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Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC)

Scientific Advisory Group

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Update on the WECAFC - FIRMS activities and achievements

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Executive summary

WECAFC-FIRMS is a specific protocol endorsed by WECAFC for the dissemination of WECAFC stocks and fisheries status reports under the Fisheries and Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS) partnership. The FIRMS presents a strong WEB presence to its Partners, the latter important in today's internet era. WECAFC and other Partners in the region have the opportunity to benefit from enhanced visibility and increased return on investment.

The WECAFC-FIRMS regional database project, funded by DG-MARE (EU), aims to strengthen reporting capacities among regional and national experts on the status of stocks and fisheries under regional Fishery Management plans. The process is demand driven (i.e., supplying data for supporting management plans) and should lead to developing a regional database for data sharing and fisheries assessments, and to identify weaknesses and recommend support to national data collection and data management where necessary. One such example of national support to data collection and dissemination is the FAO's Technical Cooperation Project in Bahamas.

FAO's Fisheries and Aquaculture Department is also engaged in the new EU BlueBRIDGE consortium funded under the EU Horizon2020 framework (http://cordis.europa.eu/news/rcn/128416_en.html). WECAFC could also benefit from BlueBRIDGE through three components: the "Global record of stocks and fisheries" which will federate knowledge on the location and status/trends of stocks and fisheries across three major

global sources (including FIRMS); the BlueBRIDGE Virtual Research Environments (VRE) for Stock Assessment and Capacity Building, which will potentially offer e-services for the planned WECAFC Regional database in support to FMPs; the BlueBRIDGE data services on aquaculture spatial planning, and aquaculture socio-economic and environmental performance indicators.

Background

FAO provides the secretariat for the FIRMS partnership. FIRMS has as direct goal to facilitate access to high-quality information on the status and trends of global marine fishery resources, fisheries and their management. The overarching aim of the FIRMS partnership is to provide decision-makers with sufficient and reliable information to develop effective fisheries policies in accordance with the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

The partnership, steadily growing, now brings together 14 Institutions representing 19 (RFBs)¹, and disseminates through the FIRMS website status and trends reports structured on an inventory backbone of over 1,000 marine resource stocks and about 200 fisheries.

On-going efforts aim at: 1) broadening geographic and thematic coverage through engagement of new partners; promoting the existence/potential of both stocks and fisheries inventories and reports to national agencies and other stakeholders for informing the best usage of FIRMS fact sheets; 2) addressing the needs expressed by users involved in reporting on the state of the Marine environment, and in marine seafood traceability and certification etc.; 3) and facilitating information sharing, dissemination and reporting by FIRMS partners. The latter includes a standard protocol for streamlining national contributions on fishing activities through the partner RFBs and their capacity building for developing regions (e.g. CECAF, SWIOFC, RECOFI, and WECAFC).

FIRMS can also play a catalytic role in the development of regional databases in support to the regional fishery management plans through enabling its partners to tap into the knowledge and experience from a well-established, cost-effective system. Capacity building facilities are also provided by FIRMS.

At [WECAFC 14](#) (February 2012) the Commission reiterated the need for improving the fisheries data and information collection to reduce critical data gaps, which are undermining any significant effort to improve fishery management. Limitations in data capacities to support decision making also constitute one of major point of immaturity. In the process to determine whether WECAFC should become a Fisheries Management Organization it has become apparent again that existing data limitations can hamper better management of the resources and the fisheries.

This need for better data and information was reiterated again during [WECAFC 15](#) (March 2014) and hence it was agreed to dedicate one of the four technical Focus Areas in the

¹ Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT), Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE), FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department, General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT), International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO), North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO), North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC), South East Atlantic Fisheries Organization (SEAFO).

WECAFC Strategic Plan (SAP) for 2014-2020 to this subject with the support of the current Programme of Work including activity 2.4 “Improved fishery and aquaculture data collection, analysis and dissemination at regional and national level” in support of this subject.

In the same meeting, the WECAFC Commission endorsed the Fisheries and Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS) partnership following the partnership proposal and arrangement formulated during the [WECAFC-FIRMS Workshop on Marine Resources and Fisheries Inventories](#) (November 2013). The Commission also expressed the need for capacity building on the use of FIRMS and emphasized that the work should concentrate initially on those fisheries and stocks that are commercially most important to the membership.

The arrangements established through the FIRMS protocol foresaw the appointment of three focal points: the WECAFC-FIRMS focal point has been appointed in the person of Ms. Nancie Cummings (NOAA); a CRFM-FIRMS focal point has been appointed by CRFM in the person of Ms. June Masters; a similar arrangement is currently being discussed with SICA/OSPESCA. WECAFC is grateful to their respective institutes for their in-kind contribution to FIRMS activities in the region.

WECAFC project - Strengthening national data collection and regional data sharing through FIRMS to support priority regional fishery management plans in the WECAFC area

The EU - DG MARE funded project arose along the needs indicated by the WECAFC 14th Commission and the pilots selected for support by this project are the three priority regional fishery management plans, spiny lobster, flying fish, and Queen conch. In addition other information can contribute to the FIRMS inventories including billfishes, shrimp and ground fish of Guianas-Brazil shelf as part of the CLME Strategic Action Programme (SAP) and its CLME+. Finally, through the WECAFC-FIRMS partnership, the development of a regional database, focusing on data and capacity improvements, data sharing and dissemination will be driven.

The project is governed through a task force, which includes members of the WECAFC Secretariat, of the FIRMS Secretariat, and the FIRMS focal points for WECAFC and CRFM. Once nominated, the focal point for SICA-OSPESCA will be invited to join this task force.

The project is expected to deliver:

1. WECAFC inventories on stocks and fisheries in support of the three FMPs published in FIRMS (spiny lobster, flying fish, and Queen conch.), including capacity building for national inventories in few pilot countries;
2. Prototype of a Regional DataBase with a pilot implemented, including a draft data sharing policy document developed for review in WECAFC-SAG and other relevant sub-regional forums (CRFM, OSPESCA, ...), and a capacity building plan;
3. Plan for building capacity and strengthening of selected national data collection systems, including through appropriate working groups mandated with TORs to carry forward the consensus agreements on data collection, data sharing, data harmonization, IT requirements for a regional database;

The project results will allow its partners to make better-informed fisheries management decisions in support of the development of fisheries management plans at national and regional

(WECAFC/CRFM/OSPESCA) level. The regional database will be eventually available for use by the 34 members and its application will be promoted. The activities and results achieved through this project will be further expanded/ amplified through the CLME+ project, and other follow-up funding.

A dedicated workshop will convene January 2016 as a major milestone to achieve the project deliverables. Representatives of WECAFC, CRFM, and OSPESCA as well national fisheries experts of about 14 selected countries will be involved so as to have the most participatory process as possible.

TCP Bahamas (TCP/BHA/3501), activities until October 2015

Under output 2 of the TCP/BHA/3501 project, “An established and functioning Fisheries Management Information System (FMIS) for The Bahamas”, complementary statistical and IT activities were led to support the implementation of the FMIS (now renamed FisMIS)

Regarding statistical activities, an assessment mission has been carried out and a comprehensive report has been produced including definition of a new Data Collection Framework (DCF). This new DCF aims to reinforce the current monitoring of mothership through the implementation of a self-reported log-book for large vessels (trips over than 2 days), and extend data collection to small scale and recreational fisheries (day trips) with a sample based survey designed with the use of mobile phones. Training has been delivered to Department of Marine Resources (DMR) in September 2015 on the new DCF, and this will be followed with a 3 months pilot implementation to test the new setup in New Providence.

Regarding IT activities, a new system is being developed on the basis of a needs assessment including the new DCF. The system, currently in an advanced developing version, has been deployed on the VPN of the Department of IT (DIT). As of the 1st of October, the new IT system is in place in the DIT test server with these features:

- System backbone with its user management;
- Reference data and registries management (for fishermen, companies and vessels), with the permits / certificates (FDC, Duty free permit, trap permit, export permit, certificate of inspection, compressor permit);
- Data upload of purchase orders (excel file), landing forms for log-book (on-line forms) and landing form for sample based survey as recommended by the Fisheries Statistician;
- Module for computing simple statistics, under testing for the purchase orders.

DMR has also benefited from with new equipment such as desktops, laptops, printers and mobile phones.

Training will be delivered for the use of the FisMIS by DMR and on the FAO fisheries statistics and statistical tools, on fisheries statistics data collection, and on processing and dissemination in general (frame survey, industrial and small scale fisheries statistics supply chain, existing setups, challenges etc..). Leaflets will be developed to promote the broader use of the web-based system.

BlueBRIDGE project (iMarine platform)

FAO's Fisheries and Aquaculture Department is engaged in the new BlueBRIDGE project funded under the EU Horizon2020 framework. BlueBRIDGE will strengthen the capacities of the iMarine platform, a data infrastructure in support to Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) (EAF) and conservation of living marine resources. BlueBRIDGE can benefit WECAFC and its regional partners from two perspectives:

FIRMS is specifically involved in the component "Global record of stocks and fisheries" (GRSF) which will federate knowledge on status/trends of stocks and fisheries across three major global sources of information: the Fisheries and Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS), RAM Legacy Stock Assessment Database and FishSource. By delivering unique stocks and fisheries Identifiers across these sources, the GRSF will be in a position to deliver a set of e-services on a critical mass of information on stocks and fishery status, and is expected to be of major interest to a variety of researchers involved in traceability of fishery products, and to stakeholders involved in "regional or global state of stocks indicators". The GRSF will be developed within the life-time of the project (30 months) and co-developed within the Blue Bridge partners and contributors with open-source solutions. The data base will contain public data and the partners will define the dissemination policies to be implemented by the iMarine e-infrastructure.

BlueBRIDGE will deliver Virtual Research Environments² (VREs) for Regional databases in support to stock assessment and fisheries management, as well as capacity building to support the uptake of such facilities by user. The WECAFC regional database objective could also benefit from these BlueBRIDGE services.

Considering these potential benefits and upon invitation from the project consortium, the WECAFC Secretariat has appointed the WECAFC-FIRMS focal point (Ms. Nancie Cummings) as WECAFC representative in BlueBRIDGE's External Advisory Board. This will facilitate the identification of possible synergies and co-funding opportunities with projects of the WECAFC region.

More information on BlueBRIDGE at <http://www.bluebridge-vres.eu/>

Actions requested from the SAG

- The SAG is requested to comment on relevant aspects of the WECAFC-FIRMS Partnership development and related projects described above.
- The SAG is encouraged to suggest to FIRMS and WECAFC Secretariats to contact specific experts in the region to contribute to or collaborate with the ongoing FIRMS activities. .
- The SAG, through its members and partners, is invited to support mobilization of national participation in the upcoming workshop and its preparatory stages, in particular the provision of national inventories of fisheries and response on the survey questionnaires on data collection systems and data gaps.

² Virtual Research Environments are cloud-based workspaces offering data services for a dedicated user community