



WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION (WECAFC)

WECAFC Working Group on Spawning Aggregations

Tailored Terms of Reference for the WECAFC Working Group on Spawning Aggregations

June 2022

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I. Background and justification

Fishery management advice and recommendations, based on the best available scientific information, are provided to WECAFC member countries for their implementation by dedicated Working Groups, established by the Commission.

The Working Groups that were established or confirmed in the subsequent sessions since the 14th session of the Commission in 2012 are the following:

1. [WECAFC Working Group on Caribbean Spiny Lobster](#)
2. [WECAFC Working Group on Queen Conch](#)
3. [WECAFC Working Group on the Management of Deep-Sea Fisheries](#)
4. [WECAFC Working Group on Recreational Fisheries](#)
5. [WECAFC Working Group on Fisheries using fish aggregating devices \(FADs\)](#)
6. [WECAFC Working Group on Flyingfish-Dolphinfish](#)
7. [WECAFC Working Group on Shrimp and Groundfish in the Northern Brazil-Guianas Shelf](#)
8. [WECAFC Working Group on Spawning Aggregations](#)
9. [WECAFC Regional Working Group on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing \(RWG-IUU\)](#)
10. [WECAFC Working Group for the Conservation and Management of Sharks in the Wider Caribbean Region](#)
11. [WECAFC Fisheries Data and Statistics Working Group \(FDS-WG\)](#)

Most Working Groups (WGs) are joint groups with other regional partner institutions, such as the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM), the Organization of Fisheries for the Central American Isthmus (OSPESCA), the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC), the French Research Institute for Exploration of the Sea (IFREMER), etc. Fishery scientists, experts, managers, and decision-makers of member countries as well as regional partner organizations, including academia and NGOs, participating

in the WGs, which have specific, time-bound terms of reference. The data used by the Working Groups to assess the status of fish stocks, to conduct fishery assessments and to generate fishery management advice and recommendations to the Commission are collected by the participating countries and NGOs.

The key drivers behind the establishment of these WGs are the need to:

- collaborate and cooperate in the assessment and management of shared resources;
- standardize data collection and reporting systems to enable assessment of stock status using data and information from various countries targeting the stock/species/resources throughout their distribution range;
- standardize the conservation and management measures for effective management;
- provide training and capacity-building to improve data collection and assessment of fisheries/fish stocks;
- harmonize regulations across the region, and countries, for effective fishery management; and
- cooperate to implement and enforce actions for effective fishery management.

Each WG will pay due attention to the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and its related guidelines, including the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries, as well as any other agreed international or regional instruments for the conservation and management of fisheries. Also, the principles of precautionary, participatory and ecosystem approaches to fisheries management will be considered. The activities of the WGs are also guided by any specific regional or international fisheries management, or related obligations and initiatives or instruments of relevance, to the respective resources associated with the specific WG – e.g. any FMPs, Declarations, agreed CMMs, regional strategies, regulations etc.

II. Role of the Working Group

a. Scope of the Work

The scope of each working group is to provide scientific and management advice for the sustainable management, conservation, and development of living marine resources in the area of competence of WECAFC. This scope also includes the development and support to national and regional plans of action, and fishery management plans, to regulate target and bycatch fisheries, as well as manage existing populations in the region. Using a multidisciplinary approach, the WG will contribute to sustainable management by providing advice to the Members of WECAFC based on the best available scientific knowledge/evidence and traditional/local ecological knowledge.

In pursuing this goal, the WG will contribute to the fulfillment of national and regional responsibilities for the marine environment and for the management of fish spawning aggregations, and related or interacting species or fisheries in the WECAFC Region, with special emphasis on the mutton snapper and Nassau Grouper.

b. Goal

The goal of each WG is to inform and provide guidance for the management of living marine resources to the WECAFC members in such a manner as to promote responsible fisheries, provide economic opportunities, and secure social wellbeing while ensuring the conservation of living marine resources and the protection of marine biodiversity.

c. Tasks/ functions

The WG will:

- Identify issues (gaps, deficiencies), challenges, and best practices in data collection at the national level in the region and provide recommendations on how to address issues and challenges, and implementation of best practices.

- Collect, review and share the past and present data and information on spawning aggregations and their associated fisheries in the WECAFC area, involving the fishers and private sector.
- Analyse the data and information collected from capture fisheries and aquaculture production and make recommendations for the sustainability of the fisheries of aggregating species in the WECAFC region.
- Monitor changes in distribution and abundance of all living aquatic species and resources of relevance to the mandate of the WG in the WECAFC region.
- Develop common methodologies for data collection, assessment, and monitoring of fish aggregations and stocks.
- Seek partnerships with other institutions that could provide assistance in the monitoring, evaluation, and effective implementation of management recommendations for the protection and conservation of fish spawning aggregations.
- Monitor and provide advice on the management and implementation of regional strategies, regulations, and management plans to protect fish spawning aggregations.
- Establish communication between the members of the WG, other WGs and relevant parties on issues of common interest to strengthen regional collaboration in the conservation, assessment and management of fish spawning aggregations.
- Ensure development of education and outreach programs that articulate the message/s of the WG and facilitate the achievement of the goals and objectives of the SAWG work plan.
- Report to the Commission and contribute to communication and visibility of the deliverables of the Working Group as may be needed.

d. Membership

Membership in the WG shall consist of representatives from all those Member States of CRFM and WECAFC, OSPESCA, including overseas territories and Departments. Specifically, Member representatives will be national Officers responsible for fisheries management with activities related to the following domains: statistical analyses of fisheries data, data collection, designing data collection systems, analyzing statistics for statistical bulletins, report preparation, organizing and managing data collection, storage and dissemination according to a variety of needs (e.g., RFMO reporting, departmental, scientific meetings, etc.).

III. Mode of Operation:

a. Role of Countries

The members of the working group will play a leading role through the following activities and commitments:

- participate in agreed activities and ensure the participation of appropriate experts;
- implement, at the national level, the work identified in the WECAFC endorsed work plan (as appropriate);
- identify and report on country-specific challenges and opportunities related to implementation of agreed conservation and management measures;
- assist with mobilization of resources and outreach materials;
- facilitate the organization of meetings in the languages of the Commission;
- host meetings on a rotational basis; and
- facilitate the identification of the Convener.

b. Role of Convener

The Convener of the working group will play a leading role during the organization of the meetings and subsequent follow up with the Secretariat of WECAFC by coordinating the inputs of the members of the Working Group. The Convener should:

- seek experts from the WECAFC members, contact potential partner organizations, and solicit their interest to join the working group;
- call for meetings, as appropriate;
- ensure that technical contributions are received in a timely manner and in the appropriate format;
- Ensure that outputs are delivered as agreed during each meeting;
- collaborate closely with FAO-WECAFC and other subregional and regional organizations as appropriate;
- assist in the preparation and publication process of the proceedings of the meeting;
- participate (in person or virtually) at the meetings to present the draft working documents and provide any clarifications as required;
- facilitate the review by the WG membership within a reasonable period of time (max. 15 days) on suggested edits or modifications as considered necessary to address comments and the return of the revised document to the WECAFC Secretariat for distribution and consideration by the Commission;
- participate in the Commission's sessions (physically or virtually) if required, to support the Secretariat in clarifying or substantiating some points of the draft working documents;
- assist in the relevant processes to gather information in support of seeking funds to implement priority activities of the WG; and
- identify, participate in and share information on inter-sessional activities.

c. Election and role of Convener

- The Working Group shall elect a Convener from among its Members to serve over a two-year period. The term of office of the Convener may be extended as determined appropriate. In the case where another qualified Convener is not available, the Convener's term may be renewed for an additional two-year term until another Convener is selected.

d. Roles of the FAO/WECAFC Secretariat

The FAO/WECAFC Secretariat will play a supporting role in the activities of the Working Group by assisting in:

- Coordinating activities of the WG, among WECAFC and Non-WECAFC Members, at the wider regional level (including facilitating procurement of funding).
- Assisting with logistical arrangements for the convening of meetings.
- Providing technical assistance, such as a technical secretary or research support, if needed and as resources permit.
- Liaising with other Regional Fishery Bodies (RFBs) active in the Wider Caribbean Region and neighboring areas for their engagement and collaboration as much as possible in the work of the WG; these RFBs include amongst others OSPESCA, CRFM, CFMC, ICCAT, NAFO, NEAFC, CECAF, COPPESAALC, etc.
- Liaising with other relevant regional and international organizations as appropriate, such as the Sargasso Sea Commission, SPAW Protocol, etc.
- Coordinating the formulation and adoption of recommendations and/or resolutions and reports/documents by the WG to facilitate the decision-making process by the Commission.
- Ensuring the strategic linkage between the work of the WG and programmes and projects hosted to support the fisheries and healthy ecosystems framework of the CLME+ and any future phase of this project.
- Facilitating training and collaboration of WECAFC Member States and subregional training institutions as appropriate and based on available resources.

e. Roles of other Subregional organizations (e.g. CFMC, CRFM, ICCAT, OSPESCA, UNEP-CEP, IFREMER, NOAA, CARICOM, OECS, etc.)

Subregional organizations have an important role to play in assisting their member countries to participate fully in the activities of the Working Group. Therefore, they may be invited to:

- provide expertise, technical assistance and support;
- facilitate procurement of funding when possible;
- collaborate in implementing the activities of the Working Group;
- collaborate with the WECAFC Secretariat and subregional organizations in coordinating the activities of the Working Group; and
- facilitate the decision-making process at the subregional level.

Regional Activity Centre for the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife for the Wider Caribbean Region (CAR-SPAW-RAC)

Pursuant to mutual aims and objectives with the WG:

- The convener of this working group will contribute as a technical representative to the SPAW STAC Ad Hoc Working Group on Parrotfish.
- CAR-SPAW-RAC will provide expertise technical assistance and support with respect to management of species of parrotfish which form spawning aggregations.

IV. Outputs

In discharging its duties, the WG will deliver the following outputs:

- biennial Work Plans, including providing performance of projects on a routine schedule;
- reports on assessment and monitoring of the status of spawning aggregations;
- draft Fisheries Management Plans;
- draft Regional Plans of Action;
- proposed Recommendations and Resolutions to the Commission; and
- revised TORs as needed.

V. Communication

A mechanism for ongoing communication among WG members (video conference, Skype, zoom meeting and email), is essential to ensure that the work of the group is sustained between meetings. It must include all members and the communication tools must be accessible to all members.

The successful functioning of the WG also requires that each member country and organization/ agency identify a national node or focal point who will be contacted through the WECAFC National Focal Point and technically coordinate at national level all matters pertinent to the WG. The outputs of the WG will be communicated through reports to WECAFC, OSPESCA, CFMC, CRFM, CITES, UNEP-CEP, ICCAT, IFREMER, and national fishery administrations via the WECAFC Secretariat.

VI. Working Group meetings and cost

The WG should meet physically or virtually on a regular basis, the timing of which is decided by the members, but at a minimum once every two years. The meetings should be of 2-5 days and use cost-effective accommodations and institutional facilities and, where possible, take advantage of other meetings in the region. Meetings shall be chaired by the Convener of the WG. The reports of the meetings will be formally submitted to OSPESCA, WECAFC, CFMC and CRFM, ICCAT, CITES, UNEP-CEP, IFREMER, Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute Network, etc.

VII. Amendments to the Terms of Reference

Amendment of these terms of reference may be done at each biennial meeting of the Commission for implementation by the working groups in the subsequent intersessional period.

VIII. Templates for Recommendations and Resolutions

Standardized templates will ensure a common understanding of what should be included in draft recommendations and resolutions, ease the reporting of deliverables as well as facilitate their review by other WECAFC bodies, as appropriate. Working Groups should include the following elements when preparing draft recommendations and resolutions to be presented to the WECAFC membership or other WECAFC bodies (e.g. the Scientific Advisory Group or other WECAFC Working Groups).

Recommendations and Resolutions

Draft recommendations and resolutions for review by other WECAFC bodies and the WECAFC membership should include the following elements:

- **Cover Note**: A brief cover note for draft recommendations and/or resolutions should be provided to assist reviewers. The cover note should include a clear, candid, and transparent explanation of:
 - a. why the action was developed,
 - b. at which WG meeting it was discussed,
 - c. a brief overview of how the WG arrived at its decision to put the action forward;
 - d. how the action will impact future WECAFC activities, including, where relevant any possible changes in resource or workload requirements for Members or the WECAFC Secretariat;
 - e. the ramifications of *not* approving the recommended action;
 - f. the full picture of the context for the recommended action.
- **Preambular Text**: This should provide essential elements to highlight the context and intent of the proposed action in a concise bulleted format. The preambular text should include only the core historical elements and should include references to related decisions or measures.
- **Action Text**: This should indicate clearly what action(s) the WG is taking, or is asking the WECAFC Membership to take, at a national, subregional, and/or regional level, including specific timelines to which the action(s) will adhere.

Considering that each WG can have more than one meeting, and more than one issue to address during each intersessional period, the WGs can produce several reports/documents or draft resolutions/recommendations. To facilitate analysis by the Commission, each WG shall prepare a single set of recommendations and/or resolutions organized by fishery or by theme, including all the topics addressed in the intersessional meetings. In this regard, the Commission would consider a single set of draft recommendations and/or resolutions for spiny lobster, queen conch, flying fish and dolphinfish, FADs, FDS, etc.

The WGs shall refer relevant recommendations and resolutions of a scientific nature to the SAG for scientific review at least one month before the meeting of SAG, to provide adequate time to the Secretariat and SAG members to review them before the meeting. This will improve the efficiency of the reviews during the SAG sessions.