

# CONSULTANCY REPORT ACTIVITY 3. JOINT WORKSHOP

**Technical assistance to support the  
SICA/OSPESCA Secretariat in  
reviewing and updating the  
MARPLESCA Plan in the framework  
of the GCP/SLC/225/EC Project.**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Central America Fisheries and Aquaculture Organisation (OSPESCA) signed a letter of agreement with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) to support the implementation of selected components of the GCP/SLC/225/EC Project<sup>1</sup>. The letter of agreement was signed in September 2025, with amendments in October 2025 and January 2026.

Pursuant to this letter of agreement, technical assistance has been engaged to provide support to SICA OSPESCA Secretariat. In accordance with the established terms of reference, the Secretariat will undertake the following activities:

1. Contribute to the validation of FIRMS inventories for OSPESCA countries: the service provider will contact OSPESCA to organise the review and validation by OSPESCA countries with a Caribbean coastline (7 countries) of the FIRMS inventories prepared by the FAO FIRMS team. It is expected that at least 4 (out of 7) countries will publish new inventories.
2. Contribute to the drafting and revision of version 1.1 of the WECAFC DCRF: version 1.0 of the Data Collection Reference Framework approved by the 18th meeting of the Data Collection Forum in 2022.
3. Contribute to and participate in the joint meeting of the three Working Groups: the service provider shall organise preparatory meetings of the Caribbean Spiny Lobster Working Group to prepare for the joint meeting of the three WGs in December 2025, shall contribute to identifying cross-cutting issues to inform the joint meeting, and shall contribute to drafting a joint recommendation to the Commission for its next meeting.

The schedule for completing the activities and delivering the products has been adjusted, as indicated by the two amendments to the letter of agreement.

This report details the outcomes of Activity No. 3, a collaborative workshop conducted by the Caribbean Spiny Lobster Working Group, the Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing Working Group, and the Fisheries Data and Statistics Working Group. The workshop contributed to Output 4 of GCP/SLC/225/EC Project. In this report emphasis is given to the presentations and discussions concerning management measures of Caribbean spiny lobster fisheries.

## ACTIVITY 3. WECAFC WORKING GROUPS JOINT MEETING

### Background

The Caribbean Spiny Lobster (CSL) (*Panulirus argus*) is one of the most commercially valuable resources in the WECAFC region which above all, since the decade of the 60s, has generated significant social and economic benefits to the countries in the wider Caribbean. Some 28 WECAFC Member States report landings of this species, with landings averaging around 29 000 tons in the last 10 years.

Trends in the management of this resource have been marked by a steady increase in exploitation which has led to very restrictive fishing limits tied to the sustainable resource capacity. The lack of basic fishery statistics supports the need for immediate steps towards a science-based data collection framework (e.g., WECAFC Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF), as endorsed at WECAFC 18). Further, the importance of identifying simple, feasible, and cost-effective

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<sup>1</sup> “Enhance data collection and monitoring for sustainable spiny lobster fisheries, and concurrently develop practical approaches to characterize illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU) with focus on small-scale fisheries in the WECAFC region”

methods to characterize the levels of and disposition of catch from IUU fishing cannot be understated as the real impact on stock status and future sustainability is unknown.

Three specific objectives have been identified to help bolster groundwork to operationalize the “MARPLESCA Plan” developed under the “Ecosystem Approach for the Caribbean Spiny Lobster Fisheries subproject” endorsed by the 17<sup>th</sup> Session of WECAFC in 2019: (i) characterization and quantification of IUU fishing, (ii) identification of management and conservation measures for Caribbean Spiny Lobster and finally (iii) characterization of the socio-economics aspect of the Caribbean Spiny Lobster fishery.

The 3 specific objectives align with the anticipated outputs of the GCP/SLC/225/EC project and correspond to 3 established WECAFC working group: Caribbean spiny lobster (CSL) group; Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing group; and fisheries data and statistics (FDS) group. Output 4 of the referenced project involved convening a joint meeting of these working groups to evaluate the activities and achievements related to these topics to generate recommendations, identify challenges and potential partnerships, as well as future work.

## The meeting

Initially scheduled for December 2025 in St Kitts and Nevis, the meeting was postponed to 2026 due to various circumstances. It ultimately took place at United Nations House in Bridgetown, Barbados, from February 3 to 6, 2026. The event was conducted in a hybrid format, allowing both in-person and online participation. The adjusted and approved agenda can be found in Annex 1. For those attending in person, attendance included all three working group conveners, the project coordinator, the WECAFC secretary, and representatives from at least two countries for each working group. One delegate from Brazil, Honduras, and Panama respectively participated in the Caribbean spiny lobster working group. A provisional list of participants is in Annex 2.

The agenda included plenary meetings with presentations and recommendations from the 3 working groups, followed by breakout sessions to discuss recommendations for WECAFC and other relevant topics. Meeting documents were available in English on the WECAFC website, and plenary sessions had English to Spanish simultaneous interpretation and vice versa. During the Caribbean spiny lobster group sessions, the convener also interpreted due to logistical issue for breakout group interpretation in the identified rooms.

On Tuesday, 3 February, the first day started with the usual formalities and an overview of the meeting’s objectives. Shortly afterward, Mr. Yann Laurent, the Project Coordinator, gave an outline of project GCP/SLC/225/EC.

Dr. Shelley Clarke followed and delivered a thorough overview of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, addressing its definition as well as methodologies for quantification and characterization. She referenced relevant publications by the FAO on the topic. As part of the project, two pilot studies were conducted to assess IUU fishing in Nicaragua and St Kitts and Nevis, and Dr. Clarke presented the findings from both locations.

The outcomes and lessons learned from the pilots were:

- Pilot risk characterizations in Nicaragua and St Kitts & Nevis were successful
- They allowed consensus building on:
  - What are the highest IUU fishing risks?
  - What data and methods are needed for quantification?

- What are the priorities for MCS system improvement? (e.g. work plans)
- Countries managing based on stock assessments may need estimates — these should cover all key risks and avoid overlaps, but still may be highly uncertain
- Countries whose focus is on reducing high risk activities are recommended to consider indicators

On the recommendations she suggested to conduct further pilots in WECAFC member States to demonstrate the IUU risk characterization methods under a broader range of national scenarios (e.g. data rich versus data poor). Also recommended further develop the SKN pilot results to provide SKN with an indicators tool for ongoing monitoring. Her final recommendation was to disseminate the methodology and its potential benefits to national authorities for their direct use by developing a more detailed version of the paper for publication by WECAFC as a report or as part of the FAO Technical Guidelines Series.

Mr. Manuel Pérez, convener of the Caribbean spiny lobster working group, presented an assessment of the MARPLESCA Plan's regional analysis, as well as management and conservation measures based on a thorough review of national and subregional legal frameworks, surveys sent to national fisheries authorities, and technical consultations with FAO experts. The findings show that gaps exist in aligning key practices—such as closed seasons, minimum size limits, and restrictions on fishing gear and access—which makes compliance and enforcement challenging. These difficulties, along with inconsistent and limited data (especially from artisanal fisheries), increase uncertainty about stock status and weaken fisheries management effectiveness.

Recommendations prioritize three strategic areas: 1) aligning management and conservation across subregional and regional levels by standardizing measures like closed seasons, size limits, and gear regulations, among others; 2) establishing a regional monitoring system to assess the effectiveness of the MARPLESCA Plan using specific indicators; and 3) strengthening national and regional data collection and stock assessment capabilities through tools such as the DCRF and other initiatives, and developing national management plans with defined operational objectives and reference points.

Key messages are:

1. The sustainability of the Caribbean spiny lobster depends on regional harmonisation: The coexistence of heterogeneous national measures for shared stocks reduces management effectiveness, hinders enforcement and may encourage IUU fishing.
2. IUU fishing continues to pose a significant risk to the CSL fishery: The limited quantification/characterization of IUU fishing, especially in artisanal fisheries, introduces a high degree of uncertainty into stock assessments and the effectiveness of management measures.
3. Data gaps limit science/evidence-based management: Deficiencies persist in biological, catch, effort and socio-economic data, restricting the application of stock assessments and the definition of scientific reference points.
4. The integration of small-scale fisheries into data systems is a priority: Strengthening reporting and monitoring systems in the small-scale subsector is essential for a comprehensive view of fisheries at the national and regional levels.
5. The WECAFC DCRF is a key tool for advancing regional standardisation on data collection.

Dr. Nancie Cummings presented on fisheries data and statistics, summarising the FAO GCP/SLC/225/EC project's collaboration with the WECAFC FDS working group. She outlined the

development of the WECAFC DCRF Structure and discussed recent changes in content, formats, and appendices.

Following each convener presentation, a brief question-and-answer session was conducted. Participants agreed on the need to further improve management and conservation of Caribbean spiny lobster, emphasizing regional harmonisation despite national challenges. IUU fishing drew interest for its new solutions, with the Caribbean spiny lobster pilots example offering potential models for other fisheries.

On the second day, Mr. Aureliano Gentile, Fisheries and Resources Monitoring System (FAO FIRMS), delivered a presentation outlining the importance of keeping inventories for Caribbean spiny lobster in the WECAFC region. He detailed the development process and the methodology employed. The status of fisheries inventories is presented in Table 1. Notably, Belize, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Honduras, all OSPESCA members, have completed the process and granted authorisation for publication. Although Nicaragua has finalised the validation phase, authorisation for publication was not pursued. Costa Rica and Panama are nearing completion of validation and are anticipated to approve publication by February 2026. The target is to have all FIRMS inventories to be published before the next Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) meeting in 2027.

**Table 1 Status of the Caribbean spiny lobster fisheries inventory in FIRMS as of January 2026**

| Status  | Number of countries | Countries  |
|---|---------------------|--|
| <b>Inventory to be finalized</b>                    | <b>11</b>           | Haiti; Turks and Caicos Is.; Colombia; Mexico; Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba (Netherlands); British Virgin Is.; Anguilla; Barbados; Curacao (Kingdom of the Netherlands); Saint Lucia                           |
| <b>Draft - ready for validation</b>                 | <b>12</b>           | Brazil; Bahamas; Cuba; Jamaica; Antigua & Barbuda; Guadeloupe (France); Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; Martinique (France); Grenada; Trinidad & Tobago; Panama ( <i>exchanges in progress</i> )                 |
| <b>Draft - ready for clearance</b>                  | <b>9</b>            | Nicaragua; United States of America; Puerto Rico (USA); Costa Rica ( <i>exchanges in progress</i> ); Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela; Saint Kitts and Nevis; Bermuda (UK); United States Virgin Islands; Dominica |
| <b>Published (clearance received, January 2026)</b> | <b>4</b>            | <b>Belize</b> (1 fishery fact sheet, ref year 2023); <b>Dominican Republic</b> (2, ref year 2014); <b>Honduras</b> (3, ref year 2023); <b>Guatemala</b> (3, ref year 2023)   |

A short presentation was provided by Mr. Yann Laurent with an update on the progress of the socio-economic data collection pilot initiatives, which are integral to one of the project's outputs. He noted that the pilot in St Kitts & Nevis had recently concluded its data collection stage; however, as analysis has yet to commence, no outputs were currently available for presentation. This was corroborated by the representative from St Kitts & Nevis, who indicated that data entry would be completed by the second week of February. The supplementary pilot project planned for Grenada remains pending due to ongoing administrative delays.

## **Breakout Groups Sessions**

Over two days, different breakout groups met to review draft recommendations that will be presented at the upcoming SAG and Commission meetings. These recommendations stem from work completed as part of the GCP/SLC/225/EC project. Below are summaries of the sessions and their outcomes.

### **Breakout CSL Working Group**

The breakout CSLWG discussions confirmed broad regional consensus on the need to strengthen and harmonise management measures for Caribbean spiny lobster fisheries, while recognizing important national and subregional specificities. Significant progress has been made in recognising essential conservation and management measures, particularly focusing on closed seasons, minimum size restrictions, safeguarding berried females, and protecting vulnerable periods. Nevertheless, effective implementation remains uneven, particularly in small-scale fisheries, due to limitations in data collection, monitoring, enforcement capacity, and socio-economic considerations affecting fishing communities, including indigenous groups.

The discussions further highlighted that robust, harmonised data systems are a prerequisite for advancing stock assessment, setting effort controls or catch limits, and addressing IUU fishing. While some countries have made progress in licensing, reporting, and quota systems, regional comparability and analytical capacity remain weak. The group considered that the establishment of a structured monitoring and evaluation framework of the MARPLESCA Plan implementation and sustained capacity development and project support, including training and use of regional tools, and alignment with ongoing initiatives are therefore critical to ensure adaptive, science-based management and long-term sustainability of the fishery.

#### **Key Messages**

- Regional agreement exists on core management and conservation measures for Caribbean spiny lobster, but harmonisation and effective implementation require renewed institutional and technical support.
- Improved data collection and reporting in artisanal fisheries is essential to underpin stock assessments, effort controls, and informed management decisions.
- Protection of reproductive capacity, including large spawners, is widely supported but needs additional research, guidance, and compliance mechanisms.
- Addressing IUU fishing in small-scale contexts requires practical, data-driven approaches integrated with traceability and monitoring systems.
- A regional M&E framework for the MARPLESCA Plan Implementation, supported by agreed indicators and national reporting, is necessary to track progress and guide adaptive management.
- Targeted capacity development, use of regional tools (e.g. WECAFC DCRF), and alignment with FAO-led and partner initiatives are critical to ensure sustainability and regional coherence.
- Participants supported the draft recommendations to SAG and WECAFC, agreeing they included the main points for the commission's review (see Annex 3).

## Breakout IUU Group

The main point of discussion included:

### 1. Dr. Shelley Clarke's review of the methodology used for IUU risk characterization and quantification of the Caribbean Spiny Lobster fisheries in Nicaragua (NIC) and St. Kitts and Nevis (SKN) pilots;

- Clarification on the universal IUU indicator framework
- Discussion on the development of the shortlist of IUU risks
- Review of and discussion on the lessons learned from the pilots

### 2. Specific points emphasized during discussions included:

- the work done in the pilots (NIC & SKN) was more about the demonstration of the methodology and how it had to be adapted to specifically suit CSL in the Caribbean region
- the methodology could be applied to/adapted for other countries and/or species
- the indicator approach is much more relevant to small island development states (SIDS)/developing countries and their dependencies (e.g. small islands), small-scale fisheries (SSF) and in instances where data may be limited or poor
- the recognition that it is particularly challenging for SIDS to prepare estimates, therefore, the indicator approach is one that is worthy of consideration
- the acknowledgement that fisheries crimes can occur because of IUU and as such, they too can be tracked as indicators
- the continued challenge of a lack of exchange of data and information across and within countries (regionally and inter-agency)
- the importance of data and addressing the related challenges (e.g. acquisition, sharing etc.) could help with the development of standardized regional indicators

### 3. Review, discussion and revision of recommendations for future work by FAO

1. Seek opportunities for conducting **additional expert-facilitated pilots of the IUU fishing risk characterization methods**, including in other fisheries of regional importance, to further demonstrate their practicality across a range of threats (simple to complex), jurisdictional environments (single to multi-agency/State) and scales (sub-national to regional)
  2. Build on existing IUU fishing risk characterization results, either those already completed (e.g. SKN) or those to be completed under Recommendation 1, to **formulate an initial set of IUU fishing indicators**, including calculation algorithms and current values, that can be used as a tool by fisheries authorities to track trends in high-risk threats over time
  3. **Produce stepwise instructions and easy-to-use worksheets** illustrating the methods applied in the pilots to facilitate independent application of the methods by fisheries authorities
  4. **Combine Recommendations 1 through 3 as a package of work** that would a) produce simple, stand-alone guidance materials, b) train national authorities to use the materials through an in-country guided pilot risk characterization exercise and/or which c) culminates in the development of an initial set of indicators suitable for use as an ongoing monitoring tool.
3. **Review and amendments to the draft recommendation to WECAFC 21 (including for endorsement by SAG XIV):**

- the draft recommendation to WECAFC was discussed and revised based on the discussion to review the draft document (see Annex 4)
- agreed text/language was added with the purpose of capturing the key points discussed
- it was agreed that the WECAFC recommendation document would be shared with participants for further input and discussion on Day 3

On Day 3 there were approximately 16 participants in attendance and the main points of discussion included:

**1. Review and discussion of the WECAFC recommendation:**

- Participants agreed with the draft cover note inclusive of the amendments; the background captured both the background work and context of IUU risk characterization as well as the wealth of discussion of the previous day
- Participants also agreed with the preamble inclusive of the amendments
- Participants agreed with the draft recommendations to the SAG and were of the opinion it captured the salient points to be put forward to the commission for consideration and acceptance (see Annex 4)

**Breakout FDS Group**

The group conducted a review of document WECAFC DCRF ver 1.1, considering a range of proposed amendments that will not be enumerated in this report. The principal areas examined and recommended by the group are as follows:

- V1.0 WECAFC DCRF Main body and Appendices endorsed at WECAFC 18 (July 2022),
- Need identified to review the full DCRF and Appendices for syntactical issues
- Need identified to incorporate **new agreements on statistical subareas** delineations agreed since FDS WG2 (Conclusion meeting from the second working group meeting) (Appendix 2)
- Need for review and **update of Appendix 3** (WECAFC List of Aquatic Species), to reflect coding issues for a few species, add some missing species, and reclassify some species to the Group 3 species (ICCAT species).
- **Need to inform Appendix 6 for CSL** (Biological references, conversions and standards) since FDS WG2 (Conclusion meeting)

The draft recommendation for SAG is in Annex 5.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The meeting was conducted in a hybrid format, accommodating both in-person and online attendees. It is noted that several key nations involved in Caribbean spiny lobster fishing were absent. Three working groups, CSL, IUU, and FDS convened as part of output 4 from the GCP/SLC/225/EC project to review the implementation. The CSL group evaluated the MARPLESCA plan along with management and conservation measures; the IUU fishing group implemented two pilot projects in Nicaragua and St Kitts & Nevis to assess IUU fishing practices; and the data and statistics group is currently preparing an updated version of the DCRF documentation.

Plenary sessions were used for general presentations and discussions, while breakout groups focused on drafting recommendations specific to each group. These drafts are preliminary and

will undergo further discussion during upcoming online sessions. It appears that the next SAG and WECAFC meeting are scheduled for 2027, giving all groups time throughout 2026 to refine their suggestions. FAO has agreed to facilitate virtual meetings, enabling working group conveners to propose suitable dates and agendas. Additionally, each of them already has an approved work plan for 2025-2027, which was endorsed at the commission's 20th meeting held in Jamaica.

The potential to propose and obtain approval on prioritization of GEF9 proposals was also noted and discussed. This initiative, originally requested by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and supported by the Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM), is structured around three key axes:

- Update knowledge on specie population status (use of a research vessel at the regional level)
- Reinforce capacity to monitor stock exploitation (including assessment of IUU level and socioeconomic data)
- Monitor impact of evidence-based policy on fisher communities

This initiative for potential funding by GEF aims for Mexico to provide a research vessel for regional use as the Nansen vessel initially targeted, is not available. FAO will hold further consultations in February 2026 to finalize the proposal.

On another note, a change in conveners was announced: Mr Manuel Pérez is leaving the CSL group as convener and will be replaced by Mr José Otilio Alvarez from Mexico. In the IUU fishing group, Mr Peter Murray is handing over to Ms Sanya Compton, both belong to CRFM. Both new conveners will be responsible for following up on the recommendations prepared at this meeting and preparing the final proposal to be submitted to SAG in 2027.

# ANNEXES

## Annex 1. Meeting Agenda

### **Joint meeting of the Working Groups on Spiny Lobster, IUU Fishing and Fisheries Data and Statistics**

**3 – 6 February 2026**

**GCP /SLC/225/EC Project**

#### **Agenda**

#### **Day 1: Tuesday, 3 February 2026 — Project Overview and Presentation of CSL, IUU and FDS Preparatory workshops outcomes**

##### **08:30 - 08:45 — In-person participant registration, logistics and housekeeping**

- 09:30 - 10:00 — Opening remarks & meeting objectives overview (WECAFC Chair)
- 10:00 - 11:30 — Plenary Session: Spiny Lobster management, IUU fishing characterizations and FDS WG. Main outputs to date
  - MARPLESCA Plan: recommended revisions and management and conservation recommendations (CSLWG convener)
  - IUU fishing characterization and quantification. Outputs and recommendations from Nicaragua and St Kitts & Nevis pilot surveys (IUU-RWG convener + SCC)
  - Socioeconomic data collection in CSL fisheries. Outputs and recommendations from Nicaragua and St. Kitts & Nevis and Grenada pilots (FDS convener)
  - Overview DCRF Main Body and Appendices changes (FDS-WG convener, FDS-WG Subareas task lead)
  - DCRF Appendix 6 additions for CSL (FDS-WG convener)
- **11:30 - 11:45 — Break and Group Photo**
- 11:45 - 12:45 — Plenary Session continued: for Spiny Lobster, IUU Fishing, and Fisheries Data and Statistics (FDS) WG. Presentation of the outputs (cont.)
- **12:45 - 13:45 — Lunch**
- 13:45 – 14:45 — Plenary Session (cont.): Further discussion on Spiny Lobster management, IUU fishing characterizations and FDS-WG
- **14:45 - 15:00 — Break**
- 15:00 -16:00 — Plenary open discussion and focus on the definition of key issues not covered on Day 1

#### **Day 2: Wednesday, 4 February 2026 — Plenary Cross-Group Discussions**

- 09:00 - 10:30 — Breakout: Group Introductions & Initial Discussions (groups meet)
  - Group 1: CSL WG –review assessment report and review new and updated accomplishments for CSL under the FIRMS process
  - Group 2: IUU-RWG Fishing –review IUU risk assessment report
  - Group 3: FDS-WG: review DCRF v1.1 Tasks IV and VI, Appendix 6
    - Gather notes particularly on challenges/issues on implementations
- **10:30 - 10:45 — Break**

- 10:45 - 12:30 — Breakout: Group meetings (cont.). Identification of main recommendations to SAG XIV (2027). Groups meet separately to identify their individual group's specific recommendations
- **12:30 - 13:30 — Lunch**
- 13:30 - 15:00 — Breakout: Group meetings (continue discussion of recommendations to SAGXIV (2027) cont.)
- **15:00 - 15:15 — Break**
- 15:15 - 17:00 — Plenary: Groups presents initial recommendations to all groups
- 17:00 — End of Meeting Day 2

**Day 3: Thursday, 5 February 2026 — Strategy building & joint planning**

- 09:00 - 10:30 — Working Group Sessions (final revision of Draft Recommendations to SAG XIV)-individual groups refine the draft recommendations
- **10:30 - 10:45 — Break**
- 10:45 – 11:30 — Plenary: All Groups feedback (Share and Refine Drafts with Other Groups)
- 11:30-12:30 -----Plenary: Joint Groups Actions, Planning (Collaborative Dialogue on issues, roadblocks)
- **12:30 - 13:30 — Lunch**
- 13:30 - 15:00 — Preparation of Final Reports & Presentations. (Conveners of each group work)
- 15:15 - 17:00 — Breakout Groups: Finalization of Individual Working Group (Main findings, recommendations, anticipated issues)

**Day 4: Friday, 6 February 2026 — Reporting, conclusions & next Steps**

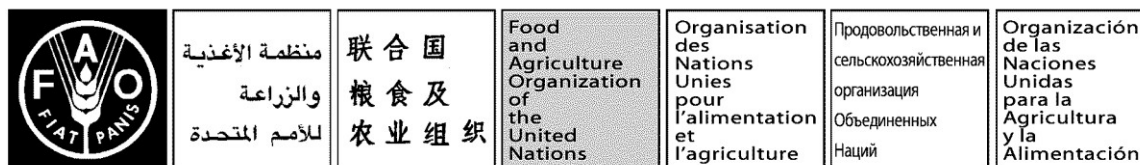
- 09:00 - 10:30 — Plenary: Group Presentations of findings, timetables, and recommendations
- **10:30 - 10:45 — Break**
- 10:45 - 12:30 — Discussion: Implementation, potential partnerships, and implementation implications
- **12:30 - 13:30 — Lunch**
- 13:30 - 15:00 — **Closing Remarks & Next Steps**

Annex 2 Provisional list of participants

| <b>PROVISIONAL PARTICIPANTS FOR THE CSL-IUU-FDS WECAFC WGs</b> |                                       |   |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| <b>COUNTRY/ORG</b>   | <b>NAME</b>                           | <b>POSITION</b>   |
| <b>Brazil</b>  | <b>Adayse Bossolani da Guarda</b>     | General Coordinator for Coastal-Marine Participatory Management                 |
|  | <b>Edilene Pinheiro Ferreira</b>      | Division Chief, Department of Fisheries Territories and Management              |
|  | <b>Dian Barreto da Cruz</b>           | Division Chief, Department of Fish Products Industry                            |
|  | <b>Caio Faro</b>                      | Biologist, Department of Industrial, Recreational and Sport Fishing             |
|  | <b>Thamires Bride</b>                 | General Coordinator for Industrial, Recreational and Sport Fisheries Management |
| <b>Colombia</b>  | <b>Anthony Rojas Archbold</b>         | Regional Bogotá / San Andrés  |
|  | <b>Carlos Augusto Borda</b>           | Regional Bogotá   |
|  | <b>Carlos Guillermo Barreto Reyes</b> | Technical Directorate of Inspection and Surveillance (DTIV)                     |
|  | <b>Claudia Liliana Sanchez</b>        | Technical Directorate of Administration and Promotion                           |
|  | <b>Henry Gómez</b>                    | Technical Directorate of Inspection and Surveillance (DTIV)                     |
|  | <b>Yudy Sanchez</b>                   | Technical Directorate of Inspection and Surveillance (DTIV)                     |
|  | <b>Wilberto Angulo Viveros</b>        | Office of Knowledge Generation and Information (OGCI)                           |
|  | <b>Luis José Alvarez Vega</b>         | Advisor to the General Directorate  |
|  | <b>Diana Marcela Alvarez Rojas</b>    | Advisor to the General Directorate  |
| <b>Cuba</b>  | <b>Ofelia Morales Fadragas</b>        | Subdirectora de Pesqueria   |
|  | <b>Juan Manuel García Alum</b>        | Director General  |
|  | <b>Guillermo Quintana Cañizares</b>   | Director de Calidad y Desarrollo  |
|  | <b>Midalys Naranjo Blanco</b>         | Viceministra Minal  |
| <b>Dominican Republic</b>                                      | <b>Angela Gonzalez</b>                | Standards and Regulation Analyst  |

| <b>PROVISIONAL PARTICIPANTS FOR THE CSL-IUU-FDS WECAFC WGs</b> |                               |   |
|--|-------------------------------|---|
| <b>COUNTRY/ORG</b>   | <b>NAME</b>                   | <b>POSITION</b>   |
| <b>France</b>  | <b>Clemence Larrat</b>        | Project Manager for the Mediteranian/North-West Atlantic/West Central Atlantic, Director Genereal for Mairtime Affairs, Fisheries and Aquaculture |
| <b>Honduras</b>  | <b>Marco Osorto Nunez</b>     | Head of Research and Technology Transfer  |
| <b>Jamaica</b>   | <b>Kimberlee Cooke Panton</b> | Senior Planning, Development and Management   |
| <b>Mexico</b>  | <b>Isabel Robles</b>          | WECAFC Chair  |
| <b>Panama</b>  | <b>Katusca Dixon</b>          | Biologist   |
| <b>Saint Kitts and Nevis</b>                                   | <b>Andrea Browne</b>          | Head of Research and Development Unit   |
| <b>Saint Lucia</b>   | <b>Patricia Hubert-Medar</b>  | Data Management Officer   |
|  | <b>Charlie Prospere</b>       | Fisheries Biologist   |
|  | <b>Monique Calderon</b>       | Fisheries Biologist   |
| <b>Saint Vincent and the Grenadines</b>                        | <b>Cheryl Jardine-Jackson</b> | Fisheries Officer   |
|  | <b>Allsion Thomas</b>         | Senior Fisheries Assistant, Data Unit   |
|  | <b>Paul Robertson</b>         | Immigration Officer III   |
|  | <b>Chimell Martin</b>         | Fisheries Officer   |
| <b>Suriname</b>  | <b>Tomas Willems</b>          | Research and Statistical Division   |
| <b>Trinidad and Tobago</b>                                     | <b>Lara Ferreira</b>          | Fisheries Officer   |
|  | <b>Esther Tobias-Clarke</b>   |   |
|  | <b>Jenise Kirk</b>            |   |
|  | <b>Kiriwn Sampson</b>         |   |
|  | <b>Recardo Mieux</b>          |   |
|  | <b>Elizabeth Mohammed</b>     | Director of Fisheries (Ag)  |
| <b>United States of America</b>                                | <b>Kent Laborde</b>           | Foreign Affairs Specialist, Office of International Affairs, Trade and Commerce   |
|  | <b>Maria Lopez</b>            | Lead/Council Liaison, Sustainable Fisheries Division/Caribbean  |
|  | <b>Carly Daiek</b>            |   |
| <b>Venezuela</b>   | <b>Alexandra Natera</b>       | Marine Biologist, Artisanal Maritime Fishing Line Directorate   |

| <b>PROVISIONAL PARTICIPANTS FOR THE CSL-IUU-FDS WECAFC WGs</b> |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>COUNTRY/ORG</b>   | <b>NAME</b>                                 | <b>POSITION</b>  |
|  | <b>Giovanna Giandolfi</b>                   | Marine Biologist, Director of the Artisanal Maritime Fishing Line                          |
|  | <b>Arlis Salas</b>                          | Director of the Multilateral Affairs Line, Office of Integration and International Affairs |
|  | <b>Arvin Rodriguez</b>                      | Analyst of the COPACO-MPPPA desk   |
| <b>Observers (partners/individual)</b>                         | <b>NAME</b>                                 | <b>POSITION</b>  |
| <b>CNFO</b>  | <b>Vernel Nicholls</b>                      | Public Relations Officer   |
|  | <b>Devon Stephen</b>                        | Chair, CNFO  |
|  | <b>Adrian LaRoda</b>                        | CNFO Board Member  |
|  | <b>Nadine Nembhard</b>                      | Administrative Office  |
| <b>CRFM</b>  | <b>Sanya Compton</b>                        | Programme Manager, Climate Change and Blue Economy, Policy Planning and Management         |
| <b>GCFI</b>  | <b>Alejandro Acosta</b>                     | Chairman of Program Committee, Board of Directors  |
| <b>IFREMER</b>   | <b>Julie Duchene</b>                        | Advisor  |
| <b>IMPACS</b>  | <b>Shane Bovell</b>                         | Maritime Analyst   |
|  | <b>Virun Lutchman</b>                       | Environmental Crime Lead   |
|  | <b>Tenika Griffith</b>                      | Environmental Crime Analyst  |
|  | <b>Melanie Garib</b>                        | Environmental Crime Analyst  |
| <b>OSPESCA</b>   | <b>Manuel Perez</b>                         | CSL Convener   |
| <b>RSS</b>   | <b>Lieutenant Commander Rolerick Sobers</b> | Regional Maritime Officer  |
|  | <b>Ms Leona Harewood</b>                    | Administrative Assistant   |
| <b>FAO HQ &amp; Field Staff/Consultants</b>                    |   |  |
|  | <b>Yvette Diei Ouadi</b>                    | Fishery and Aquaculture Officer/WECAFC Secretary   |
|  | <b>Yann Laurent</b>                         | Consultant - Fisheries Statistics & Management Information Systems                         |
|  | <b>Marcelo Vasconcellos</b>                 | Fishery Resources Officer  |
|  | <b>Nancie Cummings</b>                      | WECAFC FDS-WG Convener and SAG member  |
|  | <b>Peter Murray</b>                         | WECAFC RWG-IUU Convener  |
|  | <b>Aureliano Gentile</b>                    |  |
|  | <b>James Geehan</b>                         |  |
|  | <b>Shelley Clarke</b>                       |  |



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|--|
| <b>WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION (WECAFC)</b>  |
| <b>Joint meeting of the Working Groups on Spiny Lobster, IUU Fishing and Fisheries Data and Statistics</b>                 |
| <b>Bridgetown, Barbados, 3-6 February 2026</b>   |
| <b>Draft Recommendation</b>  |
| <b>CRFM/WECAFC/OSPESCA/CFMC CARIBBEAN SPINY LOBSTER WORKING GROUP “ ON THE MARPLESCA PLAN REVISION AND IMPLEMENTATION”</b> |

#### Cover note

The Regional Caribbean Spiny Lobster Management Plan (MARPLESCA Plan), adopted at the 17th WECAFC session in 2019, brings together efforts to manage Caribbean spiny lobster across the region and encourages collaboration between member countries. The plan includes various strategies for managing and protecting lobster resources, as well as outlining approaches for research and monitoring fisheries. A major focus is on making sure management and conservation practices are consistent throughout the region. Additionally, the plan requires that both its actions and outputs be reviewed every five years.

The revision of the MARPLESCA Plan is essential to ensure the resource's long-term sustainability. This process accommodates evolving biological, social, and fishing contexts, while integrating enhanced governance practices, advancements in fishing technologies, and adherence to the recommendations outlined in the WECAFC Strategic Plan 2022-2027 and the Small Scale Fisheries Guidelines.

Some key aspects include:

- Sustainability and Biology: Assessment models and resource management need to be updated based on current biological data, including accurate sampling to adjust exploitation strategies.
- Governance and Compliance: The revision aligns actions with the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and strengthens monitoring and control to prevent illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and improve long-term sustainability.

- **Dynamic Adaptation:** As lobster is a shared resource, the plan must be a dynamic instrument that responds to the socio-economic situation of fishers and environmental changes.
- **Integration of Recommendations:** The COPACO Strategic Plan 2022-2027 highlights the need to improve governance and support small-scale fisheries, which justifies the revision of current management frameworks.

The review of the MARPLESCA Plan was finalised in 2024 and presented in a document prepared under output 2, 'Conservation and management measures for Spiny Lobster defined at the WECAFC level to combat IUU fishing in the region,' as part of the GCP/SLC/225/EC project funded by DG MARE. It reviews national-level management measures for the Caribbean spiny lobster and compares the regional management plan (MARPLESCA) with sub-regional (Regulation OSP-02-09, St. George's Declaration) and regional instruments (WECAFC recommendations). The report concludes with recommendations for the CSL WG to improve the plan implementation and promote enhanced harmonised management measures across the whole WECAFC region.

The recommendations and actions were presented in July 2025 to the WECAFC Caribbean Spiny Lobster Working Group and deemed appropriate to be submitted in the next Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) and WECAFC meetings as they will contribute to enhance management and conservation measures and a better plan implementation with new monitoring and evaluation processes if adopted.

Key messages are:

1. **The sustainability of the Caribbean spiny lobster depends on regional harmonisation:** The coexistence of heterogeneous national measures for shared stocks reduces management effectiveness, hinders enforcement and may encourage IUU fishing.
2. **IUU fishing continues to pose a significant risk to the CSL fishery:** The limited quantification/characterization of IUU fishing, especially in artisanal fisheries, introduces a high degree of uncertainty into stock assessments and the effectiveness of management measures.
3. **Data gaps limit science/evidence-based management:** Deficiencies persist in biological, catch, effort and socio-economic data, restricting the application of stock assessments and the definition of scientific reference points.
4. **The integration of small-scale fisheries into data systems is a priority:** Strengthening reporting and monitoring systems in the small-scale subsector is essential for a comprehensive view of fisheries at the national and regional levels.
5. **The WECAFC DCRF is a key tool for advancing regional standardisation on data collection.**

## Preamble

The Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC),

**RECALLING** that the objective of the Commission is to promote the effective conservation, management and development of the living marine resources within the area of competence of the Commission, in accordance with the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, and address common problems of fisheries management and development faced by members of the Commission;

**NOTING** with concern the ongoing challenges in ensuring sustained harvests of the Spiny Lobster (*Panulirus argus*), while recognizing the ecosystem value of these stocks and the increased need for further development of regional collaboration and harmonization of the management of this important regional resource;

**MINDFUL** of the high socio-economic importance of the spiny lobster fisheries for the WECAFC area, its contribution to export earnings, employment and coastal livelihoods;

**RECALLING** the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous People Rights, as in several countries of the region indigenous people conduct lobster fishing;

**RECOGNIZING** the important step taken by the OSPESCA in preparing the Regional Management and Conservation Plan of Caribbean Spiny Lobster, within the framework of the OSPESCA Ecolobster+ sub-project, which was adopted in the WECAFC 17<sup>th</sup> session in 2019;

**RECOGNIZING** the St. George's Declaration on Conservation, Management and Sustainable Use of the Caribbean Spiny Lobster (*Panulirus argus*) adopted by the CRFM Ministerial Council in 2015, which harmonises lobster fisheries management measures within the CRFM membership;

**FURTHER RECOGNIZING** the continued efforts by the CRFM members and other major lobster fisheries countries in the WECAFC region to manage lobster fisheries sustainably in their waters;

**DEEPLY APPRECIATING** the contribution of the European Union through the GCP /SLC/225/EC project to enhance data collection and monitoring for sustainable spiny lobster fisheries and concurrently develop practical approaches to characterize illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU) with focus on small-scale fisheries in the WECAFC region;

**RECALLING** that most WECAFC members have signed the Memorandum of Understanding enabling the creation of a Coordination Mechanism to support Integrated Ocean Governance in the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems (CLME+ region) with the support of the UNDP/GEF/UNOPS PROCARIBE+ Project which has also included Caribbean Spiny Lobster in actions regarding seafood traceability and spiny lobster trap fishing;

**FURTHER RECALLING** that managing and conserving the Caribbean spiny lobster is essential for maintaining ecological balance and supporting the socio-economic well-being of the WECAFC region. The MARPLESCA plan, adopted during WECAFC's 17<sup>th</sup> session in 2019, represents a significant step toward a unified, regional approach to sustainable spiny lobster management. However, despite its potential, the plan's implementation remains limited, with many countries yet to fully adopt its measures

**FURTHER RECALLING** Recommendation WECAFC/16/2016/2 "On spiny lobster management and conservation in the WECAFC area" and the recommendations provided by the Caribbean Spiny Lobster Working Group after reviewing the MARPLESCA Plan revision and implementation;

## **Action Items**

### **Recommendations to the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG)**

SAG is invited to review, validate, and provide scientific guidance on the following:

#### **Management and conservation measures**

- Endorse the **harmonisation of closed seasons** among countries exploiting the same Caribbean spiny lobster stocks, with aligned timing and duration, and recommend targeted research where current dates require revision.

- Support the **harmonisation of minimum size limits** within shared stock areas and promote research and pilot adoption of **maximum size limits** to protect large spawners.
- Recommend the **regional prohibition of catch, landing, and sale of berried females or with tar spots and moulting individuals**.
- Support the **regional prohibition of spearguns** in Caribbean spiny lobster fisheries.
- Promote improved **recording of fishing effort in trap/pots fisheries**, including systematic inventories of traps/pots at the start and end of each fishing season.
- Encourage discussion on the **future feasibility of national catch quotas**, supported by enhanced data collection and stock assessment capacity.
- Support the **ban on sale and export of Caribbean spiny lobster meat without shell** as a measure to strengthen traceability and combat IUU fishing.

#### **Monitoring and evaluation**

- Validate a **regional Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework** for the implementation of the MARPLESCA Plan, including agreed reporting periodicity, core indicators, and standard reporting structure.

#### **Capacity Building**

- Promote the development and use of **biological, fishery, and socio-economic indicators** (e.g. Biomass, Fishery Mortality, CPUE, size structure, spawning indicators among others) to assess the effectiveness of management measures and stock status.
- Promote training and use of the **WECAFC DCRF (Data Collection Reference Framework)** in all Caribbean spiny lobster countries as a tool to harmonise and improve data collection. Emphasis should be done in Spanish-speaking countries.
- Training in **stock assessment models and statistical analysis**, to enable comparable assessments across countries.
- Preparing guidelines for **developing national Caribbean spiny lobster management plans**, which include operational management objectives and reference points including a methodology for monitoring and evaluating the plan.
- Encourage the application of **FAO-aligned and data-limited assessment approaches**, adapted to national contexts.
- **Mobilize resources and prepare regional initiatives** to assist the Members in the implementation of the above actions and recommendation

#### **Recommendations to WECAFC**

The WECAFC Commission is invited to:

##### **Regional policy and coordination**

- **Encourage the progressive harmonization of management and conservation measures** for Caribbean spiny lobster stocks shared among WECAFC members, with particular attention to closed seasons, minimum and maximum size limits, protection of reproductive and vulnerable life stages, gear restrictions and relevant market measures.
- Strengthen collaboration among the **Caribbean spiny lobster, IUU, and Fisheries Data and Statistics Working Groups**, building on the joint WG approach established under the project.

##### **Data collection, traceability, and IUU fishing**

- **Promote the integration of IUU fishing considerations into management frameworks**, including strengthened monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) systems and the development of traceability approaches adapted to small-scale fisheries

- Promote adoption and scaling-up of the **WECAFC Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF)** and compatible digital tools, with emphasis on **artisanal and small-scale fisheries**.
- Encourage Members to strengthen **registration, licensing, and reporting systems** for both vessels and fishers across all fleet segments.

#### **Capacity development and projects**

- Support targeted **capacity development** in stock assessment, statistics, and socio-economic data collection, adapted to varying data availability and national capacities.
- Encourage the development of **guidelines for national Caribbean spiny lobster management plans**, including operational objectives, reference points, and Monitoring & Evaluation methodologies.
- **Invite FAO and WECAFC members to mobilize financial and technical resources**, through regional and subregional projects, to address identified data and capacity gaps and ensure continuous support to the effective implementation of the MARPLESCA Plan.

### [Annex 4 Recommendation to SAG /WECAFC Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing Group](#)

#### **Cover note**

The spiny lobster fisheries in the Western Central Atlantic (FAO Fishing Area 31) are one of the region's most valuable marine resources. Reported catches peaked in 1999 at over 36,400 t and though fluctuating annually averaged approximately 28,000 t through 2018. After that point, annual catches from the region have been reported in a lower range of 23,000-24,000 t through 2023. While there are numerous factors which may have contributed to recent catches falling below the long-term regional average, IUU fishing in the form of unlicensed take, violation of closed season and size limits, and encroachment by foreign vessels are long-standing concerns.

It was expected that through collaboration with the regional fishery and data statistics working group activities could be implemented using a set of harmonized procedures set out in the WECAFC Data Collection Reference Framework. In order to align the DCRF with the specifics of artisanal fisheries, new tools or instruments may be developed. The lobster fishery would be used as a case study to develop a clear and simple/feasible/practical approach and implementation guide for characterizing and where feasible, estimate levels of IUU fishing, taking into account the need for capacity building, cost effectiveness as well as the need for information sharing via the WECAFC WECAFIS. FAO's Technical Guidelines on Methodologies and Indicators for the estimation of the Magnitude and Impact of IUU were to be used to the extent practical.

**Two pilot studies were carried out**—in Nicaragua (NIC) in January 2025 and Saint Kitts & Nevis (SKN) in May 2025—trialing the application of IUU fishing risk characterization techniques to Caribbean spiny lobster (*Panulirus argus*) fisheries of different scales (artisanal or industrial). Quantification of the catch associated with IUU fishing activities, though acknowledged to be of interest, was not the goal of the pilots per se, particularly as it could not be confirmed *a priori* that sufficient data would be available to support robust estimates. Instead, the pilots aimed to conduct an initial scoping exercise to identify and rank specific activities, their potential impact and available data sources, and to assess whether and how quantification could be conducted. Based on the outcomes reported there, recommendations for further application of the approach to other fisheries in the region, as well as further work in the two pilot countries, were presented.

Published FAO technical guidelines on estimating the magnitude and impact of IUU fishing were used to derive the methodology for the pilot studies. The FAO guidelines are primarily designed for fisheries that have already decided whether to attempt an estimate of the quantity (or value) of losses due to IUU fishing (FAO 2023c), or to develop a set of indicators which aim to measure several different signals of whether conditions are getting better or worse. Therefore, before application to NIC and SKN the FAO methods needed to be elaborated to define the preliminary steps necessary to characterize risks and determine which type of quantification approach would be most appropriate.

The purpose of the risk characterization is two-fold: first, it helps to identify the IUU fishing components that are desirable to include in the quantification; and second, it helps to determine which quantification approach best suits the needs of fishery managers. In the first case, the quantification will clearly need to include the high impact risks unless there are major data limitations that prevent this. Medium impact risks should also be included to the extent that data are available and the exercise does not become overly complex. Low impact risks can be excluded from the quantification exercise but should be re-visited periodically to verify whether they remain low.

When selecting a quantification approach, one overarching consideration is whether an amount of IUU fishing, in number of lobster or their value, is required. If so, estimation will be the preferred approach even if data quantity, quality and availability are limited (FAO 2023c). However, this does not preclude also pursuing an indicators approach (FAO 2024). Risks are not expected to remain static over time, and future risk characterizations will change accordingly. In such cases, an indicators approach is more accommodating as it can add or remove indicators over time, and by separately tracking which IUU fishing components are increasing or decreasing it can help focus the MCS system on emerging threats. Conversely, an estimation approach is a more resource-intensive exercise designed to produce a snapshot of current conditions and may be highly uncertain depending on the data and assumptions required. Furthermore, although the estimation can be repeated at a later date, if the risks included in the estimate shift from one point in time to another, the estimates may not be directly comparable and thus the ability to discern a trend is impaired.

Recent work done by the CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS) in collaboration with Auxilium Worldwide has reiterated that IUU fishing is a treat against sovereignty and that the food security impacts may actually be greater than the economic impacts; thus, the importance of characterizing IUU fishing risks cannot be overemphasised.

A first and critical step in IUU fishing risk characterization is to define the scope of the exercise. This involves specifying a number of filters which determine what IUU fishing activities are to be included and excluded. Considerations include which fisheries or sectors, species, areas/regions, and timeframes should be covered by the characterization and which illegal, unreported and/or unregulated activities should be included.

The second step in the risk characterization involves considering all of the potential ways that IUU fishing could occur and deciding which are important to quantify. For example, it may be generally understood that inaccurate reporting is an issue in a given fishery, but is this related to lack of reporting, under-reporting or mis-identification of species? Does it relate to catch or effort, or both? Does it occur in logbooks, landings or other records? To what extent does it constitute non-compliance by fishers or does it refer to lack of reporting systems? Attaining this level of precision is critical for ensuring that all relevant aspects of IUU fishing are considered, avoiding double-counting and identifying data sources that can help quantify each issue.

The risk characterization methodology used was based on existing FAO guidance documents but is presented in those documents as an important prologue to estimates or indicators, rather than an independent exercise explained in a detailed, step-by-step manner. For the pilots, FAO experts drew upon and elaborated the relevant sections of the FAO guidance documents, facilitated the discussions and processed the information into an easily understood format.

While that work could serve as a model for future pilots, in the interest of cost-effectiveness, ideally national staff could rely on detailed guidance materials to conduct risk characterization exercises independently. It was therefore recommended to expand the guidance to include new components, inter alia how to develop the “long” list of potential IUU fishing activities; how to formulate the “short” list to cover all potential risks and yet avoid overlaps (e.g. assessing essentially the same risk under two different categories); how to maintain a focus on IUU fishing versus other types of illicit behavior (e.g. smuggling of legally caught lobster); and how to develop a consistent process for categorizing risks as being of low, medium or high impact. These materials could be developed, added to the basic framework, and published as another volume in the FAO series on quantifying IUU fishing.

Many countries in the region face threats from IUU fishing but lack a clear work plan for mitigating these risks. These countries would benefit from a similar risk characterization exercise for Caribbean spiny lobster, as done for NIC and SKN. Priority sites for further piloting of the risk characterization methods could be selected based on i) the current size of the lobster fishery (catch or vessels); ii) the current value of the fishery to the national economy; iii) some qualitative measure of threat from IUU fishing at the national level (e.g. based on media reports or anecdotal evidence); iv) expressed interest and commitment of staff resources by the country.

Although the pilot work thus far has focused on Caribbean spiny lobster fisheries only, FAO’s methods for IUU fishing risk characterization, estimates and indicators are designed to be applied to all types of fisheries. It is therefore recommended to seek opportunities to apply the methods to other regional fisheries threatened by IUU fishing such as high-value CITES-listed conch, shark and sea cucumber species, or mixed fisheries being impacted by foreign vessel encroachment, over-capacity and/or uncontrolled take (CLALS 2022). As the geographic and biological scope of pilots expand, the methods introduced here should gain traction within national administrations leading to a renewed and sharpened focus on effective and measurable strategies for combatting IUU fishing.

Quantification of IUU fishing and/or the development of indicators to track trends in IUU risks whether for utilization at the national or regional level is dependent on data availability and data sharing, whether in-country among national agencies, or between and among countries. This can allow for, and facilitate, scaling of results and adaptation of methodologies based on national realities. Related to this is the need for building capacities and training without which efforts risk characterization would be ineffective.

## **Preamble**

**Recognising** that IUU fishing is a treat against sovereignty, while acknowledging that the food security impacts may actually be greater than the economic impacts

**Noting** the work on the project funded by the European Union, to Enhance data collection and monitoring for sustainable spiny lobster fisheries, and concurrently develop practical approaches to characterise illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU) with focus on small-scale fisheries in the WECAFC region, as a joint initiative between the Fisheries Data and

Statistics, Spiny Lobster and IUU joint working groups of WECAFC; and is consistent with Measure 26 of the RPOA-IUU

**Noting also** that two pilot studies were carried out—in Nicaragua (NIC) in January 2025 and Saint Kitts & Nevis (SKN) in May 2025—trialing the application of IUU fishing risk characterization techniques to Caribbean spiny lobster (*Panulirus argus*) fisheries of different scales; aimed to conduct an initial scoping exercise to identify and rank specific activities, their potential impact and available data sources, and to assess whether and how quantification could be conducted; and, that based on the outcomes reported there, recommendations for further application of the approach to other fisheries in the region, as well as further work in the two pilot countries, were presented.

**Noting further** that published FAO technical guidelines on estimating the magnitude and impact of IUU fishing were used to derive the methodology for the pilot studies.

**Recalling** that the FAO guidelines are primarily designed for fisheries that have already decided whether to attempt an estimate of the quantity (or value) of losses due to IUU fishing, or to develop a set of indicators which aim to measure several different signals of whether conditions are getting better or worse. Therefore, before application to the pilot countries, the FAO methods needed to be elaborated to define the preliminary steps necessary to characterize risks and determine which type of quantification approach would be most appropriate.

**Noting** that many countries in the region face threats from IUU fishing but lack a clear work plan for mitigating these risks. These countries would benefit from a similar risk characterization exercise as done for Caribbean spiny lobster in NIC and SKN, whether for lobster or for other species(-groups) of importance to the countries.

**ADOPTS** in conformity with Article 6 of the WECAFC Revised Statutes this **RECOMMENDATION** that:

The FAO guidance should be expanded to include new components, inter alia how to develop the “long” list of potential IUU fishing activities; how to formulate the “short” list to cover all potential risks and yet avoid overlaps (e.g. assessing essentially the same risk under two different categories); how to maintain a focus on IUU fishing versus other types of illicit behavior (e.g. smuggling of legally caught lobster); and how to develop a consistent process for categorizing risks as being of low, medium or high impact. These materials could be developed, in addition to the basic framework, and published, for example, as another volume in the FAO series on quantifying IUU fishing.

FAO should seek to support capacity building and training of Member States in the utilization of the guidance and application of the methods therein.

Member States should seek opportunities to apply scalable risk characterization methods to regional fisheries threatened by IUU fishing, including but not limited to high-value CITES-listed conch, shark and sea cucumber species, or mixed fisheries being impacted by foreign vessel encroachment, over-capacity and/or uncontrolled take.

Member States should select priority sites for further piloting of the risk characterization methods based on i) the current size of the fishery of concern (catch or vessels); ii) the current value of the fishery to the national economy; iii) some qualitative measure of threat from IUU fishing at the national level (e.g. based on media reports or anecdotal evidence); iv) expressed interest and commitment of staff resources by the country.

The risk characterization methods introduced should be used by national administrations, to the extent practicable, supporting a renewed and sharpened focus on effective and measurable strategies for combatting IUU fishing.

## Annex 5 Recommendation to SAG /WECAFC Fisheries data and Statistics Group

### **FDS WG DRAFT Recommendations to further develop for Submission to SAG on the Updated V 1.1 DCRF**

**Cover Sheet-** To be developed before report is finalized. Background on need for this recommendation relating to data and statistics for CSL fisheries

**Preamble-** To be developed before report is finalized

#### **Recommendations (Draft)**

##### **1. General-**

FDS recognized the inputs from the FAO FIRMS staff of HQ to inform information of CSL fisheries through the FIRMS process; these data on individual fisheries in the region were recognized by FDS WG as auxiliary information critical to supplementing basic statistics on Task I, II, and III statistics for CSL providing critical support in stock assessment, monitoring and evaluation

2. **Relating to editorial changes-to the DCRF V1.0 Main Body** – these changes including general text on the background and history of the development of the DCRF and Structure of the DCRF Tasks, and changes to Appendix 3- species lists . Such changes, are not of a technical nature, but more in the context of editorial and will be made on an as-needed basis and are not required to be formally reviewed by the WG or by SAG. A log will be maintained to document these chronological general changes and shared with the WG periodically.

3. The FDS WG further recommends accepting the newly revised Appendix 2 on subarea delimitations as presented at the Joint CSL-IUU-FDS Workshop-as being the most current for providing relevant and up to date consensus on FAO statistical subarea delimitations for area 31.

4. **Relating to technical changes to the DCRF Structure** – involving structural modifications to the DCRF and/or to the content of the task (e.g., extensions of a DCRF Task (e.g., revising Task IV- biological data and Task VI- socio-economic statistics) or such other major changes as adding a new task these will require review and discussion by the FDS WG.

5. **Progressing the WECAFC DCRF Task Structure template specifically through the Joint CSL-IUU-FDS project:**

a. **Towards the collection of length frequency (LF) data** including a preview of a proposed new length frequency template for the collection of individual length frequency data first to include:

- Supports renaming the current V1.0 DCRF Task IV.1 template is recommended to become DCRF Task IV.2 in V1.1 DCRF--- this template to

reflect **aggregated length frequency data across** the sample data of individual LFs for a fleet segment/mode/gear type/

- Recommend a new DCRF Task IV.1 to be accepted (within V1.1 DCRF) which will focus at collection of **individual length frequency** data (while still maintaining confidentiality of data for individual vessel information (e.g., name, registration number).
- The new revised Task IV.1- will look similar to the template presented by Blondel et. al. 2025 (FIRMS SC 14- include link to FSC ppt) reflecting individual row by row length frequency data.

| Flag State | Fishing area | Year | Month | Day | Fleet segment | Fishing mode | Gear type | Vessel name | Vessel registration number | Source |
|------------|--------------|------|-------|-----|---------------|--------------|-----------|-------------|----------------------------|--------|
|            |              |      |       |     |               |              |           |             |                            |        |

| Species | Total retained catch | Total discarded catch (in unit) | Catch unit | Amount (quantity) of sample (weight or numbers) | Sample weight unit | Measurement class | Measurement unit | Disposition | Sex | Maturity staging method | Maturity scale | Total Number (frequency) of sampled individuals by length measurement class | Sampling procedure | Data version |
|---------|----------------------|---------------------------------|------------|---|--------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------|-----|-------------------------|----------------|---|--------------------|--------------|
|         |                      |                                 |            |   |                    |                   |                  |             |     |                         |                |   |                    |              |

- Operationally, **the collection of individual length frequency data could materialize** through taking advantage of new advances in technology (e.g., camera systems) and would link to already in-use systems collecting other important statistics such as catch and effort. Critical to this success of this type of new data collection requirement implementation would be pilot studies (or desk) with the aim to explore available technologies which could facilitate meeting regional needs thus leveraging already ongoing capacities.
- The FDS WG supports the exploration of field collection procedures for acquisition of LF data that would aim to harmonize sampling across fisheries and achieve efficiencies in cost for countries while taking advantage of advance tools for collection.

**b. Extensions of DCRF V1.0 Task VI- socio-economic template**

- The current Task VI.1- VI.3 will remain as is incorporating the recent review editorial changes by Cecillia Ghesquière into DCRF V1.1.
- The FDS WG discussed and considered the collection additional data characterizing income/investment costs and operational costs and recommended to move forward with collection of these data types for WECAFC fisheries. These collection of these additional data would be implemented through adding additional subtasks on the already included Task VI variables (e.g., Task VI.4, VI.5 and VI.6) into DCRF V1.1.
  - *The FDS WG recognized the need to link these sub-tasks with proper guidance for implementation*

**6. Appendix 6- biological references for growth, natural mortality and reproduction and conversions on W-L and L-L**

- i. **Templates (tools) for use** for all WECAFC species for informing population parameters for growth, maturation and natural mortality and conversions for weight-length and length-length calculations were reviewed and the FDS WG considered and recommended them as acceptable to content (variables) required for informing such population parameters for WECAFC species.
- ii. **Informing population references for CSL**
  - a. The specific historical parameter estimates informing biological references for growth, natural mortality, reproduction, and Weight-Length and Length-Length conversions for CSL from the desk study were presented and discussed. There were no dissensions to the historical estimates presented.
  - b. It is recommended to use these historical parameter estimates from the desk study for use in CSL stock assessment and monitoring as needed and to further consider the need to update these references as capacity and resources increase recognizing that with current capacity and cost restraints such studies would most probably come from university and/or private researchers. The difficulties associated with obtaining samples from routine fishery sampling operations was considered a significant impediment to carrying out such studies (e.g., age and growth, reproduction) however, the importance for these type data specific to each country was recognized. It is recommended to explore leveraging resources across other WGs (CSL etc.), across countries and academic collaborations towards the aim to collect much needed samples for carrying out biological studies for not only CSL but scaling to other WECAFC species.
  - c. **It was noted the need** to update the historical biological studies focused directly to ageing and maturation topics as needed however- it was recommended felt that capacity efforts should first focus at collections of basic fishery length frequency (LF) data taking advantage of new advances in ICT tools and then as capacity and resources grow/improve then such studies to update these biological references (growth, maturation, natural mortality) could take place.
  - d. The need to further examine during the next intersession the path the Members wish for such implementation activities (LF collections, socio-economic data, etc.) guidance document, new ANNEXES to the DCRF.