



The decline of fish stocks in the region among topics of recent WECAFC Meeting

April 28, 2022 - Bridgetown, Barbados – The Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) recently hosted the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) at its meeting held from 25 to 27 April 2022. The virtual meeting featured the participation of members of SAG, conveners of the 11 ad hoc working groups and 30 observers from member countries and partner organizations.

The delegates of the meeting reviewed technical and scientific papers on regional conservation and management measures and other instruments, for evidence-based fisheries management decisions that reverse the slope of the declines of fish stocks in the region. Some of the draft plans tabled included, The Regional Fish Spawning Aggregation Fishery Management Plan which focuses on Nassau Grouper and Mutton Snapper of which the two species are on the brink of extinction, The Regional Strategy on the Management of bycatch and discards in Latin American and Caribbean bottom trawl (shrimp and ground fish) fisheries; The Regional Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks, Rays and Chimaeras, which are also threatened; and The Caribbean Regional Management Plan for the Moored Fish Aggregating Devices (MFAD).

Along with these topics were the WECAFC Guide for improved monitoring of MFAD catches and improved assessment of MFAD impact on stocks, the biological data, the stocks spatial distribution and the ecological connectivity between the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction and the Exclusive Economic Zones in the WECAFC region, and a study findings on health and safety in the dive fisheries of key species. The meeting also discussed foundations of a common regional framework to promote harmonization and standardization of fisheries statistics production in the region, embodied in the Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF). The DCRF is an instrument which provides the guidelines needed to produce harmonized

statistics necessary to ensure that the fisheries management policy, is informed by adequate data and statistics.

Deidre Warner-Kramer, Chairperson, WECAFC stated, "WECAFC is an essential forum for the wider Caribbean to work together to support sustainable fisheries, healthy ecosystems, and thriving coastal communities. This work must be grounded in sound science and collaboration, and the expert contributions of the SAG in both of these regards will be critical to our success at the next meeting of the Commission this summer".

The SAG group serves as an advisory body to WECAFC Commission and is made up of a maximum of seven qualified scientists from the wider Caribbean, who are experienced in a range of specific subject matters related to fisheries and serve the organization in their personal capacity. The group plays an important role in numerous areas, including, providing scientific advice to WECAFC ad hoc working groups, reviewing and contributing to the report on the situation, trends and prospects of fisheries in the WECAFC Region. Some of the working and regional partner institutions includes, the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM), the Central America Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization (OSPESCA), the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC) and the French Research Institute for Exploration of the Sea (IFREMER). These groups comprise of fishery scientists, experts, managers and decision-makers of member countries, regional partner organizations and non-governmental organizations who participate in the working groups, which have specific terms of reference and are time bound. The data used by the working groups to generate fishery management advice and recommendations are collected by the participating countries and NGOs.

Peter Murray, CFRM Advisor, Fisheries Management and Development and Convener of the WECAFC Regional Working Group on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing acknowledged how important the review by SAG is and stated, "The 11th meeting of the SAG helped advance our ongoing efforts for deterring, preventing and combating illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; and organized crime in the fishing industry".

Meanwhile, Yvette Diei Ouali, the Secretary of WECAFC, praised the proactivity of the new SAG team and the work accomplished by the working groups' conveners, as overwhelmingly commended by the participants at the closure of the meeting.

She further indicated, “The quality of the background documents, including others such as the Working Groups TORs, the 2022-2024 Work plan as well as the new 2022-2027 Strategic plan of WECAFC, was instrumental in the extremely productive deliberations and mirrors a smooth review by the Commission at its 18th Session planned for 25-29 July 2022 in Managua, Nicaragua”. She added, “These deliberations greatly support the attainment of the objective of the Commission, as they would ultimately drive actual benefits of fisheries for food and nutrition security, income earning, livelihoods and healthy ecosystems is effectively secured and protected.”

For more information:

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