

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACT

Ana Suárez

asuarez@edf.org

Cel. +52-1-6121042013

Fishery Leaders from Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean Meet to Tackle Overfishing and Climate Impacts

Shared vision and cooperation are seen as critical elements to tackle challenges at key conference

(Punta Cana, Dominican Republic - November 6, 2019) A key conference of fishery leaders from the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean region met today to discuss and urge the adoption of sustainable fisheries management as one of the best pathways to tackle both overfishing and the negative impacts of climate change.

During a special session of the 72nd annual Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI) Conference, participants agreed that solving these challenges will require both national and regional work and cooperation. Nations represented at the conference included participants from the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Belize, Mexico, and the United States.

Through the special session, titled “*Effective fisheries management to redefine fisheries policies in the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean*”, organized by Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), fishing leaders, managers, fishermen, and scientists from those five nations, presented successful experiences on fisheries management and policies that are spurring collective action to help address the region’s main challenges. The group agreed that the best path forward for sustainable fisheries is to promote good management both on a national and regional scale.

“We all know that our oceans are at risk unless we do something now. The Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico countries share many common fishing resources, such as grouper, snapper, or other finfish. That is why we are calling on more cooperation and communication among our nations, particularly now that fishing resources may move due to climate change,” said José Luis Carrillo Galaz, President of the Fishing Federation of Fishing Cooperatives of West-Center Yucatan, Mexico.

Some of the main challenges related to fisheries management and ecosystems health presented in the session include overfishing, climate change, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and the need to more actively involve fishing communities in fisheries management. To solve them, participation and policy reform are crucial to making changes in the water long-lasting, according to participants.

“Including all voices when doing fisheries management policies, through the Managed Access Committees and the Fisheries Advisory Council, for instance, has been extremely effective for finding solutions that work for both the environment and the people. Plus, it creates a greater sense of belonging and stewardship over the resources,” shared Elmer Rodríguez, fisher and Director of the National Fishing Cooperative in Belize, whose country [tripled the size of its Marine Protected Areas](#) early this year, and is about to publish a new National Fisheries Law.

During the session, Valerie Miller, Senior Manager at Environmental Defense Fund, shared eight pillars for effective fisheries management that can help address the challenges mentioned by participants. These pillars include science-based solutions, participatory processes, and regional cooperation. Also, during the GCFI Conference, EDF released a French version of its [Virtual Fisheries Academy](#), an interactive tool to help practitioners and fishers learn about sustainable fisheries management. The Academy – previously available in English, Spanish, Mandarin and now translated into French with the support of the United Nations Environment Programme and the Caribbean Biological Corridor – is now accessible to more people in the Caribbean region.

“Once again, the GCFI provided a unique opportunity to reflect upon the need to continue working from a regional perspective, especially in the face of global challenges like climate change. We expect the solutions presented in this session will translate into regional approaches that can be scaled up for the benefit of coastal livelihoods, food security, and ecosystems conservation”, expressed Valerie Miller.

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Editor's note:

Among the participants of this special session were:

- Alejandro Acosta – Researcher, United States
- Andrés Aldana – Representative of the Turneffe Atoll Sustainability Association, Belize
- Romina Alzugaray Martínez – Researcher, Center of Fishing Research, Cuba
- José Luis Carrillo Galaz – President of the Federation of Fishing Cooperatives in the Center-West region of Yucatan, Mexico
- Aldo Croquer – The Nature Conservancy, Dominican Republic
- Sepp Haukebo – Manager for the Gulf of Mexico, Environmental Defense Fund
- Luis Manjarrés – Researcher, Colombia
- Jeannette Mateo – Dominican Republic Council on Fishing and Aquaculture, Dominican Republic
- Valerie Miller – Senior Manager for the Cuba Program, Environmental Defense Fund
- Nicanor Nolasco Requena – Program Manager, Environmental Defense Fund, Belize
- Rafael Puga Millán – Researcher, Center of Fishing Research, Cuba
- Elmer Rodríguez – Fisher and Director of the National Fishing Cooperative, Belize
- Josefina Santos – Director of the Regional Center of Fishing Research in Yucalpeten, National Institute of Fishing and Aquaculture, Mexico
- Elizabeth Silleck – Policy Manager for the Gulf of Mexico Program, Environmental Defense Fund
- Dan Whittle – Senior Director, Environmental Defense Fund
- Someira Zambrano – Dominican Reef Network, Dominican Republic