested that such skills be utilised to facilitate technical co-operation among the countries through the TCDC (Technical Co-operation Among Developing Countries) mechanism, and for capacity building.

VIII. Consultation and Co-ordination

28. The groups recognised that for their work to be relevant to the management issues and questions identified by managers and resource users, the results of the analyses must be communicated to fisheries managers, the political directorate responsible for fisheries, and the resource users. Reference was made to the success and impact of the national workshops held in the six countries of the group in May/June 2000. It was recommended that the approach recommended by the Brazil-Guianas working group on shrimp and groundfish fisheries should also be applied to other important fisheries in the WECAFC region. This would require holding regular national workshops to communicate the results of the assessments of the resources and fisheries undertaken by the management agencies, and their management implications to the resource managers, fishers and the politicians and obtaining their feedback. The responsibility of organising and holding national workshops was the responsibility of the national fisheries authorities.
29. The groups recommended that the fisheries managers from the countries should meet once every three to five years to: (i) consider and discuss the work of the group; (ii) discuss regional management strategies and priorities that will define the future stock assessment work of the group; and, (iii) review options for

harmonising management strategies for the various fisheries,(iv) recommend changes to the next WECAFC Session.

IX. Suggested Action by the Commission

30. The Commission is invited to review the document, note the achievements and deficiencies and make recommendations on how to strengthen and improve the process for co-operation and capacity building for responsible fisheries management in the WECAFC region. The Commission should also suggest actions that should be taken by its members to overcome these deficiencies.