



## **Scientists advice to fishery policy makers in the Caribbean**

**Cancun, 29 October 2011**

Policy makers should be alerted to the declining trend in fisheries production in the Caribbean region. The Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) calls for renewed attention from policy makers to the declining trend in fish catches of some important commercial fisheries species stocks including the valuable Caribbean spiny lobster and several important reef species and urges action in support of the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

WECAFC was established in 1973 under the constitution of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and currently has 35 member countries. WECAFC aims to promote the effective conservation, management and development of the living marine resources in the Wider Caribbean Region, in accordance with the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, and address common problems of fisheries management and development faced by members of the Commission.

The Scientific Advisory Group of WECAFC, at its fifth session, which took place in Puerto Morelos, Mexico on 28-29 October, discussed the fisheries resource status in the Wider Caribbean Region, identified emerging and continuing issues of concern to fisheries stakeholders, and produced a set of research-related priorities focusing on fisheries resource assessment and management, for consideration by WECAFC in February 2012.

### **Working Groups of regional experts**

With the intention of increasing the effectiveness of WECAFC, the SAG made recommendations for reinforcing cooperation between different regional and sub-regional fisheries bodies by forming joint working groups and strengthening the activities and functioning of various existing working groups composed of regional experts in their fields. These included, amongst others: the establishment of an OSPESCA<sup>1</sup>/WECAFC/CRFM<sup>2</sup> Working Group on Spiny Lobster, and the strengthening of the CRFM/WECAFC Working Group on Flying Fish in the Eastern Caribbean. In relation to Queen Conch the SAG noted that good progress had been made in several countries in recent years in management of the Conch, aided by the involvement of CITES. Nevertheless, the situation needs to be carefully monitored and there is need for improvement in a number of countries in the region.

### **Communication and harmonization**

The importance of fisheries and aquaculture in the region is frequently not recognised and the SAG recommended that knowledge of the sector and the priority given to it needed to be raised. The public media could make a valuable contribution in this. Moreover, the WECAFC members were urged to

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<sup>1</sup> Organization of Fishing and Aquaculture in Central America (OSPESCA)

<sup>2</sup> Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM)

pay attention to further development and harmonization of policy, management plans and legal frameworks in the region.

### **Fisheries resource assessment and management**

The SAG drew the attention of WECAFC and its members to the following research priorities aimed at improving current fisheries resource assessment and management:

- Comprehensive fisheries assessment
- Building capacity for research, assessment and management
- Aquaculture development and management
- Incorporating social, economic and livelihood considerations
- Impacts of climate change and variability on fisheries
- Governance of marine resources incorporating ecosystem approaches

The SAG meeting was hosted by the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI, more info can be found at: [www.gcfi.org](http://www.gcfi.org)) and was composed of fisheries experts from Barbados, Mexico, Panama and the United States of America, CRFM, CERMES<sup>3</sup>, CLME Project<sup>4</sup>, GCFI, NOAA<sup>5</sup>, OSPESCA and FAO. More information about WECAFC and its SAG can be found at: <http://www.fao.org/fishery/rfb/wecaafc/en>

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<sup>3</sup> Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES)

<sup>4</sup> Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem Project (CLME Project)

<sup>5</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)