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WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION Twelfth Session
WECAFC LESSER ANTILLES FISHERIES COMMITTEE Ninth Session
Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, 25-28 October 2005
REPORT OF THE THIRD SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY GROUP (SAG) OF WECAFC, Bridgetown, Barbados, 25-27 April 2005
MATTERS REQUIRING THE ATTENTION OF THE WECAF COMMISSION

SAG MEMBERS' REPORT

26. The participation of members of SAG in [these] diverse activities allowed the SAG to have a firsthand overview of the trends, challenges and constraints of fisheries-related initiatives in the WECAFC area. Members noted that many of the activities reported upon were inter-related even if not explicitly coordinated or structured to maximize opportunities for cooperation. The Commission, working groups and Member States of WECAFC were urged to integrate activities where feasible, and to ensure that the contributions of marine and fisheries science to decision-making were comprehensive and interdisciplinary.

MAIN DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ELEVENTH SESSION OF WECAFC

28. With respect to the convening of a consultation on the contribution of small-scale fisheries to food security and poverty alleviation, the Secretariat was unable to mobilize funds to support this activity, to date. No national workshops were held to specifically promote the utilization of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries since no request were received from member countries. However, other organizations such as the UWI Outreach Program, in the WECAFC region have assisted in promoting the code at the local and national levels.

Ad hoc Working Groups

FAD Working Group

34. A draft proposal aimed at securing European Union funds for research work to support the sustainable exploitation of the marine resources around moored FADs was presented to the SAG. The SAG recommended that the proposal consider both the social and economic benefits and the study of alternative management and fishing strategies to reduce possible negative

impacts, particularly on those species that were presently considered overfished. The SAG also requested that the final copy of the proposal be sent to the WECAFC secretariat for comments and should be presented to the next session of the Commission in October 2005.

Ad hoc Working Group on Queen Conch

35. The FAO Secretariat reported that, in response to requests for assistance, it was in the process of producing a manual on management of queen conch, *Strombus gigas*, in accordance with the regulations and requirements of CITES. A draft manual was produced and had been submitted to several technical experts in Belize, Jamaica and Puerto Rico, as well as to the International Queen Conch Initiative, the CARICOM Regional Fisheries Mechanism and the CITES Secretariat for comments. The manual was being finalised and should be completed during 2005. Subject to availability of extra-budgetary funds, it was intended to run national and sub-regional training workshops on application of the methods described in the manual.

Ad hoc Working Group on the Shrimp and Groundfish Fisheries of the Brazil-Guianas shelf

37. SAG welcomed the progress made by the ad hoc Working Group but urged that FAO and Working Group member countries should seek to locate support and funding for a meeting and workshop of all members of the Working Group within the next two years. It was also suggested that the issues raised at the stakeholders' meeting in Trinidad should be addressed at the next meeting, including the potential impact of pollution and habitat destruction on shrimp and groundfish resources in sheltered inshore areas.

Ad hoc Working Group on Caribbean Spiny Lobster Resource in the WECAFC Area

38. The Secretariat stated that it had not been possible to hold a meeting of the WECAFC ad hoc Working Group on Caribbean Spiny Lobster since the previous SAG meeting but that it was likely that some funding would be available from the FAO FishCode programme to hold a meeting later in 2005 or early in 2006. SAG stressed the importance of continuing the momentum built up by the Working Group on Spiny Lobster and recommended that FAO and the member countries of the Working Group should strive to ensure that a meeting took place during that period.

Ad hoc Flyingfish Working Group of the Eastern Caribbean

39. The Secretariat stated that it had not been possible to hold a meeting of the flyingfish working group since January 2001 for various reasons, which included the boundary delimitation status between two members of the Group and the state of readiness of members of the Group in terms of the availability of data on the fisheries. The agenda for the next meeting of the Group will include the draft Subregional Fisheries Management Plan for Flyingfish in the Eastern Caribbean which was prepared in 2002.

STATE OF FISHERIES IN THE WECAFC REGION

Status of fisheries resources in the WECAFC Region

41. SAG members drew attention to the poor identification of catches in many cases, noting that a large proportion of catches by WECAFC countries were identified only in highly aggregated categories rather than at species level. This poor identification would hinder effective

management and could mask important trends in landings of particular species. The SAG urged WECAFC to address this matter urgently.

43. SAG expressed concern about the inadequacy of the information on shark catches in the WECAFC area and the possibility that, for those groups for which information was available, the declines in catches may reflect declines in abundance. Attention was drawn to the report of the Twenty-sixth Session of COFI, which referred to the lack of progress in developing National Plans of Action for sharks in many countries. (...) SAG recommended that those WECAFC countries that have not yet developed and implemented NPOAs on sharks should do so as a matter of priority.

45. The SAG agreed that the final document on status of fisheries in the WECAFC region can be published as an FAO Circular and posted in the FAO/FI Web Site, after its review and approval by the Twelfth Session of the Commission to be held in October 2005. This document should be kept in the Web Page until the following session of the Commission when an updated version should be posted.

Status and Trends of Fisheries and Aquaculture

49. The Group agreed that the Secretariat would include in the Issues section in the final document to be presented to the Twelfth Session of the Commission, a presentation and brief discussion of the above-mentioned issues. Based on the available information, this section will include a description of the nature of the issues and the current status of the debate at international and regional levels.

50. The SAG agreed to provide additional comments on the document, WECAFC/SAG/05/III/3 to the Secretariat by the end of May 2005. The final document will be presented to the Twelfth Session of the Commission in October 2005. SAG recommended that the final version, as approved by the Commission, should be published as an FAO Circular and posted in the FAO/FI Web Page, until the following Session of the Commission when an updated version will be posted.

STRENGTHENING OF WECAFC

55. *How a strengthened WECAFC could most effectively interact with existing mechanisms and programs in the region.*

The meeting noted that SAG's responsibilities include reporting to WECAFC on the status and trends of the fisheries resources within the WECAFC area, most of which are shared or straddling stocks. The preparation of this report, which is one of few published reports on the status of fishery resources within the WECAFC region, could be improved through partnership arrangements with relevant agencies in the region.

56. *How a strengthened WECAFC could increase economic benefits derived from fishing activities, particularly with respect to the contribution of artisanal fisheries to economic development and food security in the region.*

None of the WECAFC ad hoc Working Groups have a programme focused on the issue of economic development and food security of traditional fisheries but all Groups use information from artisanal fisheries and in some instances have done economic analysis that include data from such fisheries. The Groups have also come to conclusions and made

recommendations relevant to traditional fisheries. The SAG does have some expertise on this issue and can provide broad advice to WECAFC on these matters, providing new information on the subject could be procured by requesting all current ad hoc Working Groups to address this issue as part of their work plan. If the countries participating in the ad hoc Working Groups wanted them to focus on methods to enhance the economic benefits from traditional fisheries, the tasks and composition of the Working Groups could be adjusted to accommodate that new aim.

57. *How a strengthened WECAFC could promote the adoption, implementation and enforcement at the national level of compatible management measures for shared stocks in the region.*

The SAG decided that although it supports harmonization of management, because this simplifies greatly the evaluation of alternative management strategies, the issues of enforcement and harmonization are management and policy issues, which were outside the terms of reference of the SAG. Attention was drawn to the fact that the conclusions and recommendations of the ad hoc Working Groups regularly addressed adoption, implementation and enforcement of management measures at the national and regional levels, and that, where appropriate, these addressed the need for regional harmonization and cooperation. SAG recommended that WECAFC should support on-going work of this nature by the Working Groups and give attention to implementation of approved Working Group recommendations.

58. The SAG noted that the evolution of the CLME supported the emphasis and priorities set by the WECAFC, and the strategy it adopted to implement its work programme, during the Ninth Session of the Commission, September 1999, Saint Lucia.

60. The SAG made also the following observations:

(i) A number of other working groups established by regional fishery organizations could complement the work of WECAFC. SAG was of the view that a strengthened WECAFC could take advantage of these working groups by coordinating meetings and activities so that they do not overlap and hopefully complement each other. A strengthened WECAFC may consider holding ad hoc working group activities that coincide with activities of these other working groups to build synergy.

(ii) WECAFC should consider how to strengthen its collaboration with regional academic institutions in WECAFC member countries because such institutions have a large pool of people with skills and knowledge that can contribute to WECAFC's work.

62. *Whether a strengthened WECAFC should initially focus on species of particular interest. Case studies could include the following spiny lobster, queen conch, snapper-grouper complex, shrimp and groundfish, wahoo, and dolphin fish.*

The SAG agreed that in the short term, facilitating current working groups should remain the emphasis of FAO activities in the WECAFC region.

63. The need for a group that focuses on demersal resources of the Central American Caribbean shelf has been identified in the past by WECAFC. The new FAO/FIINPESCA project entitled, "Strengthening of Interdisciplinary Fisheries Research for Responsible Fisheries in Central American countries", can be a conduit for the creation of an ad hoc working group on those resources. WECAFC should re-evaluate the need for and the self-sustainability of such working groups by the end of the FAO/FIINPESCA project.

64. A strengthened WECAFC should note that creating new groups should be done in a staggered manner and following a list of priorities that consider the need to cover the resources/area and issues that are of high priority to WECAFC members.

65. The WECAFC could benefit from the transboundary diagnostic analyses generated by other regional bodies, and to be conducted by the PDF-B stage of the CLME project, as a source of information for re-evaluating the number and/or scope of existing and future ad hoc working groups.

A Suggested Process for Strengthening WECAFC

67. The process of strengthening WECAFC through facilitating the operations of the existing ad hoc Working Groups, which may be modified or supplemented over time, has already been agreed upon by WECAFC at its Ninth Session, September 1999, Saint Lucia. (...)

68. The meeting observed that the process of strengthening WECAFC should also focus on other functions of the Commission such as, deepening its role in co-ordination, communication, source of information on status and trends of fisheries in the region, promoting regional cooperation and exchange of information. These areas also need strengthening if the scientific evidence generated by the WECAFC ad hoc working groups and SAG is to be used effectively in management decision-making.

69. The SAG observed that the ad hoc working groups on Caribbean Spiny Lobster agreed on achieving self-sustainability over time at the level of meetings of ministers and fisheries managers. The Joint Statement of Ministers/Managers of the Meeting of Decision-Makers of the ad hoc working group on Caribbean Spiny lobster, 4 October 2002, Cuba, stated, “We undertake to support the full participation of our countries in the activities of the WECAFC ad hoc Working Group on Caribbean Spiny lobster and to seriously consider ways to strengthen the Working Group and to make it self-sufficient over time”.¹

70. SAG was of the firm view that a strengthened Commission should actively pursue the goal of self-sustainability for those working groups where feasible.

71. [To this end,] WECAFC could consider ensuring the following for each working group:

- (i) that complete and effective data collection and analysis systems are in place in all participating countries and, where relevant, include catch and effort in international waters;
- (ii) that each Working Group has high level capacity for biological, ecological, social and economic assessments of the fisheries and resources;
- (iii) that scientific advice is generated on a regular basis and is used to inform and guide management decisions; and
- (iv) that structures and processes are in place for good consultation with and participation by stakeholders.

73. WECAFC should ensure the creation of partnerships with other relevant organisations to ensure that the working groups are working towards and in a manner consistent with agreed national instruments, including international instruments such as the UN Law of the Sea, the

¹ FAO Fisheries Report No. 715, para. 68.

World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the Convention of Biological Diversity, etc.

75. The SAG noted that the implementation of the above process or any equivalent will require substantial increases in the resources and restructuring of the WECAFC secretariat. In this regard, the SAG recommended that the Commission seriously consider making the WECAFC secretary a full time position. The FAO secretariat pointed out that it was highly unlikely that FAO could cover the budgetary implications of such a recommendation, given the current financial position of the Organization.

The CLME, an option for implementation of the suggested process

76. The SAG noted, from the oral presentation of the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem (CLME) project coordinator, that the CLME seems to have similar goals to those of WECAFC with respect to living marine resources. It recommended that WECAFC member countries and FAO should consider participating actively in the PDF-B stage of the CLME project to ensure that due consideration is given to the priorities set by WECAFC member countries, the WECAFC current strategy for providing technical assistance to member countries and also to take advantage of the opportunities that the CLME project may offer, for the benefit of its members.

79. The SAG therefore recommends that WECAFC considers:

- (i) participating actively in the PDF-B stage of the CLME project and the subsequent implementation of the full project; and
- (ii) encouraging the use by the CLME project of the existing WECAFC ad hoc Working Groups as vehicles for relevant assessment and governance activities and where applicable, strengthen the work of the groups.

80. The SAG noted that the CLME project may last for ten years and by making use of the opportunities presented by the project, and any other opportunities that may arise by the end of that period, WECAFC could make substantial progress towards fulfilling its obligations as an FAO Article VI body. Also, by the end of that period WECAFC members could initiate joint management for at least some of its shared resources by working through and strengthening the WECAFC working groups, if the Members so desire.

MEMBERSHIP OF SAG

81. The meeting agreed that the SAG could benefit from limited renewal of membership in 2006, after the next meeting of the Commission, to encourage the participation of other regional scientists in the WECAFC process and therefore, expand the support for WECAFC activities, whilst ensuring relative continuity of the knowledge now shared by the current members of the SAG. FAO should ensure that replacement members maintain the balance of scientific disciplines and related skills currently represented on the SAG.

TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING

85. The SAG proposed to hold a meeting in 2007, in accordance with the Terms of Reference.