

Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission Report of the Eleventh Session of the Commission and of the Eighth Session of the Committee for the Development And Management of Fisheries in the Lesser Antilles. St George's, Grenada, 21-24 October 2003. FAO Fisheries Report No. 725

APPENDIX D

**RECOMMENDATION ON STRENGTHENING WECAFC
AS AN ORGANIZATION**

The Commission recommended intersessional work be conducted to explore the feasibility of strengthening WECAFC to promote effective conservation and management of marine capture fisheries throughout the Western Central Atlantic region.

Participants in the Eleventh Session of WECAFC recognized the following factors as relevant to this recommendation:

- The WECAFC region is extremely diverse, both with respect to social, economic, cultural and political characteristics and with respect to the types of fisheries resources available.
- Many of the most critical fisheries resources are trans-boundary, straddling or highly migratory stocks, making regional and sub-regional cooperation a prerequisite for sustainable fisheries management.
- The lack of effective regional cooperation has contributed to the current state of the region's fisheries. Many of the most economically and socially important fisheries are in decline.

In its 2003 assessment of the Status of Fisheries in the Western Central Atlantic Region, FAO assessed the situation as follows: "Unless urgent steps are taken to collect sufficient information on landings and effort to provide, at least, the minimum information necessary to ensure sustainable utilization, there is a high risk that landings will continue to decline, as this review shows many have already done. This will lead to further erosion of the social and economic benefits currently being derived from the region's marine resources. As so many of the resources are shared between two or more countries, close co-operation between countries at a variety of international levels will commonly be advantageous and often essential in securing this".

The Commission considered that improved regional cooperation leading to effective regional conservation and management measures was essential to change the present situation and believed that strengthening WECAFC was a possible way forward in this regard. The region needs to adopt a unified and coordinated approach to fisheries management for shared stocks, recognizing that the diversity of the region will sometimes require multiple approaches.

As noted in the paper, "Current Strategy of WECAFC" (WECAFC/XI/03/09), "WECAFC is the only regional cooperation institution whose geographic jurisdiction covers the entire region and whose membership includes all of the countries bordering it". For these reasons, a strengthened WECAFC would bring substantial benefits to the region. As the focal

point for fisheries management in the region, this organization would be better placed to secure increased financial contributions from member States along the lines of other regional fisheries management organizations. A strengthened WECAFC would also be in a much better position to coordinate relevant scientific research and to contribute to the region's battle against IUU fishing, as it could adopt anti-IUU measures now in use in other regional fora. With progress on the twin goals of science and enforcement, the long-term sustainability of fisheries resources in the Caribbean would be more assured and planners could more effectively use this resource in poverty alleviation programs at the national level.

WECAFC members have repeatedly stressed the need for strengthened regional cooperation for critical fish stocks. With respect to queen conch resources, Caribbean countries have adopted the 1996 San Juan Declaration, which explicitly calls for strengthened regional cooperation on queen conch. Prior to the 2001 WECAFC meeting, Ministers and senior decision-makers at a meeting of the Spiny Lobster Ad Hoc Working Group declared that "greater cooperation was required among lobster-producing nations of the WECAFC region given the shared nature of the resource".

The Commission accordingly recommended the establishment of a WECAFC intersessional working group tasked to study the feasibility of strengthening regional fisheries management in the region and to report to the twelfth session of WECAFC. Funding for the intersessional working group would be channeled through FAO. To achieve equitable geographic distribution, this working group should be open to participation by all WECAFC members. The Scientific Advisory Group should also be invited to participate in the intersessional work.

This Intersessional work should explore the following issues:

- Experience within FAO in strengthening other international fisheries bodies.
- How a strengthened WECAFC could most effectively interact with existing mechanisms and programs in the region.
- How a strengthened WECAFC could increase economic benefits derived from fishing activities, particularly with respect to the contribution of artisanal fisheries to economic development and food security in the region.
- How a strengthened WECAFC could promote the adoption, implementation and enforcement at the national level of compatible management measures for shared stocks in the region.
- How a strengthened WECAFC could build on current structures and programs in the region such as the existing working groups and build effective outreach with related organizations and institutions.
- Cost estimates for the establishment and running of a strengthened WECAFC with management authorities and a timetable for its establishment.
- Whether a strengthened WECAFC should initially focus on species of particular interest. Case studies could include the following spiny lobster, queen conch, snapper-grouper complex, shrimp and groundfish, wahoo, and dolphin fish.

The Commission also expressed the wish that participants in the White Water to Blue Water Conference to be held in Miami, Florida, USA, 21-26 March 2004, specifically support the intersessional work envisioned through this recommendation.