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## TWENTY-EIGHTH FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Guatemala City, Guatemala, 26 to 30 April 2004

### REPORT OF THE XI WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION (WECAFC)

1. The Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) was established by Resolution 4/61 of the FAO Council at its Sixty-first Session held in Rome in November 1973 under Article VI (1) of the FAO Constitution. The Commission has competence to deal with all living marine resources.
2. The membership of the WECAFC is open to all Member Nations and Associate Members of FAO which notify the Director-General of their desire to be considered as members. The present members of the Commission are: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, European Community, France, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Japan, Korea (Rep. of), Mexico, Netherlands (Kingdom of), Nicaragua, Panama, Saint Christopher and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Spain, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom, United States of America, Venezuela.
3. The goal of the Commission is to promote international cooperation for the conservation, development and sustainable utilisation of the living marine resources of the Western Central Atlantic region (Wider Caribbean region). The main objectives of the Commission are to facilitate the coordination of research, to encourage education and training, to assist Member Governments in establishing rational policies and to promote the rational management of resources that are of interest for two or more countries.

#### Eleventh Session of WECAFC

4. The Eleventh Session of the WECAFC and the Eighth Session of the Committee for Development and Management of Fisheries in the Lesser Antilles were held at the Grenada Trade Centre, St George's, Grenada, from 21 to 24 October 2003.
5. Delegates from 19 WECAFC member countries and the European Community, and observers from the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Caribbean Environment Programme Regional Coordinating Unit and the Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES), attended the Sessions.

6. Given the social and economic importance of fisheries to the WECAFC member countries, the role fisheries play in their national food security, and the keen interest in regional cooperation for the conservation and management these fisheries resources facilitated through the unique and neutral forum, the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission, it was considered necessary to inform to the FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean on the outcome of the Eleventh Session of the Commission.

## **Main Decisions and Recommendations of the Commission**

### **State of Fisheries Resources**

7. Several delegations reiterated the need to improve national systems for data collection and monitoring of fisheries, stressing that improvements in this area were a high priority for the region. The need for improved enforcement of regulations by many countries was emphasized. Other issues raised included: the need for collection of information on the economic value of fisheries to demonstrate their social and economic importance to decision-makers; the requirement for stronger conservation measures throughout the region; and the role of greater international cooperation in addressing many of the problems facing fisheries conservation and utilization in the region (para. 14).

8. Several delegations expressed concern about the overall status of stocks in the WECAFC region. It was also suggested that little progress had been made in improving the situation over the last 20 years or more and that, in contrast, the status of stocks had deteriorated over this period. The need for WECAFC Members to address the problems more seriously and to look for new ways and initiatives to strengthen fisheries management throughout the region was also raised. It was agreed that while good progress had been made in raising awareness at the international and regional levels of the problems and needs in fisheries, this awareness had not been successfully transferred to the national level in many countries (para. 15).

9. A number of delegations called for increased assistance from FAO and WECAFC in the assessment of national and regional large pelagic resources and identification of shark landings, especially in cases where the sharks were landed in 'dressed' condition. The need for FAO to work with countries, CITES and relevant regional organizations in helping countries to address the CITES regulations on queen conch was raised by a number of delegations (para. 16).

### **Situation and Trends of Fisheries and in the WECAFC region**

10. Most participants agreed that countries should address IUU (Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated) fishing at a national level, particularly through the development of national plans of action and the updating of their national legislation. Fisheries management measures concerning IUU fishing must be implemented and enforced. It was also suggested that countries exchange, through the WECAFC Secretariat, lists of registered fishing vessels flying their flags and authorized to fish, as well as lists of vessels involved in IUU fishing, in order that all member countries be aware of IUU fishing in the region so that they can take appropriate measure (para.19).

11. The meeting recommended that FAO continue its work on subsidies in order to deepen the understanding of the impact of subsidies on sustainability of fisheries resources, fleet over-capacity and trade (para. 21).

### **Strategies for Increasing the Contribution of Small-Scale Capture Fisheries to Food Security and Poverty**

12. Many member countries noted that the contribution of small-scale fisheries to food security and poverty alleviation was generally overlooked and underestimated and that a major part of fish

supplies for internal consumption and export were provided by this sector. In some member countries, small-scale fishers contributed approximately 90 percent of total landings (para.23).

13. Several countries informed the Commission that poverty alleviation and food security policies were first priority for their governments and that small-scale fisheries were considered as a main contributor to food security, poverty alleviation and employment, especially in coastal and riverine communities and Caribbean SIDs (para.24).

14. The meeting also considered that open access to fisheries hampers the potential of small-scale fisheries' to contribute to food security, poverty alleviation and employment generation (para.25).

15. The meeting requested FAO to consider the possibility of convening, during the intersessional period, a consultation on the contribution of small-scale fisheries to food security and poverty alleviation in the region (para.27).

### **Intersessional Activities and Matters Referred to the Attention of the Commission**

#### *Report of the activities of the WECAFC ad hoc Working Groups*

16. The Chairperson, (Cuba) noted that the ad hoc working group on Caribbean Spiny Lobster provides a mechanism for the periodic transparent exchange of information on the spiny lobster resource. This information should be used to prepare and refine regional management plans for this species. He noted that it was essential for the group to meet periodically. In this regard, the Chairperson expressed concern about the continuity of the activities of the working group and mentioned three options to support the next meeting of the group: (i) obtain financial support from FAO or seek donations through FAO; (ii) the participating countries provide specific support; or a combination of (i) and (ii) (para.32).

17. The Commission expressed satisfaction with the work and achievements of the following WECAFC ad hoc working groups:

- Ad hoc Working Group on Shrimp and Groundfish Resources in the Brazil-Guianas Shelf;
- Ad hoc Working Group on Caribbean Spiny Lobster (*Panulirus argus*);
- Ad hoc Flyingfish Working Group of the Eastern Caribbean;
- Ad hoc Working Group on Queen conch (*Strombus gigas*); and
- Ad hoc Working Group on the Development of Sustainable Moored Fish Aggregating Device Fishing in the Lesser Antilles.

#### *Intersessional activities and follow-up actions*

18. The Commission expressed satisfaction with the follow-up activities undertaken by the Secretariat and the intersessional activities that were implemented (para.48).

#### *Progress in the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries*

19. All participants informed the meeting that their countries had undertaken actions regarding the implementation of the Code and many of them were taking steps to update their national legislations accordingly. The need for harmonizing fisheries legislations among member countries was also highlighted (para.54).

20. Many countries agreed that there was a need to define indicators to evaluate application of the Code of Conduct at the fishers level. Some countries requested assistance from FAO to hold national workshops on and to disseminate the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries at the fishers level (para.55).

### **Report of the Second Session of the Scientific Advisory Group**

21. The Commission noted the conclusions and recommendations of the second meeting of the SAG. In approving the report, the Commission asked the Secretariat to implement the recommendations taking into consideration the limited resources available to the Commission (para.59).

### **Current Strategy of WECAFC**

22. The Commission expressed satisfaction with the work and achievements of the ad hoc working groups given the limited financial resources that were at their disposal and suggested no changes in the focus of the current working groups at this stage. The need to work effectively with other relevant regional and international organizations was emphasized. In addition to the programmed activities, in the longer term the Commission should monitor regional and international developments, so as to be able to determine, if and when, additional regional activities or interventions may be required (para.62).

23. The Commission agreed to establish a WECAFC intersessional working group to explore the feasibility of strengthening regional fisheries management as well as the costs, benefits and other implications of such action (para.64).

24. The Commission agreed to include the activities envisaged under this recommendation in the Programme of Work for WECAFC for the next biennium, subject to the funds being obtained (para.66).

### **Work Programme of WECAFC**

25. Some delegations observed that the Commission should be realistic and not be advocating an ever-increasing work load given the current financial constraints being faced by the Commission (para.70).

26. Several delegations noted that Item G of the Draft Work Programme, Coordination and Liaison, especially with regional organizations working in the area of fisheries, should be accorded high priority in order to avoid duplication and to ensure optimal use of the limited human and financial resources available to the region (para.71).

27. Some delegations suggested that WECAFC member countries should participate more actively in COFI in order to attract more attention to the problems and issues facing the region and also more resources to the region (para.72).

28. The Commission adopted the Work Programme for 2003-05, and noted that its successful implementation would depend on obtaining the necessary financial resources from extra budgetary sources (para.73).

### **Introduction to Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries**

29. The value of the EAF Guidelines was acknowledged and some delegations urged FAO to prepare and distribute a simplified and summarized version of the Guidelines to facilitate dissemination and awareness of the approach. This had been successfully done in the case of the FAO Guidelines on IUU fishing (para.79).

### **Use of Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (Mcs) of Fishing as an Integral Part of Fisheries Management**

30. In view of the numerous reports of IUU Fishing in the region, and the clarifications provided by the Secretariat, there were no objections to the proposal to hold VMS Workshops, as recommended in the WECAFC region (para.86).

**Any Other Matters**

31. The Commission was informed of the Large Marine Ecosystem Project, “Sustainable Management of the Shared Living Marine Resources of the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem (CLME) and Adjacent Regions”, which was being developed by IOCARIBE for funding by the Global Environmental facility (GEF). It focuses on governance of transboundary resources (para.89).

*White Water to Blue Water*

32. The delegate of the US provided a synopsis of the White Water to Blue Water (WW2BW) initiative which was first proposed by the US delegation at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, September 2002 and presented to the Twenty-sixth Session of COFI.

***Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism***

33. The CARICOM delegate briefly explained the process of formation of the Caribbean Regional Fishery Mechanism (CRFM), a fishery body of the CARICOM, which was inaugurated in March 2003 (para.93).