

Port State Measures important for Countries in the Western Central Atlantic region

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in collaboration with the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC), a FAO Regional Fisheries Body, is hosting a Regional Workshop to build capacity for implementation of the 2009 FAO Agreement on Port States Measures among the Caribbean Small-Island Developing States (SIDS). The Workshop is being held in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago from 24 to 28 March 2014, and is being attended by more than 80 officials from 25 countries.

Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing continues to be a threat to the effective conservation and management of fish stocks in the Wider Caribbean Region. IUU fishing is causing economic and social losses for the Caribbean countries and negatively impacts their food security.

The FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to Combat Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing has been designed to intensify global collaboration between fisheries and port authorities, coast guards and navies. The aim is to eliminate IUU fishing, through globally agreed minimum standards for concerted action, enabling better inspections and controls at the ports on vessels and increasing flag State responsibility.

In his opening remarks, Mr Barton Clarke, FAO Representative to Trinidad and Tobago, emphasized that the Agreement is important in particular for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) as it empowers them to exert greater control of their own waters and over shared stocks, increasing transparency of fishing operations. Coastal fisheries resources of Caribbean SIDS are already under pressure and illegal fishing from foreign vessels is adding to this. Most target fish stocks in the Caribbean region are already either fully exploited or over exploited. Caribbean SIDS' fisheries are carried out mostly by small-scale vessels in coastal near-shore areas, but industrial fleets from other countries fish further off-shore and on the high seas of the Western Central Atlantic - vast areas that are difficult to manage and monitor. These fisheries negatively affect the availability of fish to the small-scale fleets of the SIDS.

The Agreement on Port State Measures provides Caribbean SIDS with a cost-effective way to combat IUU fishing. Where there is evidence of IUU fishing by a vessel that requests entry to its port, the port State may prohibit such entry. Where the vessel has entered port, the port State may – or in certain circumstances must – deny the use of its ports to the vessel for such profitable activities including landings, transshipments, supply and services. A harmonized system of port inspections, communications and measures means that the vessel is unable to offload its valuable catch or carry on fishing operations and may be squeezed out of business. Mr. Clarke encouraged the Caribbean SIDS to become “Champions of Port State Measures” and eliminate jointly illegal fisheries in the region.

Ms. Joan Hannibal-Phillips, the Acting Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Food Production, in her welcome address to the workshop emphasized the commitment of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to taking steps towards making Trinidad and Tobago a

food secure nation through, among other measures, the management of the marine resources and preventing or deterring actions that can undermine the effectiveness of pertinent management and conservation measures.

She stressed the importance of an inclusive inter-agency approach to implementing Port State Measures in which collaboration with the Maritime Services Department of the Ministry of Transport; the Customs and Excise Department of the Ministry of Finance and the Economy; the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard of the Ministry of National Security; the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, and others is key to success.

Mrs. Christine Chan A Shing, Director for Fisheries of the Ministry of Food Production added that port State measures contribute to reducing vessel time for inspection at sea, reducing unfair competition from illegal fishers, harmonizing minimum standards for inspection and actions, increasing the exchange of information regionally and internationally, and, most importantly, strengthening the sustainability of the fisheries resources while securing legitimate income for fishers.

The United Nations has declared 2014 as the International Year of the SIDS. It is widely recognized that fishing is an essential economic activity for the small islands and that it contributes to food security, employment and livelihoods. The Agreement on Port State Measures will, once ratified by 25 countries, enter into force and will enable participating fish importing countries to assure their consumers that fish and fishery products on their markets derive from legitimate fisheries. Through increased traceability of fish it is expected that the implementation of the Agreement will lead to reduced market opportunities for illegal fishers and reduced costs for sea-based inspection while increasing the more economical port-based inspections.

The workshop is organized within of the framework of a broader international FAO programme to strengthen capacity for the effective implementation of the Agreement. It is receiving technical support from FAO and WECAFC, and financial support from the Government of Norway, the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) and the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem (CLME) project. In addition, technical contributions are being made by the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), which is assisting in the delivery of the workshop, as well as the International Maritime Organization (IMO), Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization (OSPESCA) and CRFM. The PEW Trust and Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) also provide contributions to this important regional event.

WECAFC is comprised of thirty-three countries and the European Union, and its Fifteenth biennial Session will be hosted by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago from 26 to 28 March 2014. The Members' commitment to responsible fisheries is high. The Session is expected to adopt a Resolution "on the implementation of the Port State Measures Agreement and the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on flag State performance in the region" which encourages Workshop follow-up by all Members.

More information about WECAFC can be found at: www.fao.org/fishery/rfb/wecafc/en

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