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Organización  
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para la  
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y la  
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<b>WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION</b> Thirteenth Session
<b>WECAFC LESSER ANTILLES FISHERIES COMMITTEE</b> Tenth Session
Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, 9–12 October 2007
<b>REPORT OF THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY GROUP OF WECAFC – Matters requiring the attention of the Commission<sup>1</sup></b>

## INTRODUCTION

1. The Fourth Session of the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) was held at the Universidad Marista in Mérida, Mexico, from 2 to 4 April 2007 at the kind invitation of the Director of Research and Graduate Studies of the Universidad Marista de Mérida. Members of SAG were selected on the basis of their specialized knowledge and served in their personal capacities and not as representatives of their respective governments or organizations.

## THE AGENDA OF SAG

2. It was agreed that future meetings of SAG should include voluntary presentations by members on subjects or areas of broad interest to the Commission. The topics should be selected in consultation with the members. (para. 6).

## MAIN DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TWELFTH SESSION OF WECAFC AND THE TWENTY SEVENTH SESSION OF COFI

3. The SAG concurred with the WECAFC recommendation to have a workshop on turtle-fishery interaction but suggested that the workshop should not only address turtles but bycatch reduction in general, given the focus on EAF and the various current, regional initiatives on turtles. (para. 11).

4. The SAG observed that few initiatives were undertaken in the region on the formulation of sound national fisheries policies despite the need for countries to address the requirements posed by the evolving international normative fisheries framework. This was of high priority and should be addressed urgently through national dialogue involving the pertinent government entities. (para. 12).

5. SAG suggested that fisheries departments should attempt to ensure that fisheries objectives are taken into account, as appropriate, in the establishment of MPAs with goals other than fisheries management. SAG also recommended that MPAs should be established within the broader framework of EAF (Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries) and Integrated Coastal Zone Management/Integrated Coastal Assessment Management (ICZM/ICAM). SAG suggested the convening of a regional meeting by the various agencies working on MPAs in the region to share the large body of existing knowledge on the subject with fisheries managers of the region. (para. 13).

<sup>1</sup> Extracted from: FAO Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission. Report of the fourth session of the Scientific Advisory Group, Mérida, Mexico, 2–4 April 2007. *FAO Fisheries Report No. 842*. Rome, FAO. 2007. 32 pp.

6. The Meeting acknowledged the importance of small-scale fisheries in the WECAFC area and agreed that the problems they face continue to challenge the region. The Group suggested that the WECAFC follow the approach adopted by the Twenty-seventh COFI, which referred to the necessity to tailor policies and development programmes to the specific needs in particular locations, countries and regions and types of small-scale fisheries and the need to adopt an appropriate rights-based approach to managing small-scale fisheries. (para. 14).

7. With respect to subsidies in fisheries, the SAG observed that few empirical studies were done in the region on the impact of subsidies on the sustainability of fishery resources, fish trade, poverty alleviation, food security and development. It was also noted that many fisheries managers of the region were not normally involved in WTO discussions on fisheries subsidies. (para. 15).

## **STATE OF FISHERIES IN THE WECAFC REGION**

8. In the discussion on landings of Caribbean spiny lobster, attention was drawn to the experience with *Homarus* sp. in the USA, which had shown higher yields after a substantial reduction in the abundance of important predators. The potential implications of such a predator-prey interaction involving *P. argus* were discussed in relation to likely decreases in the abundance of some predators such as groupers, and sharks and rays. It was suggested that research should be undertaken to examine this issue. (para. 20).

9. Some positive developments were reported on measures to protect spawning aggregations of grouper species. (para. 22).

10. SAG reiterated the need to improve management of fisheries that caught sharks, including improving knowledge of the status of the stocks. (para. 23).

11. It was reported that the sea cucumber harvest was growing in the region and needed adequate monitoring, assessment and management. This is particularly urgent given the sedentary nature and vulnerability of the resource. (para. 24).

12. SAG welcomed the proposal by the Twenty-seventh COFI that FAO should undertake a scoping study to identify the key issues on climate change and fisheries, initiate a discussion on how the fishing industry can adapt to climate change, and take a lead in informing fishers and policy-makers about the likely consequences of climate change for fisheries. (para. 25).

13. SAG agreed that the poor status of management of fisheries in the region was a matter of serious concern and suggested that there had been a widespread decline in management effectiveness over the last decade or more throughout much of the region. If this was not urgently reversed, accompanied by effective control over other human impacts of marine and coastal ecosystems, the already poor state of many resources and ecosystems would deteriorate further. (para. 26).

14. It was suggested that in the future, FAO reports on the status of stocks should go even further in reporting on trends and the conditions of critical ecosystem habitats and consider important patterns and events in relation to the wider ecosystem, particularly the physical, oceanographic environment. (para. 27).

15. The ecological impacts of the increasing use of casitas as lobster habitat and FADs for aggregating large pelagic species needed to be evaluated as they had the potential to contribute substantially to overexploitation and, in the case of casitas, to the perturbation of ecosystems. (para. 28).

16. The Group suggested that, subject to information availability, the document on status and trends of fisheries and aquaculture include comments on the potential current demand effect on fish imports originated by tourism growth and by the public concern about “avian flu” disease. (para. 30).

17. SAG suggested that the document also include a list of issues currently being debated at the international level and which may have implications for the region. (para. 31).

## **Fishery Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS)**

18. It was noted that FAO regional fisheries bodies, such as WECAFC, had to rely on data and information available from the countries or from specific regional or subregional events such as WECAFC workshops. (para. 36).

19. If FIRMS was to be useful to countries, the outputs of data and information had to be flexible and allow for reporting in different forms to different bodies, for example to the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) and to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). (para. 37).

## **INTERSESSIONAL ACTIVITIES**

20. The SAG noted that in terms of achievements, the working group on Caribbean spiny lobster was comparatively the most successful and has made significant advances in providing scientific advice for decision-making. At the same time SAG expressed its concern that the working groups on flying fish and shrimp and groundfish fisheries in the Brazil-Guianas shelf did not meet and indicated that the momentum gained by these two groups may be lost. (para. 39).

21. Some SAG members expressed their concerns at the length of time it is taking the Working Group on moored fish aggregating devices to acquire the scientific information to provide fisheries managers with advice for the management and control of this emerging fishery. The SAG encouraged the participating countries to expedite and strengthen their involvement in the research project on promoting subregional cooperation for the development of sustainable fishing using moored FADs in the Lesser Antilles. (para. 40).

22. SAG encouraged FAO/WECAFC and other international organization involved in fisheries in the region to continue and establish more linkages to create more synergy. (para. 41).

## **FACTORS OF UNSUSTAINABILITY AND OVEREXPLOITATION IN MARINE FISHERIES**

23. SAG supported the conclusions of the regional workshop on the Review of factors contributing to overexploitation and unsustainability in fisheries, Barbados, December 2006 and recommended that WECAFC should consider means of addressing and taking actions towards removing the obstacles to sustainable use. SAG stressed the importance of evaluating the existing set of incentives in the WECAFC countries that either encourage or discourage sustainable use of resources and recommended that WECAFC should consider taking steps to ensure that the overall set of incentives unequivocally promoted sustainable and responsible fisheries. It was suggested that WECAFC may wish to consider a specific exercise to review the incentives currently operating within the WECAF area. (para. 43).

24. Weak management and poor governance were identified as major problems in many WECAFC countries and SAG agreed that FAO and WECAFC should consider means to address these problems. (para. 45).

25. Training was an essential component of capacity-building in the region and WECAFC members, donor countries and FAO should attempt to provide more training to the region. (para. 46).

## **FISHERIES SOCIAL SCIENCE IN THE WECAFC REGION**

26. Fisheries authorities should be encouraged to acquire staff trained in social sciences in order to build capacity, perhaps through sharing expertise. (para. 48).

27. SAG suggested that fisheries stakeholders could benefit from a document that pointed out the role of different disciplines within social science to fisheries management and requested FAO to consider undertaking this task. The topic could also be included in the guidelines for the social, economic and institutional aspects of EAF. (para. 49).

28. The aim of incorporating the human dimension is not only to improve the performance of inputs and processes in fisheries governance, but to ensure that outputs and outcomes contribute meaningfully to human

well-being. The Commission may wish to encourage universities and fisheries authorities in the region to pay more attention to the social science aspects of fisheries governance while retaining an interdisciplinary approach. (para. 50).

## **COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION IN FISHERIES SCIENCE IN THE REGION**

29. A simple and brief summary of fisheries-related research activities in the region, distributed electronically monthly or bi-monthly, could help to bridge the existing gaps in communication. Initiatives such as the CLME project, which contained provision for communication, should be encouraged to test simple systems for improving information exchange and determine whether this led to improvements in project outcomes. (para. 52).

## **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

### **UNDP/Unesco/IOCARIBE/GEF – Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem Project**

30. It noted that the Twelfth Session of the Commission, October 2005, endorsed its recommendations that WECAFC should participate in the implementation of the full project, agreed that the CLME project remained an important initiative with which WECAFC should partner in several ways, and that the Commission may wish to place the CLME project on its agenda for the 2007 meeting to fully consider the project. (para. 54).

31. WECAFC should encourage 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. (para. 54).

32. SAG endorsed the need for greater attention to governance, especially in the light of the reports from other activities in the region that identified deficiencies in governance as major factors contributing to unsustainability. (para. 56).

33. Notwithstanding the overall support for WECAFC partnering in the CLME, there were queries about the functional relationships for ensuring that institutions, such as the WECAFC ad hoc working groups, were strengthened through the partnership as intended. (para. 57).

34. A specific concern was that where activities had limited geographic scope (e.g. the lobster demonstration project) mechanisms existed to involve the entire working group so as to reduce the likelihood of fragmentation due to differing levels of participation. (para. 57).

### **CERMES-UWI -- Marine Resource Governance in the Eastern Caribbean**

35. It was suggested that resources such as reef and slope fisheries, and flyingfish, could be especially interesting at the regional level. At the national level it may be useful to compare governance arrangements and enabling policies for fisheries that can be managed nationally with those that require international management. This may focus on the differences between more open and more closed governance systems (e.g. large pelagics versus sea urchins). (para. 60).

## **TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING**

36. The SAG acknowledged the offer of the Caribbean Coral Reef Institute, University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez to host the next meeting in April 2009. (para. 62).