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WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION (WECAFC)
THIRTEENTH (VIRTUAL) SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY GROUP (SAG)
23-24 April 2025
Main decisions and recommendations of the thirty-sixth session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI)

SUMMARY

This document contains highlights of some of the most relevant topics discussed at the 36th Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI). The full report of the session is made available as WECAFC/SAG/XIII/2025/inf.4.

A selection of matters of general interest and of global and regional processes of particular interest to WECAFC is submitted to the consideration of the Commission for follow-up in 2025-2026.

THIRTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES. ROME, 8–12 July 2024

The Committee on Fisheries (COFI) held its 36th Session in hybrid modality from 8 to 12 July 2024. A selection of matters of general interest and of global and regional processes of particular interest to WECAFC is submitted to the consideration of the Commission.

MATTERS OF GENERAL INTEREST

The Committee:

- a. commended FAO for the 2024 edition of the State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA) publication including its emphasis on Blue Transformation to efficiently support Members, partners and key stakeholders, particularly small-scale fishers, to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- b. stressed that, as highlighted in the 2024 SOFIA report, effective fisheries management leads to stock recovery and increases catches, and encouraged FAO and its Members to continue efforts in this direction, seize every opportunity to make fisheries management more effective;
- c. recalled the role of RFMOs, RFBs and arrangements in achieving effective fisheries management and called on FAO to continue supporting their work, including through the RFBs Secretariats Network;
- d. while noting variability between and within regions, expressed concern for the continuously degrading accumulated trends at the global level in the status of marine fish stocks, due to unsustainable practices, challenges from illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, overcapacity and overfishing, climate change, loss of biodiversity and aquatic ecosystems degradation, and welcomed the progress made in some regions, emphasizing the need to improve fisheries management measures acknowledging the management challenges concerning fisheries undertaken by small-scale fishers, particularly multistock fisheries, including through strengthened collaboration with and within regional fisheries management organizations/arrangements (RFMO/As) and other relevant regional fishery bodies (RFBs), as appropriate;
- e. underscored the importance of capture fisheries and encouraged FAO to continue to provide the necessary technical support for sustainable fisheries management;
- f. stressed the crucial contribution of small-scale and artisanal fishers, fish farmers and fish workers, and the need to promote gender equity and reduce inequalities in the fisheries and aquaculture sector;
- g. continued emphasis on the critical role of regional fisheries management organizations/arrangements (RFMO/As) and regional fishery bodies (RFBs) in achieving effective fisheries management, and called on FAO to continue supporting their work;
- h. encouraged FAO to continue assisting Members in strengthening their capacity to collect, manage, analyse and communicate timely and disaggregated data to support decision-making processes, in close collaboration with RFMO/As and RFBs, where appropriate;

- i. encouraged FAO to develop and deliver a capacity development and training programme on data collection systems, stock assessment and fisheries management;
- j. noted the progress reported by FAO Members in combating IUU fishing and called for enhanced coordination and effective implementation of international instruments, including through RFBs, and encouraged the uptake of internationally agreed practices and standards at national and regional levels;
- k. urged Members and RFMOs to ensure that they have a comprehensive framework for monitoring and control of transshipment operations, taking into account the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Transshipment, and called on FAO to support their work and monitor progress;
- l. acknowledged the role of RFBs in addressing climate change impacts on fisheries and ecosystems, encouraged Members to advance efforts to fully consider climate change in RFB conservation and management measures, appreciated FAO's engagement with RFBs on these issues, and encouraged FAO to facilitate information exchange and enhance regional cooperation and coordination with and among RFB;
- m. highlighted the importance of Blue Transformation as a PPA and roadmap, reflecting FAO's vision to maximize the contribution of sustainable aquatic food systems to food security, nutrition and livelihoods.

GLOBAL AND REGIONAL PROCESSES OF PARTICULAR INTEREST TO WECAFC

The Committee:

- a. welcomed the progressive discussions on aquatic foods under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and requested FAO to continue engaging with the UNFCCC and other relevant global fora, while encouraging Members to include consideration of aquatic foods into their Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans with the support from FAO;
- b. reiterated the important role of FAO in informing CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) parties of the best available scientific data and technical information on fisheries issues, including through the Expert Advisory Panel, and encouraged FAO to strengthen support to Members and RFBs in implementing CITES listings;
- c. invited FAO to raise awareness, for all relevant stakeholders including Members and RFBs, on the implications of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (the 'BBNJ Agreement') for the fisheries and aquaculture sector and support Members, as appropriate, in the ratification and implementation of the Agreement;
- d. noted that there are multiple parallel processes and discussions relevant to issues of plastics in the fisheries and aquaculture sector such as on the Voluntary Code of Conduct (VCoC) on sustainable use of plastics in agriculture under the FAO Committee on Agriculture and on a legally binding instrument on plastics under the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) of the UN Environment Programme, and requested coordination by FAO and Members to participate and contribute technical expertise within these processes to prevent contradictory outcomes

- e. appreciated FAO's collaboration with IMO in global and regional projects that prevent and reduce marine plastic litter from shipping and fishing operations, including ALDFG (abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear), such as the GloLitter Partnerships and regional projects;
- f. emphasized the need for interdisciplinary research, policy and legislative framework development, and testing and dissemination of fishing gear innovations that prevent and reduce plastic pollution from fishing and aquaculture operations in inland and marine environment.