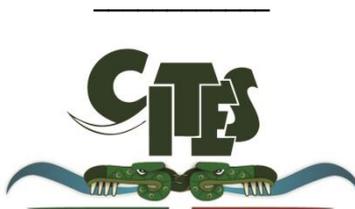


(English and Spanish only / únicamente en inglés y español / seulement en anglais et espagnol)

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA



Twenty-seventh meeting of the Animals Committee
Veracruz (Mexico), 28 April – 3 May 2014

FINAL REPORT OF THE FIFTEENTH SESSION
OF THE WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION (WECAFC)

This information document has been submitted by the Secretariat in relation to agenda item 27. It contains information extracted from the Final Report of the Fifteenth Session of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) (Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, 26-28 March 2014).

* *The geographical designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the CITES Secretariat or the United Nations Environment Programme concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The responsibility for the contents of the document rests exclusively with its author.*



WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION (WECAFC)

FIFTEENTH SESSION

Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, 26-28 March 2014

Final Report

1. The Fifteenth Session of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission was held in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, from 26 to 28 March 2014. The meeting was kindly hosted by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and officially opened by H.E. Anthony Carmona President and H.E. Devant Maharaj, Minister for Food Production of Trinidad and Tobago.
2. The following 29 members attended the Session: Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Costa Rica, Cuba, Commonwealth of Dominica, Dominican Republic, European Union, France, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Panama, Kingdom of Spain, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Republic of Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Apologies were received from Guinea and Honduras. The list of participants, including observers and other participants is in Appendix B.

Election of chairperson and two-vice chairpersons for the Commission

3. Ms. Christine Chan A Shing (Trinidad and Tobago) was elected chairperson of the Commission. Mr. Lionel Reynal (France) and Mr. Raul Gonzalez Pantaleon (Dominican Republic) were elected respectively as first and second Vice-Chairperson.
4. The Commission adopted the agenda as shown in Appendix A.

Review of the State of Fisheries and Aquaculture in the WECAFC region

5. The Commission considered the review of the state of fisheries and aquaculture in the WECAFC region in document WECAFC/XV/2014/2. Members appreciated the report, described additional information available and offered to supply it to the Secretariat. The EU offered to make available to the Commission the data and information of all its members fishing in the WECAFC area, in order to contribute to the improvement of scientific advice. Members underlined the needs for: improved data and information collection; the reduction of uncertainty levels on the state of the fisheries resources; and incorporation of members' management efforts in the review, especially for the main commercial species. It was acknowledged that declining catches could be an indication of management decisions rather than of overfishing. On the other hand inflated production data that is contrary to the known status of given stocks could trigger the misinterpretation of data and result in its erroneous use. Noting that the status report focuses on the countries that harvest the most fish, it was emphasized that the special needs of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) should be taken into account as well and that a separate reporting mechanism for SIDS should eventually be created.
6. The status of the Queen Conch and lobster stocks in the region and the exploitation level assigned to these stocks in the report triggered substantial discussion. The members considered Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing of Queen Conch and lobster a major problem in the region, and asked members to renew their efforts to deter fishers from getting involved in IUU fishing in neighbouring countries.

Main decisions and recommendations of the thirtieth session of COFI and the fourteenth session of WECAFC

7. The Commission took note of the decisions and recommendations of the Thirtieth Session of COFI and the Fourteenth Session of WECAFC, set out in WECAFC/XV/2014/3.
8. The prominence of FAO's work on the promotion of sustainable fisheries and food security was highlighted and the attention of the Commission was drawn to the importance of the current capacity building activities for implementation of the 2009 FAO Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA). Satisfaction was expressed on the proposed endorsement by COFI 31 of the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on Flag State Performance and the contribution they will make to combating IUU fishing. The work of WECAFC in support of the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) was acknowledged. The Commission was requested to increase attention to Sea Cucumber management and some members recommended that a study should be carried out on sharks and marine mammals in the WECAFC region.

Intersessional activities and matters referred to the attention of the Commission

9. The Commission considered the intersessional activities of the Commission and FAO in the WECAFC region as reported in WECAFC/XV/2014/4, and applauded the achievements and outcomes described.
10. The Commission adopted resolution WECAFC/15/2014/8 promoting the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests and the International Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries, when endorsed by COFI (Appendix C).
11. The continuous support of FAO was acknowledged, in particular for the development of national and regional plans of action for the management and conservation of sharks. The WECAFC Working Groups (WGs) were considered to be an essential tool for implementing the Program of Work. The substantive issue of IUU fishing was raised by Bahamas and echoed by several members. In discussion on their respective terms of reference (ToRs), it was underlined that all WGs should be mandated to address IUU fishing. In addition, it was agreed to create a special WG to address IUU fishing issues in the Region and ToRs were prepared and agreed in principle.
12. Proposals were made to incorporate more traditional/local knowledge of fishers and other sources, and to consider new stock assessment techniques for Queen Conch.
13. The session was informed that funds were secured only for some WGs. The Secretariat called on the members to budget for their active participation in the relevant WGs.
14. The Commission endorsed the WGs ToRs as presented in WECAFC/XV/2014/17 under the understanding that they can be amended where relevant, and requested further standardization of the format for the ToRs. The Commission agreed to the establishment of a WECAFC/OSPESCA Working Group on Sharks and the re-activation of the WECAFC/CRFM/IFREMER Working Group on shrimp and groundfish of the North Brazil Guianas Shelf.

Report of the Sixth Session of the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) of WECAFC

15. The Commission thanked the members of the SAG for their work and endorsed the report of the Sixth session of the SAG, including its conclusions and recommendations, as presented in WECAFC/XV/2014/5.
16. The Commission adopted resolutions WECAFC/15/2014/7 "on promoting the implementation of the Regional Strategy for the Control of Invasive Lionfish in the Wider Caribbean, as prepared by the International Coral Reef Initiative and partners", and WECAFC/15/2014/10 "on the Strategic Action Programme for the sustainable management of the shared living marine resources of the Caribbean and north Brazil shelf large marine ecosystems (CLME+ SAP)" (Appendix C).
17. The meeting was informed about the change in the membership and increased size of the SAG.
18. Members expressed concern that the SAG report did not mention the WG on Spiny Lobster. It was recalled that no meeting of this WG was held during the 2012-2013 period as the planned workshop had to be postponed for administrative reasons.

Report by the Secretary on the financial and administrative affairs of the Commission

19. The Commission thanked the Secretariat for the preparation of the first financial and administrative report and welcomed Costa Rica as the 34th member to the Commission.
20. The Commission congratulated the Secretariat for the increased transparency in reporting on administrative and financial issues and endorsed the report as presented.

Consideration of extra-budgetary funding

21. The Commission appreciated the efforts made by FAO and the WECAFC Secretariat, with support from the WECAFC Bureau and members of various WGs, to mobilize resources in support of WECAFC's Programme of Work and looked forward to the start of implementation of the projects listed in WECAFC/XV/2014/Ref.14.
22. The Commission took note of the efforts made by FAO and WECAFC Secretariat, with the support of the WECAFC Bureau and various members of WGs, to mobilize resources in support of the WECAFC Programme of Work and to identify donors.
23. The Commission endorsed the report and instructed the Secretariat to continue the search for funding of the project proposals.

Recommendations on fisheries management

24. The Commission thanked the CRFM Secretariat and FAO for the "Review of current fisheries management performance and conservation measures in the WECAFC Region", in Working Document WECAFC/XV/2014/7, and emphasized that the members should increase their efforts in terms of establishing proper legal, policy and management frameworks in support of sustainable fisheries.
25. The Commission discussed and adopted the following recommendations, which appear in Appendix C to this report:
 - WECAFC/15/2014/1 "on the establishment of a regional closed season for fisheries in the WECAFC area to protect spawning aggregations of groupers and snappers". In discussion, the delegate from the United States announced that they will propose the listing of Nassau Grouper in Annex 3 of the SPAW Protocol at the next SPAW meeting, and invite comments from WECAFC members on its proposal to ensure its adoption.
 - WECAFC/15/2014/2 "on the sustainability of fisheries using fish aggregating devices in the WECAFC area". In discussion, France indicated that five years would be needed to prepare the fishing community for implementation of this recommendation on statistics, and Haiti encouraged attention to the marketing of fish caught by FADs.
 - WECAFC/15/2014/3 "on the management and conservation of Queen Conch in the WECAFC area". In discussion, it was recommended that WECAFC transmit this Recommendation to the CITES Secretariat and request that they consider it in the appropriate manner. It was noted that some countries do not yet have a management plan for Queen Conch, that regionally harmonized terminology on processing is needed and that further steps to develop regional conversion factors need to be taken. The Commission noted that some stakeholders use outdated data on the Queen Conch stocks and fisheries to the possible detriment of members despite the availability of recent information coming out of the report of the first WG on Queen Conch and other available sources. The Commission further noted that inaccurate conclusions based on outdated and erroneous information has been and can be used to justify management actions that may have significant negative social and economic impact on Members. As a way of example, Members expressed concern that outdated and erroneous data were used as justification for an NGO petition to consider to list Queen Conch on the US Endangered Species Act (ESA). The United States explained their process for listing of species under the ESA, and detailed the ongoing review process for Queen Conch.
 - WECAFC/15/2014/4 "on strengthening fisheries management planning in the WECAFC area".

WECAFC Performance Review

26. The Commission thanked FAO for conducting the first performance review in its 40 years of existence of WECAFC in a cost-effective and efficient manner. The assistance from FAO, the Government of France in Guadeloupe and the EU in the organization of the Reorientation and Strategic Planning Workshop, held in Guadeloupe on 29-30 January 2014 were recognized.
27. Considering the outcomes of the Performance Review, the Commission identified the needs for strengthening the Secretariat, reinforcing financial and human resources and the role of the WGs. The communication and information activities should also be further improved, by in particular the WECAFC website. The visibility of WECAFC activities would need to be enhanced.

Strategic Re-orientation of WECAFC (Options to consider)

28. The Commission addressed working document WECAFC/XV/2014/12 on the “Background, guidance and strategic options for the strategic re-orientation of WECAFC: Options paper”. Delegations were not authorized by their governments to take a decision on a possible transformation. After extensive discussion, in which cost aspects and stakeholder involvement were the main issues, it was concluded that WECAFC should remain an Article VI advisory body for the immediate future.
29. The Commission agreed that within Strategy 2 of the CLME Strategic Action Plan, the role of WECAFC and the relationship with its partners OSPESCA and CRFM should be assessed. The Commission expressed appreciation to the WECAFC Secretariat for the in-depth analysis and information package provided regarding the range of options for WECAFC reorientation, however any decision at this session was considered premature.
30. The Commission endorsed as a way forward an independent cost benefit assessment as proposed by the EU. The EU will explore whether the support to this initiative could be made available as well as to organize a workshop to analyse the results. Because of the decision to defer this matter, Draft Resolution WECAFC/XV/2014/6 was not considered.

WECAFC Strategic Plan 2014 -2020

31. The Commission discussed and reviewed the draft WECAFC Strategic Plan 2014 - 2020, as presented in Working Document WECAFC/XV/2014/13 and approved it with minor amendments.

Proposal for Amendment of the Rules of Procedure of WECAFC

32. The Commission reviewed and adopted the draft revised Rules of Procedure proposed in Appendix 1 of Document WECAFC/XV/2014/15, with the understanding that original Rule IX, relating to the SAG, will remain in force and proposed Rule XII, on a Technical Advisory Committee will be withdrawn.

Regional collaboration in addressing IUU fishing

33. The Commission, acknowledging the joint efforts of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the Government of Norway, FAO, WECAFC, CRFM, CLME and collaboration with PEW and the Marine Stewardship Council in promoting regional collaboration in addressing IUU fishing, and particularly, in the organization of the FAO/WECAFC Workshop on Implementing the 2009 FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to Combat Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, 24 – 28 March 2014), discussed and noted the outcomes of this workshop. The Commission adopted Resolution WECAFC/15/2014/9 “on the implementation of the Port state Measures Agreement and the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on flag State performance in the region”. Model legislation to implement the Port State Measures agreement had been provided to Workshop participants.
34. Supported by the EU, France underlines the importance of WECAFC as the appropriate framework to identify solutions for fighting IUU fishing, in addition to bilateral initiatives.
35. Recognizing the high quality and considering the region wide validity of the CRFM work on combating IUU fishing the Commission also adopted Resolution WECAFC/15/2014/6 “on region-wide support to the

implementation of the CRFM "Castries, St Lucia, (2010) Declaration on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing".

SPAW Protocol and regional fisheries management

36. The Commission expressed appreciation to the Secretariats of the SPAW Protocol and WECAFC for having initiated communication and collaboration and emphasized that this should form the basis for further collaboration on sustainable management of fish species (lobster, Queen Conch).
37. The Commission agreed to improve coordination and strengthen collaboration on matters of mutual interest (e.g. regional management plans, support to WGs). WECAFC members which had not done so were encouraged to become party to the SPAW Protocol.

WECAFC – FIRMS partnership

38. The Commission took note of the outcomes of the WECAFC-FIRMS Workshop on marine resources and fisheries inventories, held in Corpus Christi, United States of America, on 01-02/11/2013. Recognizing that a partnership with FIRMS would enable WECAFC to tap into the knowledge and experience from a well-established, cost-effective system for the monitoring of fisheries resources status and fisheries activities, the Commission agreed to enter into a WECAFC-FIRMS Partnership.
39. The Commission expressed the need for capacity building on the use of FIRMS and emphasized that the works should concentrate initially on those fisheries and stocks that are commercially most important to the membership.

Programme of Work of WECAFC (2014 - 2015)

40. The Commission considered the Draft Programme of Work of WECAFC (2014-2015) set out in WECAFC/XV/2014/14. The Commission agreed on minor amendments to proposals on Working Groups and approved the Programme of Work shown in Appendix D. It was suggested that the Programme of Work should explicitly mention activities related to the linkage between environment/conservation and fisheries as well as proposed activities supporting the way forward for WECAFC related to the WG on IUU fishing, and the proposal from the EU on the cost efficiency analysis of the strategic options.

Any other matters

41. The members expressed warm appreciation to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for their excellent organization and hospitality that contributed to the success of the session.

Date and Place of the next session

42. The Commission welcomed the offer made by France to host the 16th session of WECAFC in French Guyana, Martinique or Guadeloupe.

Adoption of the report

43. The report was adopted on Friday 28 March 2014 at 16.00 hrs.

Recommendation WECAFC/15/2014/3

ON THE MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION OF QUEEN CONCH IN THE WECAFC AREA

The Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC),

RECALLING that the objective of the Commission is to promote the effective conservation, management and development of the living marine resources within the area of competence of the Commission, in accordance with the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, and to address common problems of fisheries management and development faced by members of the Commission;

NOTING with concern the ongoing challenges in ensuring sustained and legal utilization of Queen Conch (*Strombus gigas*) resources, complying with CITES Appendix-II provisions for international trade in the species, and the limited progress made in terms of regional collaboration and coordination of the management of the resource;

MINDFUL of the high socio-economic importance of the Queen Conch fisheries for the Wider Caribbean Region;

RECOGNIZING that in recent years, national efforts for the management and conservation of Queen Conch have increased in the region, leading to encouraging developments such as better stock protection, improved understanding of the species ecology and management needs, and enhanced enforcement to combat illegal catch and trade, and that most of this progress made was CITES driven;

FURTHER RECOGNIZING the efforts at local, national and regional levels to manage Queen Conch fisheries in line with the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement, the precautionary approach and the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) as regionally promoted by the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM Working Group on Queen Conch members, the 2009 FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing, and the provisions of CITES for international trade in the species;

MINDFUL of the obligations and available opportunities to the countries that are Party to the SPAW (Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife) Protocol to work collaboratively to implement plans for conservation of Queen Conch, which is listed in Annex III of that Treaty;

CONVINCED that scientific research on the biology, life cycle, conservation and management of Queen Conch should continue to inform fisheries decision makers on, *inter alia*, sustainable harvest and fishery strategies, precautionary controls, appropriate fishing capacity, and measures to enhance enforcement and compliance;

RECOGNIZING the efforts of the CRFM to facilitate queen conch assessments during its annual scientific meetings, to improve and harmonize scientific approaches to assessing the status of Queen Conch stocks and to improve the regional capacity to conduct underwater surveys for the purpose of estimating abundance and setting Total Allowable Catches;

APPRECIATING the agreement on a Joint Action Plan of CRFM and OSPESCA, concluded in September 2012, which emphasizes the need for joint work on, *inter alia*, Queen Conch research and sustainable management, and the ongoing work by CFMC, CITES and WECAFC towards sustainable utilization of the resource;

ACKNOWLEDGING the work of UNEP's Caribbean Environment Programme under the Cartagena Convention and in particular the listing of Queen Conch under its SPAW Protocol;

RECALLING the outcomes of the first meeting of the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM Working Group on Queen Conch, held Panama City, Panama, 23–25 October 2012 and the Declaration of Panama City prepared by the same Working Group;

FURTHER RECALLING the need for immediate implementation, as applicable, of the recommendations made by the Queen Conch Expert Workshop held in Miami, USA, 22–24 May 2012, and reviewed and validated by the Working Group during the meeting in Panama City on 23–25 October 2012;

REAFFIRMING the commitments made by Queen Conch range states at the CITES Sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16), held in Bangkok (Thailand), 3-14 March 2013 and the decision made on “Regional cooperation on the management of and trade in the Queen Conch (*Strombus gigas*)”;

RECOGNIZING that some WECAFC members, including Belize, Bahamas, Colombia, Cuba, Honduras and Jamaica have conducted recent stock assessments of the Queen Conch in the waters under their national jurisdiction, and are implementing the recommendations from the Working Group and CITES and preparing the agreed Non-Detriment Findings;

PENDING the delivery of additional information by the Working Group, CRFM Annual Scientific Meeting and the WECAFC Scientific Advisory Group (SAG);

ADOPTS in conformity with the provision of Article 6 (h) of the Revised Statutes of the WECAFC the RECOMMENDATION that:

1. Members of WECAFC implement the CITES COP 16 Decision on “Regional cooperation on the management of and trade in the queen conch (*Strombus gigas*)” and report, through FAO and the CITES Secretariat on progress with implementation of the decision, to CITES COP 17.
2. Members of WECAFC prepare (if relevant) national level Queen Conch management and conservation plans, in line with CITES COP16 Decision, and put in place appropriate legislation in support of long-term sustainable Queen Conch stocks.
3. WECAFC, FAO and CITES cooperate closely and work jointly on the improvement and standardization of trade data and statistics (through regionally agreed conversion factors in the absence of national conversion factors based on regionally agreed processing grades and terminologies) for Queen Conch and its derivatives such as pearls, shells and opercula.
4. Members of WECAFC work towards determining and adopting national conversion factors based on regionally agreed processing grades and terminologies before the end of 2015 and communicate the adoption formally to the FAO and CITES Secretariats.
5. Members of WECAFC apply the corresponding regionally agreed conversion factors by the end of 2016.
6. Members of WECAFC prepare and share their non-detriment findings in 2014 in support of well-informed decision making processes at the national and regional levels for better conservation and management of the Queen Conch.
7. WECAFC sends this recommendation to the CITES Secretariat with the request that CITES include this topic in the work of the Animals Committee.
8. WECAFC, in close coordination with OSPESCA, CRFM, CFMC, CITES and the SPAW Protocol Secretariat, develop a regional plan for the management and conservation of Queen Conch, in accordance with the best available scientific evidence to be presented to the 16th session of WECAFC for final review and regional adoption.