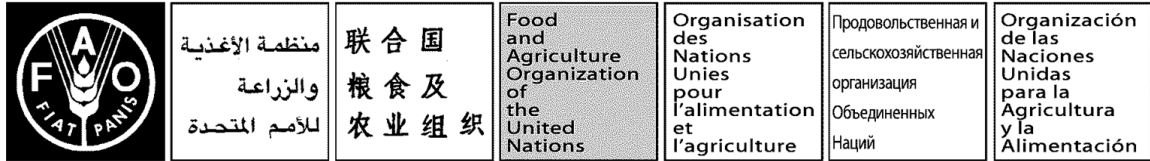


September 2023

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WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION (WECAFC)
NINETEENTH SESSION
Bridgetown, Barbados, 6-8 September 2023
Main decisions and recommendations of the thirty-fifth session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI)

SUMMARY

This document contains highlights of some of the most relevant topics discussed at the 35th Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) The full report of the session is made available as WECAFC/SAG/XII/2023/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 2023-2024.

**THIRTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES. ROME,
5–9 September 2022**

The Committee on Fisheries (COFI) held its 35th Session in hybrid modality from 5 to 9 September 2022. 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:

expressed appreciation that FAO included information on ongoing methodological improvements to better reflect the regional and subregional **status of fish stocks**, recognizing efforts to rebuild stocks and increasing the number of stocks with assessments, while ensuring the integrity of the time series;

welcomed the progress made in some regions, while expressing concern for the **current status of marine fish stocks at global level**, and emphasized the need to improve fisheries management based on the precautionary and an ecosystem approach and including through strengthened collaboration with and within regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs), and other relevant Regional Fisheries Advisory Bodies (RFABs) and civil society as appropriate, including through building capacity and strengthening the link between decision making on fisheries management and the best available science;

emphasized the need to promote **sustainable aquaculture and manage all fisheries sustainably** as a positive contribution to sustainable and inclusive economies, including through the implementation of an ecosystem approach to fisheries (EAF), combating IUU fishing, implementing the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) and building inclusive and equitable value chains to ensure the full contribution of the sector to achieving the SDGs;

noted that improvement of statistical capacity, data delivery and robust reporting and monitoring capacity are still a critical challenge to many Members, but are a key to understanding the progress and shortfalls of **SDG implementation**;

encouraged the uptake of the **Voluntary Guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes** (VGCDs) and thanked FAO for producing technical guides for national authorities to better understand and implement catch documentation schemes, and further highlighted the importance of information sharing, transparency and traceability;

endorsed the proposal for establishing a **COFI Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management** (SCFM) and implementing it as proposed by the WG;

urged FAO, in collaboration with its partners, to continue to **promote the importance of fisheries and aquaculture** in relevant fora and initiatives such as the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and the 27th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP 27).

GLOBAL AND REGIONAL PROCESSES OF PARTICULAR INTEREST TO WECAFC

The Committee celebrated the adoption at the **WTO of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies** as a critical step to achieve SDG target 14.6, and called upon Members to accept the agreement, and complete further negotiations to achieve a comprehensive agreement on fisheries subsidies, and further called on FAO to support Members in its implementation, as appropriate;

appreciated the continued increase in number of Parties to the **Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA)** and noted the conclusions of the Third Meeting of the Parties to the PSMA, including the decision to develop strategies to improve the effectiveness of the PSMA; encouraged further adherence to the Agreement and welcomed the convening of the fourth meeting of the Parties to be hosted by Indonesia in May 2023;

welcomed the launch of the pilot phase of the **PSMA Global Information Exchange System (GIES)**, stressed the need to develop and deploy GIES fully so that Parties can use it in a manner compatible with their national systems, recognized the importance of sharing information for effective implementation of the Agreement and emphasized the importance of continuing the integration with existing RFMO systems;

welcomed the launch of the second version of the **FAO Global Record of Fishing Vessels, Refrigerated Transport Vessels and Supply Vessels (Global Record)**, and reiterated a call to strengthen engagement for broader participation in the Global Record, reiterating the importance for Members to upload and update information on their fleets;

encouraged FAO to increase the knowledge and awareness on **climate change impacts in fisheries and aquaculture** and to provide guidance on adaptation and mitigation, highlighting the need for guidance on climate resilient fisheries management, including by convening a workshop with RFMOs and RFABs, and further encouraged the inclusion of climate change in the GSA.

acknowledged the importance of **area-based management tools in fisheries and aquaculture** for biodiversity conservation, and encouraged FAO to continue the consultative process to develop and disseminate practical FAO-led guidance on “other effective area-based conservation measures” (OECMs);

urged effective **cooperation between fisheries and environment bodies** at national, regional and global levels, stressing that collaboration is needed to ensure coherence in policy-making for the ocean and inland waters, contributing to the protection of biodiversity;

requested FAO to strengthen its involvement in the Intergovernmental Conference on an international legally binding instrument 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 (BBNJ)** process to provide the necessary and relevant technical advice;

encouraged FAO, within its mandate and area of competence, to continue to provide technical advice and relevant information to support the negotiation process on **BBNJ**;

highlighted the key role of RFMOs, RFABs and other regional initiatives for fisheries and aquaculture sustainability and encouraged FAO to continue providing support for RFMOs/RFABs including through **Regional Fishery Body Secretariats’ Network (RSN)** and to develop cross-sectoral cooperation between RFMOs/RFABs and regional seas conventions and programmes, as well as urging Members to engage effectively in all RFMOs to which they are parties;

called upon FAO to further increase its support to Marine and Inland Regional and Subregional Organizations including **Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC)** and Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic (CECAF), and to continue supporting the establishment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden Aquaculture and Fishery Organization (RAAFO), and noted the regional consultation on the establishment of RAAFO that will be held in Saudi Arabia in December 2022.