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Organización
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y la
Alimentación

WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION (WECAFC)

SEVENTH SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY GROUP (SAG)

Panama City, Panama, 7-8 November 2015

Main decisions and recommendations of the 31st session of COFI and WECAFC 15

SUMMARY

This document contains highlights of the topics discussed at the 31st Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) and the 15th Session of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC). The full reports of both sessions are made available respectively as WECAFC/SAG/VII/2015/inf.5 and WECAFC/SAG/VII/2015/inf.3.

The SAG is invited to discuss the decisions and recommendations of the two meetings and propose actions from WECAFC and particularly the SAG to follow-up in 2016 -2017 on the decisions and recommendations made.

1. Thirty-first Session of the Committee on Fisheries. Rome, 9–13 June 2014

GLOBAL POLICY AND REGULATORY MATTERS FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE CONFERENCE

- i) Many Members **emphasized** the importance of the coming into force of the 2009 Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (PSMA) as soon as possible (para. 13).
- ii) The Committee **endorsed** the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) by accepting the Chair's proposal for the finalization of paragraph 6.18 (para. 17).
- iii) Many Members **emphasized** that FAO should be the centre of fisheries and aquaculture activities within the United Nations (UN) System (para. 34).
- iv) The Committee **endorsed** the Voluntary Guidelines for Flag State Performance (VGFSP) (para. 37).
- v) The Committee **recommended** that inland fishery issues be better included in national, subregional, regional and global instruments addressing water use and food security to ensure that inland capture fisheries, and the men and women depending on them for food and nutritional security, were appropriately considered (para. 47).

- vi) The Committee **reiterated** its support for FAO's work with regard to commercially exploited aquatic species of interest to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) (para. 62).
- vii) The Committee **expressed** support for FAO's collaboration with the World Trade Organization (WTO) on issues related to trade in fish and fishery products and, in particular, the fisheries subsidies negotiations (para. 63).
- viii) The Committee **reiterated** the need to promote and implement existing international instruments, agreements, plans of action and technical guidelines (para. 81).

PROGRAMME AND BUDGETARY MATTERS FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE COUNCIL

- i) The Committee **called upon** FAO to:
 - further develop the web-based questionnaire system for the monitoring of the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (the Code), together with the related data processing tools and usability features;
 - undertake a review of the contents of the questionnaire, taking into account recent developments in global fisheries and aquaculture, as well as comments already provided by respondents, and include space for complementary information to be added to each section;
 - ensure coherence of the Code questionnaire with the Sub-committees' questionnaires on trade and aquaculture, and
 - provide assistance to Members, as appropriate, to compile and submit information through the web-based questionnaire (para. 10).
- ii) The Committee **underscored** the need to continue supporting developing countries in enhancing food security through the development of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture (para. 11).
- iii) The Committee **requested** FAO to expand its efforts to effectively implement the International Guidelines on Bycatch Management and Reduction of Discards. The Committee **called** for further work to address the issue of post-harvest losses and waste in certain fisheries (para. 14).
- iv) The Committee **welcomed** FAO's proposal for a Global Assistance Programme (GAP) to support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines without delay (para. 23).
- v) The Committee **acknowledged** the FAO's Blue Growth Initiative (BGI) and many Members **expressed interest** to collaborate in this initiative (para. 32).
- vi) The Committee **encouraged** FAO to continue with the delivery of its capacity development programme to assist developing countries in strengthening and harmonizing port State measures (para. 38).
- vii) The Committee **reiterated its support for** the continued development by FAO of the Global Record of Fishing Vessels, Refrigerated Transport Vessels and Supply Vessels (Global Record) (para. 40).
- viii) The Committee **acknowledged** the importance of inland fisheries as a means towards meeting FAO's Strategic Objectives (SOs) of food security, sustainable development, poverty alleviation, stable markets and increased resilience (para. 44).
- ix) The Committee **urged** FAO to provide guidance and increase capacity development in the areas of data collection and analysis, stock assessment, management, post-harvesting, and policy development (para. 49).
- x) The Committee **expressed** support for FAO's capacity-building activities on post-harvest issues, in particular for small-scale producers and processors in developing countries (para. 54).

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- xi) The Committee **welcomed** FAO's ongoing work on value-chains and **recommended** its strengthening, especially in relation to small-scale fisheries and aquaculture (para. 55).
- xii) The Committee **took note of** paragraph 68 of the UN General Assembly Resolution on Sustainable Fisheries of 9 December 2013 on catch documentation and **welcomed** the offer by Norway to support the convening of an Expert Consultation on this issue (para. 59).
- xiii) The Committee **agreed** that FAO should continue its work on the monitoring of private standards, certification and eco-labelling schemes and undertake an analysis of their effects on fisheries management and on economic returns (para. 61).
- xiv) The Committee **reiterated** the need for FAO's continued technical assistance and engagement with national governments for the development of aquaculture and all its aspects (para. 69).
- xv) The Committee, while approving the Evaluation Framework for Assessing Conformity of Public and Private Certification Schemes with the FAO Technical Guidelines on Aquaculture Certification, **recalled** the need to address the concerns expressed by the Members on this issue at the seventh session of the Sub-Committee (para. 75).
- xvi) The Committee **welcomed** FAO's new SOs as a basis for focusing FAO's work in fisheries and aquaculture on food security, poverty reduction and sustainable management and utilization of natural resources. The Committee **stressed** that all work carried out by FAO should be consistent with the Strategic Framework, including the activities carried out under extra-budgetary funds (para. 80).
- xvii) Many Members **expressed support** for FAO's continued work on certain issues such as deep-sea fisheries, lost and abandoned fishing gear, and the impacts of climate change on fisheries and aquaculture (para. 82).
- xviii) The Committee **noted** the need for integrating biosecurity, carrying out capacity assessment and spatial planning in the implementation of aquaculture strategies (para. 84).
- xix) The Committee **called upon** FAO to:
- further elaborate and provide more technical precision regarding the BGI in contributing to the SOs;
 - provide support to countries regarding the impacts of climate change in relation to the fisheries and aquaculture sectors; and
 - provide assistance to Members, as appropriate, to compile and submit statistics, including socio-economic data and related information on small-scale fishers and communities (para. 86).

2. Fifteenth Session of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC), Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, 26 - 28 March 2014.

Report.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

1. The fifteenth session of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission was held in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, from 26 to 28 March 2014. The meeting was kindly hosted by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and officially opened by H.E. Anthony Carmona President and H.E. Devant Maharaj, Minister for Food Production of Trinidad and Tobago.

ATTENDANCE

2. The following 29 members attended the Session: Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Costa Rica, Cuba, Commonwealth of Dominica, Dominican Republic, European Union, France, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Panama, Kingdom of Spain, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Republic of Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Apologies were received from Guinea and Honduras. The list of participants, including observers and other participants, is in Appendix B.

ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON AND TWO-VICE CHAIRPERSONS FOR THE COMMISSION

3. Ms Christine Chan A Shing (Trinidad and Tobago) was elected chairperson of the Commission. Mr Lionel Reynal (France) and Mr Raul Gonzalez Pantaleon (Dominican Republic) were elected respectively as first and second Vice-Chairperson.
4. The Commission adopted the agenda as shown in Appendix A.

REVIEW OF THE STATE OF FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE IN THE WECAFC REGION

5. The Commission considered the review of the state of fisheries and aquaculture in the WECAFC region in document WECAFC/XV/2014/2. Members appreciated the report, described additional information available and offered to supply it to the Secretariat. The EU offered to make available to the Commission the data and information of all its members fishing in the WECAFC area, in order to contribute to the improvement of scientific advice. Members underlined the needs for: improved data and information collection; the reduction of uncertainty levels on the state of the fisheries resources; and incorporation of members' management efforts in the review, especially for the main commercial species. It was acknowledged that declining catches could be an indication of management decisions rather than of overfishing. On the other hand inflated production data that is contrary to the known status of given stocks could trigger the misinterpretation of data and result in its erroneous use. Noting that the status report focuses on the countries that harvest the most fish, it was emphasized that the special needs of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) should be taken into account as well and that a separate reporting mechanism for SIDS should eventually be created.
6. The status of the Queen Conch and lobster stocks in the region and the exploitation level assigned to these stocks in the report triggered substantial discussion. The members

considered Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing of Queen Conch and lobster a major problem in the region, and asked members to renew their efforts to deter fishers from getting involved in IUU fishing in neighbouring countries.

MAIN DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE THIRTIETH SESSION OF COFI AND THE FIFTEENTH SESSION OF WECAFC

7. The Commission took note of the decisions and recommendations of the thirtieth session of COFI and the fourteenth session of WECAFC, set out in WECAFC/XV/2014/3.
8. The prominence of FAO's work on the promotion of sustainable fisheries and food security was highlighted and the attention of the Commission was drawn to the importance of the current capacity building activities for implementation of the 2009 FAO Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA). Satisfaction was expressed on the proposed endorsement by COFI 31 of the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on Flag State Performance and the contribution they will make to combating IUU fishing. The work of WECAFC in support of the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) was acknowledged. The Commission was requested to increase attention to Sea Cucumber management and some members recommended that a study should be carried out on sharks and marine mammals in the WECAFC region.

INTERSESSIONAL ACTIVITIES AND MATTERS REFERRED TO THE ATTENTION OF THE COMMISSION

9. The Commission considered the intersessional activities of the Commission and FAO in the WECAFC region as reported in WECAFC/XV/2014/4, and applauded the achievements and outcomes described.
10. The Commission adopted resolution WECAFC/15/2014/8 promoting the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests and the International Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries, when endorsed by COFI (Appendix C).
11. The continuous support of FAO was acknowledged, in particular, for the development of national and regional plans of action for the management and conservation of sharks. The WECAFC Working Groups (WGs) were considered to be an essential tool for implementing the Program of Work. The substantive issue of IUU fishing was raised by the Bahamas and echoed by several members. In discussion on their respective terms of reference (ToRs), it was underlined that all WGs should be mandated to address IUU fishing. In addition, it was agreed to create a special WG to address IUU fishing issues in the region and ToRs were prepared and agreed in principle.
12. Proposals were made to incorporate more traditional/local knowledge of fishers and other sources, and to consider new stock assessment techniques for Queen Conch.
13. The session was informed that funds were secured only for some WGs. The Secretariat called on the members to budget for their active participation in the relevant WGs.
14. The Commission endorsed the ToRs of the WGs as presented in WECAFC/XV/2014/17 under the understanding that they can be amended where relevant, and requested further standardization of the format for the ToRs. The Commission agreed to the establishment of a WECAFC/OSPESCA Working Group on Sharks and the re-activation of the WECAFC/CRFM/IFREMER Working Group on shrimp and groundfish of the North Brazil Guianas Shelf.

REPORT OF THE SIXTH SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY GROUP (SAG) OF WECAFC

15. The Commission thanked the members of the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) for their work and endorsed the report of the Sixth session of the SAG, including its conclusions and recommendations, as presented in WECAFC/XV/2014/5.
16. The Commission adopted resolutions WECAFC/15/2014/7 “on promoting the implementation of the Regional Strategy for the Control of Invasive Lionfish in the Wider Caribbean, as prepared by the International Coral Reef Initiative and partners”, and WECAFC/15/2014/10 “on the Strategic Action Programme for the sustainable management of the shared living marine resources of the Caribbean and north Brazil shelf large marine ecosystems (CLME+ SAP)” (Appendix C).
17. The meeting was informed about the change in the membership and increased size of the SAG.
18. Members expressed concern that the SAG report did not mention the WG on Spiny Lobster. It was recalled that no meeting of this WG was held during the 2012–2013 period as the planned workshop had to be postponed for administrative reasons.

REPORT BY THE SECRETARY ON THE FINANCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS OF THE COMMISSION

19. The Commission thanked the Secretariat for the preparation of the first financial and administrative report and welcomed Costa Rica as the 34th member to the Commission.
20. The Commission congratulated the Secretariat for the increased transparency in reporting on administrative and financial issues and endorsed the report as presented.

CONSIDERATION OF EXTRABUDGETARY FUNDING

21. The Commission appreciated the efforts made by FAO and the WECAFC Secretariat, with support from the WECAFC Bureau and members of various WGs, to mobilize resources in support of WECAFC’s Programme of Work and looked forward to the start of implementation of the projects listed in WECAFC/XV/2014/Ref.14.
22. The Commission took note of the efforts made by FAO and WECAFC Secretariat, with the support of the WECAFC Bureau and various members of WGs, to mobilize resources in support of the WECAFC Programme of Work and to identify donors.
23. The Commission endorsed the report and instructed the Secretariat to continue the search for funding of the project proposals.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

24. The Commission thanked the CRFM Secretariat and FAO for the “Review of current fisheries management performance and conservation measures in the WECAFC Region”, in Working Document WECAFC/XV/2014/7, and emphasized that the members should increase their efforts in terms of establishing proper legal, policy and management frameworks in support of sustainable fisheries.
25. The Commission discussed and adopted the following recommendations, which appear in Appendix C to this report:

- WECAFC/15/2014/1 “on the establishment of a regional closed season for fisheries in the WECAFC area to protect spawning aggregations of groupers and snappers”. In discussion, the delegate from the United States announced that they will propose the listing of Nassau Grouper in Annex 3 of the SPAW Protocol at the next SPAW meeting, and invite comments from WECAFC members on its proposal to ensure its adoption.
- WECAFC/15/2014/2 “on the sustainability of fisheries using fish aggregating devices in the WECAFC area”. In discussion, France indicated that five years would be needed to prepare the fishing community for implementation of this recommendation on statistics, and Haiti encouraged attention to the marketing of fish caught by FADs.
- WECAFC/15/2014/3 “on the management and conservation of Queen Conch in the WECAFC area”. In discussion, it was recommended that WECAFC transmit this Recommendation to the CITES Secretariat and request that they consider it in the appropriate manner. It was noted that some countries do not yet have a management plan for Queen Conch, that regionally harmonized terminology on processing is needed and that further steps to develop regional conversion factors need to be taken. The Commission noted that some stakeholders use outdated data on the Queen Conch stocks and fisheries to the possible detriment of members despite the availability of recent information coming out of the report of the first WG on Queen Conch and other available sources. The Commission further noted that inaccurate conclusions based on outdated and erroneous information has been and can be used to justify management actions that may have significant negative social and economic impact on Members. As a way of example, Members expressed concern that outdated and erroneous data were used as justification for an NGO petition to consider listing Queen Conch on the US Endangered Species Act (ESA). The United States explained their process for listing of species under the ESA, and detailed the ongoing review process for Queen Conch.
- WECAFC/15/2014/4 “on strengthening fisheries management planning in the WECAFC area”.

WECAFC PERFORMANCE REVIEW

26. The Commission thanked FAO for conducting the first performance review in its 40 years of existence of WECAFC in a cost-effective and efficient manner. The assistance from FAO, the Government of France in Guadeloupe and the European Union (EU) in the organization of the Reorientation and Strategic Planning Workshop, held in Guadeloupe on 29-30 January 2014 were recognized.
27. Considering the outcomes of the Performance Review, the Commission identified the needs for strengthening the Secretariat, reinforcing financial and human resources and the role of the WGs. The communication and information activities should also be further improved, by the WECAFC website in particular. The visibility of WECAFC activities would need to be enhanced.

STRATEGIC REORIENTATION OF WECAFC (Options to consider)

28. The Commission addressed working document WECAFC/XV/2014/12 on the “Background, guidance and strategic options for the strategic reorientation of WECAFC: Options paper”. Delegations were not authorized by their governments to take a decision on a possible transformation. After extensive discussion, in which cost aspects and stakeholder involvement were the main issues, it was concluded that WECAFC should remain an Article VI advisory body for the immediate future.

29. The Commission agreed that within Strategy 2 of the CLME Strategic Action Plan, the role of WECAFC and the relationship with its partners OSPESCA and CRFM should be assessed. The Commission expressed appreciation to the WECAFC Secretariat for the in-depth analysis and information package provided regarding the range of options for WECAFC reorientation, however any decision at this session was considered premature.
30. The Commission endorsed as a way forward an independent cost–benefit assessment as proposed by the EU. The EU will explore whether the support to this initiative could be made available as well as to organize a workshop to analyse the results. Because of the decision to defer this matter, Draft Resolution WECAFC/ XV/2014/6 was not considered.

WECAFC STRATEGIC PLAN 2014–2020

31. The Commission discussed and reviewed the draft WECAFC Strategic Plan 2014–2020, as presented in Working Document WECAFC/XV/2014/13 and approved it with minor amendments.

PROPOSAL FOR AMENDMENT OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE OF WECAFC

32. The Commission reviewed and adopted the draft revised Rules of Procedure proposed in Appendix 1 of Document WECAFC/XV/2014/15, with the understanding that original Rule IX, relating to the SAG, will remain in force and proposed Rule XII on a Technical Advisory Committee will be withdrawn.

REGIONAL COLLABORATION IN ADDRESSING IUU FISHING

33. The Commission, acknowledging the joint efforts of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the Government of Norway, FAO, WECAFC, CRFM, CLME and collaboration with PEW and the Marine Stewardship Council in promoting regional collaboration in addressing IUU fishing, and particularly, in the organization of the FAO/WECAFC Workshop on Implementing the 2009 FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to Combat Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, 24–28 March 2014), discussed and noted the outcomes of this workshop. The Commission adopted Resolution WECAFC/15/2014/9 “on the implementation of the Port state Measures Agreement and the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on flag State performance in the region”. Model legislation to implement the Port State Measures agreement had been provided to Workshop participants.
34. Supported by the EU, France underlines the importance of WECAFC as the appropriate framework to identify solutions for fighting IUU fishing, in addition to bilateral initiatives.
35. Recognizing the high quality and considering the region wide validity of the CRFM work on combating IUU fishing the Commission also adopted Resolution WECAFC/15/2014/6 “on region-wide support to the implementation of the CRFM, Castries, St Lucia, (2010) Declaration on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing”.

SPAW PROTOCOL AND REGIONAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

36. The Commission expressed appreciation to the Secretariats of the SPAW Protocol and WECAFC for having initiated communication and collaboration and emphasized that this should form the basis for further collaboration on sustainable management of fish species (lobster, Queen Conch).
37. The Commission agreed to improve coordination and strengthen collaboration on matters of mutual interest (e.g. regional management plans, support to WGs). WECAFC members which had not done so were encouraged to become party to the SPAW Protocol.

WECAFC–FIRMS PARTNERSHIP

38. The Commission took note of the outcomes of the WECAFC-FIRMS Workshop on marine resources and fisheries inventories, held in Corpus Christi, United States of America, 1–2 November 2013. Recognizing that a partnership with FIRMS would enable WECAFC to tap into the knowledge and experience from a well-established, cost-effective system for the monitoring of fisheries resources status and fisheries activities, the Commission agreed to enter into a WECAFC-FIRMS Partnership.
39. The Commission expressed the need for capacity building on the use of FIRMS and emphasized that the works should concentrate initially on those fisheries and stocks that are commercially most important to the membership.

PROGRAMME OF WORK OF WECAFC (2014–2015)

40. The Commission considered the Draft Programme of Work of WECAFC (2014–2015) set out in WECAFC/XV/2014/14. The Commission agreed on minor amendments to proposals on Working Groups and approved the Programme of Work shown in Appendix D. It was suggested that the Programme of Work should explicitly mention activities related to the linkage between environment/conservation and fisheries as well as proposed activities supporting the way forward for WECAFC related to the WG on IUU fishing, and the proposal from the EU on the cost efficiency analysis of the strategic options.

ANY OTHER MATTERS

41. The members expressed warm appreciation to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for their excellent organization and hospitality that contributed to the success of the session.

DATE AND PLACE OF THE NEXT SESSION

42. The Commission welcomed the offer made by France to host the 16th session of WECAFC in French Guiana, Martinique or Guadeloupe.

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

43. The report was adopted on Friday, 28 March 2014 at 16.00 hrs.