GCFI79

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Curaçao, November 2 - 6, 2026

ABOUT GCFI

The Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI) was founded in 1947 to promote the exchange of information on the use and management of marine resources in the Gulf and Caribbean Region. From its beginning, GCFI has endeavored to involve scientific, governmental, and resource-use sectors in providing a broad perspective on relevant fisheries issues. The GCFI membership comprises over 40 nations and territories representing university faculty and students, governmental agencies, policy-makers, private sector, fishers, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders.

ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

GCFI is partnering with the Government of Curaçao, Federashon Kooperativanan Uní di Produkshon (FKUP), Fundashon Ekonomia Sosial Kòrsou (FESK), Piskabon Bonaire, and the Caribbean Cetacean Society (CCS) to host GCFI79. GCFI79 is an Endorsed Decade Activity with the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. The GCFI79 logo was designed by Ashanti Raphaela; born and raised in Curaçao and a marine biologist herself

CONFERENCE THEME

The theme for the Conference is Future-Proofing Fisheries: Resources, Resilience, and Tradition which calls for a forward-looking, solutions-oriented approach to ensuring that Caribbean fisheries can withstand environmental, economic, and social pressures while continuing to provide food security, livelihoods, and cultural identity. It recognizes that sustainability is no longer just about conservation, it is about adaptation, innovation, and inclusive governance. The three pillars: Resources, Resilience, and Tradition, represent interconnected priorities.

CONFERENCE APP - WHOVA

GCFI will be once again utilizing Whova, our Conference App, which can help improve networking and facilitate connections between in-person and virtual participants. Attendees can create profiles, communicate with and schedule meetups with other attendees (in-person or virtually) whilst also being able to create personalised agendas, take notes, share documents, and much more. The app will also be used to provide simultaneous interpretation. **Please remember to bring your personal headsets (headphones, ear buds).**

REGISTRATION & TIME ZONE

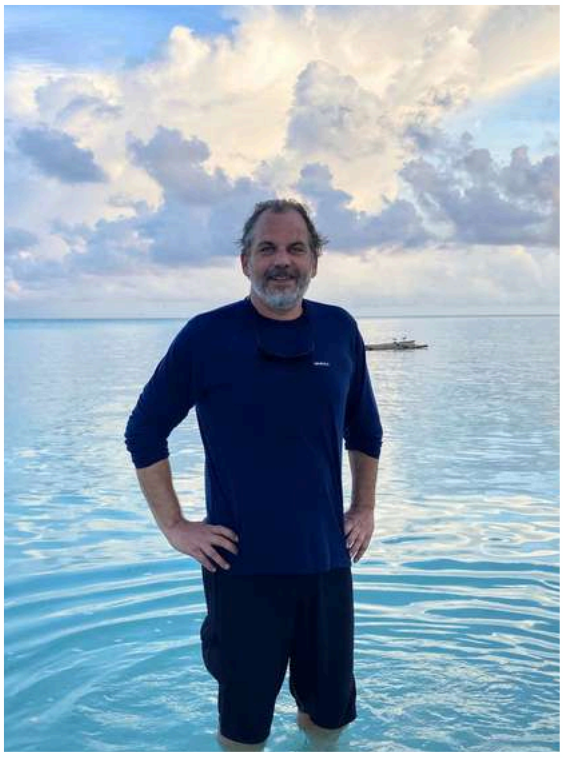
Registration will take place at the space outside the conference room between 16:00 - 18:00 on Sunday 1 November and daily from 7:30.

All times listed within this program are Local Curaçao Time
Atlantic Standard Time (AST) (GMT-4)

MONDAY 2ND NOVEMBER, 2026

GCFI79 OPENING CEREMONY | 8:00 - 9:00

- **Entrance of the Prime Minister of Curaçao**
- **Recognition and welcome by MC Juni Sluis**
- **National Anthem of Curaçao**
- **Welcome remarks by the Chairman of the Local Organizing Committee**
- **Address by the GCFI Chairman**
- **Opening address by the Prime Minister of Curaçao**
- **Ringing of the bell by the Prime Minister of Curaçao to officially open the conference**



THE LEROY CRESWELL MEMORIAL KEYNOTE ADDRESS (9:00)

KEYNOTE: DR MARK VERMEIJ
Science Director,
Carmabi Research Station

GCFI is pleased to announce that the Keynote Address of the 79th Annual Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute will be delivered by Dr. Mark Vermeij on **'Missing Conservation Goals'**. Dr. Vermeij obtained his PhD at the University of Amsterdam. Since then he has worked as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Miami and Hawaii, and is now the science director at CARMABI on Curaçao.

Since 1955, CARMABI facilitates fieldwork of approximately 250 visiting researchers a year resulting in more than 35 scientific publications annually.In addition to research, CARMABI advises (Caribbean) governments and NGO's on nature conservation, manages several natural parks itself (including an underwater park) and runs an educational program for local schoolchildren. Vermeij is also a professor at the Institute for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Dynamics (IBED) at the University of Amsterdam where his research focusses on the dynamics of coral reef communities around the world across all spatial scales of organization, including microbial, genetic and metabolomic approaches. Being permanently based "in the field" in Curacao, he has first hand experience on the issues arising from small islands wanting to develop their economy and protect their marine resources at the same time.

COFFEE BREAK | 10:00 - 10:30

MONDAY 2ND NOVEMBER, 2026

SMALL SCALE FISHERIES SESSION | 10:30 - 12:30

Moderated by Dr. Yvette Diei Ouadi

- 10:30 **Aaron Adams:** Recreational Fisher Local Ecological Knowledge Provides Information Applicable to Estuary Management
- 10:40 **MichelleFernandez:** Building a Regional Framework to Improve Small-Scale Fisheries Data Reporting and Monitoring in the Caribbean
- 10:50 **Nicholas Salvi:** Innovation in Technology for Small-Scale Fisheries Management
- 11:00 **Madeleine Guyant:** Utilizing FishPath in The Bahamas to Improve Data Collection and Fisheries Management
- 11:10 **Anna Schuhbauer (V)** Co-Developing a Socioeconomic Valuation Framework For Domestic Fisheries In The Bahamas
- 11:20 **Jeremy Pittman:** "My life is in the sea": A case study of fisheries tradition, culture, and resilience from Mahaut, Dominica
- 11:30 **Jamie Aquino:** Protecting the oceanic whitetip shark through the engagement and involvement of southern Haiti's artisanal fishers
- 11:40 **Colleen O'Brien:** Management priorities of fishery stakeholders in the US Caribbean
- 11:50 **Raymon van Anrooy:** Saving Fuel in Tropical Longline Fisheries: the benefits of retrofitting longline vessels with a dihedral bow
- 12:00 **Jean-Philippe Marechal:** Future-proofing Caribbean coral reef fisheries: A dynamic vulnerability framework linking risk pathways and future scenarios
- 12:10 **Moderated Discussion and Questions**

LUNCH BREAK | 12:30 - 14:00

SPECIAL SESSION | 14:00 - 16:00

FOOD SECURITY AND HOW FISHERIES CAN BENEFIT THE SOCIAL ECONOMY OF COMMUNITIES

Panelists

- Mr. Leandro Pereira Morales: How fishery can benefit the social economy of our communities
- Professor Wayne Ganpat: Food security focus
- Panel Discussion

COFFEE BREAK | 16:00 - 16:30

FISHERS FORUM | 16:30 - 18:00

Future-Proofing Fisheries: Resources, Resilience and Tradition – Putting Fishers at the Centre

MONDAY 2ND NOVEMBER, 2026

FISHERS FORUM | 16:30 - 18:00

Future-Proofing Fisheries: Resources, Resilience and Tradition – Putting Fishers at the Centre

Moderated by Mitchell Lay (Gladding Memorial Award Winner, 2009)

- 16:30 **Mitch Lay:** The F4F initiative: Future proofing fisheries: with fishers at the centre
- 16:45 **Fadilah Ali:** GCFI and F4F, Institutional structure and relationships
- 16:50 **Local Fisher:** Local fisheries of ABC Islands
- 17:00 **GMA winner:** Fisher-led resilience in a changing world
- 17:10 **GMA winner:** Responsible stewardship: the role of fishers and Fisher Organisations
- 17:20 **GMA winner:** Traditions driving responsible stewardship
- 17:30 **GMA winner:** Shifting the focus – fishers as co-managers of marine resources
- 17:40 **Moderated Discussion and Questions**
- 17:50 **Gladding Memorial Award presentation**

WELCOME RECEPTION | 19:00 - 21:00

TUESDAY 3RD NOVEMBER, 2026

STUDENT SYMPOSIUM | 8:00 - 10:30

Moderated by Dr. Alfonso Aguilar-Perera, GCFI Student Awards Chair

- 8:00 **Teal Guetschow:** A potential 'win-win' solution: net illumination maintains a diverse target fish catch and may reduce bycatch at a global leatherback hotspot
- 8:15 **Matia Pavkovic:** Coastal Fish Assemblages in a Highly Dynamic Tropical Seascape: Environmental Variability and Increasing Human Pressure
- 8:30 **Katie Geddes:** Seek, and you will find: Adaptive Capacity of Fisherfolk To Climate Change in the Western Tropical Atlantic
- 8:45 **Alberto Alejandro Rello Basto:** Spatiotemporal distribution of fishing activity in the mid-scale fleet of Yucatán, Mexico: A VMS-based behavioral segmentation approach
- 9:00 **Sophia Costa:** Fine-Scale Fish Movement Reveals the Importance of Seascape Structure Following a Historic Seagrass Die-Off in Florida Bay
- 9:15 **Deniel Novella:** Integrating Marine Megafauna Spatial Analysis and Anthropogenic Threat Mapping into Trinidad and Tobago's National Resilience Frameworks
- 9:30 **Ellyn Willse:** Defining the Transition from Habitat to Harmful Algal Bloom in Southeastern Florida Sargassum
- 9:45 **Zenaida María Navarro-Martínez**: Distribution, connectivity, and uses of the Atlantic tarpon (*Megalops atlanticus* Valenciennes, 1847) in Cuba: implications for its conservation
- 10:00 **Axelle Lefaucher:** Assessing reserve effects in a de facto no-take zone: a multi-scale approach in a chlordecone-contaminated bay (Martinique)
- 10:15 **Alyssa Pagel:** Rethinking Spawning Migrations: Resident and Migratory Behaviors Among Adult Sheepshead (*Archosargus probatocephalus*)

COFFEE BREAK | 10:30 - 11:00

HABITATS AND ECOSYSTEMS SESSION | 11:00 - 12:30

Moderated by Dr. Kelly Kingon

- 11:00 **Arno Verhoeven:** From Planning to Action: Implementing a Regional Conservation Strategy for Key Habitats in the Dutch Caribbean
- 11:10 **Kim de Mutsert:** Investigating mitigating effects of alternative flood control structure operations on estuarine fish and shellfish
- 11:20 **Karlisa Callwood:** Mapping Support: Adapting the Stakeholder Cube for Mangrove Conservation Engagement in The Bahamas
- 11:30 **Danielle de Kool:** The Wild East : Surveying Bonaire's Windward Reefs
- 11:40 **Milena Hernandez-Ortiz:** Towards Blue Governance in Colombia: Progress in Marine Spatial Planning for the Energy Transition and Use-Conflict Management
- 11:50 **Jennifer Rehage:** Understanding seagrass ecosystem function through coproduction with FL Keys fishing guides
- 12:00 **Lindsay Huebner:** Three decades of monitoring Florida's Coral Reef documents shifting communities and informs coral genetic management
- 12:10 **Moderated Discussion and Questions**

LUNCH BREAK | 12:30 - 14:00

TUESDAY 3RD NOVEMBER, 2026

SPECIAL SESSION | 14:00 - 16:00

Bojeo a Cuba: Scaling National Marine Monitoring into Actionable Conservation & Fisheries Management in the Caribbean

Hosted by: The Environmental Defense Fund

This special session will showcase the "Bojeo a Cuba" circumnavigation expedition as a scalable, national-level model for integrating marine monitoring, fisheries science, and policy-relevant action across the Caribbean. Conducted in 2023, during the heatwave that triggered the 4th global coral bleaching event, the expedition covered 1,960 nautical miles over 53 days and surveyed 66 sites in 23 reefs across Cuban waters, involving more than 30 national and international institutions. It generated one of the most comprehensive recent baselines of coral reef condition, coral health, fish communities, marine megafauna, and human impacts in the region. The session will synthesize key findings and focus on how these results are being translated into management and policy, addressing:

- National-scale marine biodiversity baselines and monitoring systems
- Climate change and fisheries interactions
- Drivers of reef fish biomass and ecosystem resilience
- Marine megafauna distribution and conservation priorities
- Multispecies and ecosystem-based fisheries management approaches
- Co-design processes linking scientists, communities, and decision-makers
- Pathways from scientific data to national regulations and conservation strategies to national regulations and conservation strategies

COFFEE BREAK | 16:00 - 16:30

GOVERNANCE | 16:30 - 18:00

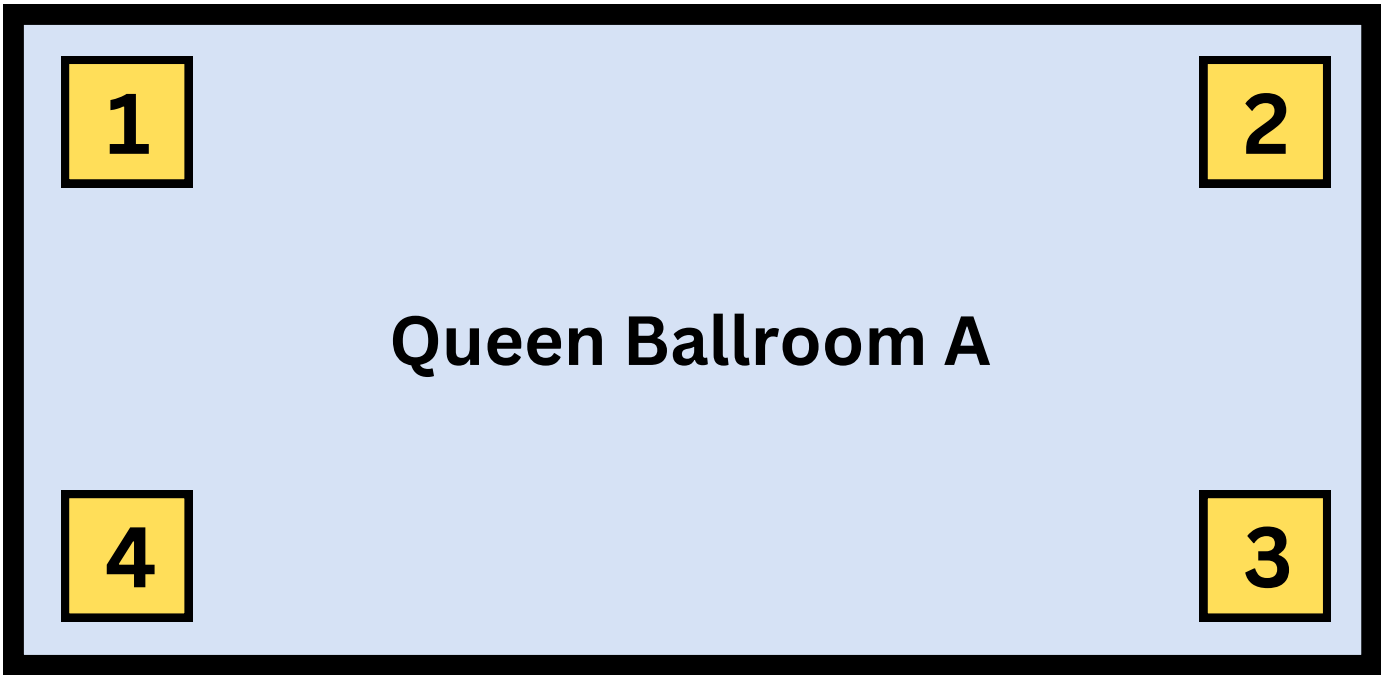
Moderated by Dr. Manoj Shivlani

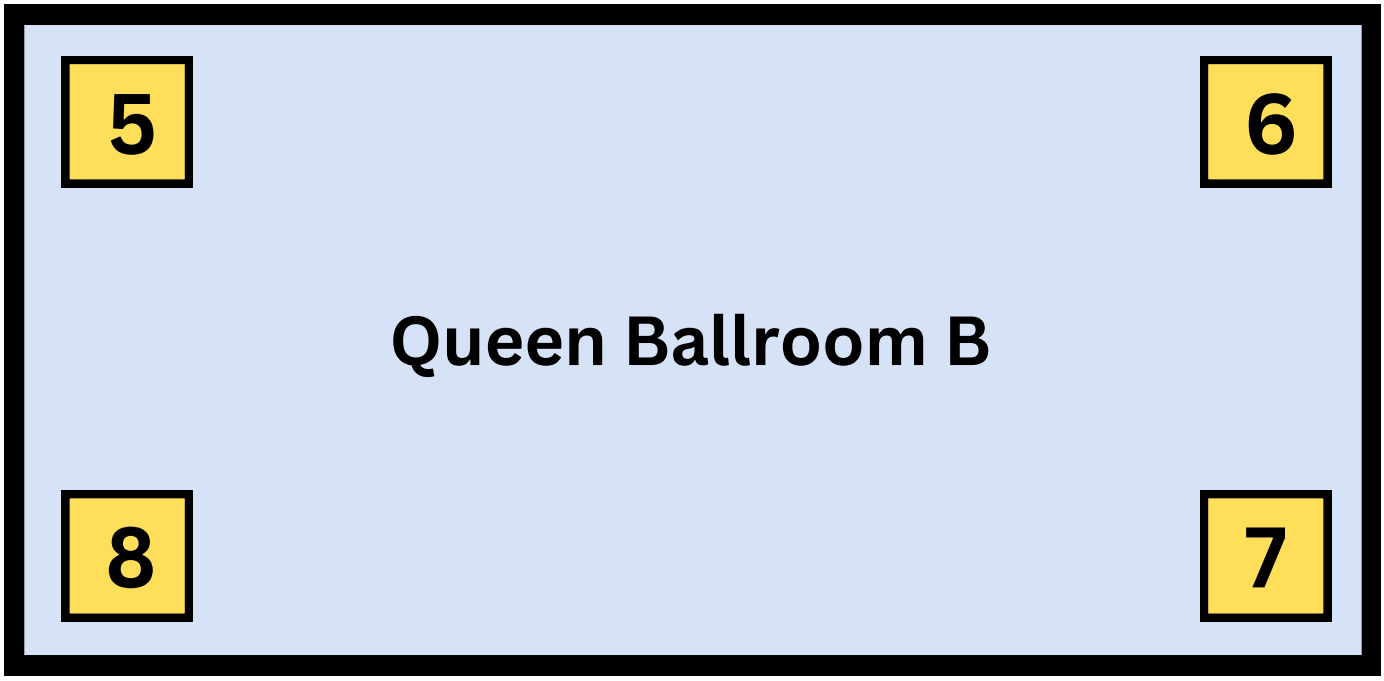
- 16:30 **Nia Browne:** From Theory to Practice: Integrating Fisheries Economics into Management—A Perspective from Barbados
- 16:40 **Arie Sanders:** Practicing governance: Local perspectives on mangrove management in northern Honduras
- 16:50 **Melanie Andrews-Bacchus:** Technical Review of the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Application in the Caribbean
- 17:00 **Jairo Altamar:** Governing Selectivity: A Regional Minimum-Mesh Rule for Artisanal Fisheries in the Colombian Caribbean
- 17:10 **Matia Pavkonic:** Illegal Foreign Fishing in French Guiana: An Integrated Assessment of Fishing Effort, Production and Spatial Dynamics
- 17:20 **Melissa Marschke:** Creating better working conditions in fishiing
- 17:30 **Derek Armitage:** Marine carbon dioxide removal (mCDR) and fisheries interactions: a governance perspective
- 17:40 **Moderated Discussion and Questions**

POSTER SESSION | 19:00 - 21:00

GCFI79 POSTER SESSION

- The Poster Session will be split between two rooms in the Queen Ballroom
- Each presenter will have a scheduled presentation time of 15 minutes and the posters will change according to the attached schedule
- Presenters will be grouped according to a theme and assigned to a monitor
- There will be two sessions: **Session A: 7-8PM** and **Session B: 8-9PM**





GCFI79 POSTER SESSION A | 19:00 - 20:00

STATION 1A: Small Scale Fisheries

- 19:00 **Derek Soto:** Designing a Port Sampling Survey for the small-scale multispecies fisheries of the US Caribbean
- 19:15 **Jirani Welch:** Adaptive Management of a Small-Scale Trap Fishery in Bermuda: Lessons from the Guinea Chick Fishery
- 19:30 **Sabrine Brismeur**: Building Trust Before Biodiversity: Lessons from an Artisanal Fisher Incentive Program in Sint Maarten
- 19:45 **Lorenzo George**: Improving the durability and end-of-life performance of lobster pots in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines: a prospective pilot study on pot materials, biodegradable panels and ALDFG prevention

STATION 2A: Governance

- 19:00 **Amy Piko:** Deepwater Horizon Restoration Program Oceanic Fish Restoration Project – Final Results from Working in Partnership with the Gulf Pelagic Longline Fleet to Help Restore Natural Resources
- 19:15 **Frédérique Fardin:** Navigating the academic-practitioner interface in ocean governance: insights from small island developing state and territories
- 19:30 **Sharon Hutchinson:** Strengthening Blue Economy Value Chains: Evidence from the Gillnet Fishery Value Chain in Trinidad and Tobago
- 19:45 **Alexandria Rodriguez Doyle:** Independence and Social Mobility through Education and Lived Experiences

STATION 3A: Emerging Issues

- 19:00 **Iksandar Costa:** Close to the edge: thermal limits in tropical estuarine nurseries
- 19:15 **Melanie Gomez:** Modeling Climate-Driven Changes in Reef Fish Communities Along Florida's Gulf Coast Using Underwater Video Surveys
- 19:30 **Shalanka Ranjula Millawitiya Arachchilage:** Sea Turtles in Trinidad and Tobago: Sentinels of Anthropogenic Stressors in the Marine Environment
- 19:45 **Kelly Kingon:** Sargassum Solutions: Artisanal Products for the Cottage Industry

STATION 4A: Marine Protected Areas

- 19:00 **Danellia Aitcheson:** Strengthening Blue Resilience: A Model for Locally Led Adaptation (LLA) in Jamaica's Small-Scale Fisheries
- 19:15 **Daavia Nesbitt:** Water Quality Assessment of Sweeting's Pond, Eleuthera, The Bahamas: Implications for the Habitat of the Lined Seahorse (Hippocampus erectus)
- 19:30 **Lindy Knowles:** Baseline Marine Assessments and Community-Driven Park Management Enhancement for the San Salvador Marine Protected Areas
- 19:45 **Kendon James:** Assessing Pollution and Ecosystem Health in Woburn Bay, Grenada: An Integrated Evaluation of Physicochemical Water Quality, Microbial Contamination and Benthic Macroinvertebrate Communities

GCFI79 POSTER SESSION A | 19:00 - 20:00

STATION 5A: French Caribbean Research

- 19:00 **Magali Combes:** How Citizen Science Helps In Monitoring Coral Reef Health In Martinique
- 19:15 **Charlotte Dromard:** Experimental reef restoration in Guadeloupe: algal weeding and urchins replenishment
- 19:30 **Coralie Mouty***: Towards setting a long-term passive acoustic monitoring of contrasting sites in Guadeloupe island
- 19:45 **Hanna-May Malahel***: Population status and recruitment dynamics of Diadema antillarum following the 2022 mass mortality event in Guadeloupe

STATION 6A: Sustainable Fisheries

- 19:00 **Jesse Williams*:** What Drives the Adoption of Bycatch Reduction Technologies? Evidence from Gillnet Fishers in Trinidad and Tobago
- 19:15 **Tomas Willems:** Balancing Conservation and Catch: Mitigating ETP Bycatch in a Tropical Bottom Trawl Fishery with Flexible Grids
- 19:30 **Michael Hiwat:** Giving Juveniles a Chance: Evaluating Square Mesh Panel performance in a Tropical Bottom Trawl Fishery
- 19:45 **Gaushimi Poeran:** From Discards to Delicacies: Transforming Underutilized Fish into Value-Added Products in Suriname's Demersal Trawl Fishery

STATION 7A: Virtual

- 19:00 **Jaqueline Cassimiro de Sales:** Age, Growth and Identification of Southwest Atlantic Stocks of Vermilion Snapper (*Rhomboplites aurorubens)* from an Otolith Based Approach
- 19:15 **Salma López:** Longitudinal Assessment of Body Condition in a Rehabilitating Greater Caribbean Manatee (*Trichechus manatus manatus*) Using Standardized UAV-Based Image Analysis
- 19:30 **Leo Kissel:** Using Acoustic Telemetry to Assess Habitat Use of Baitfishes in Essential Fish Habitat within Hurricane Hole Lagoon, Boca Ciega Bay, St. Petersburg, Florida, USA Phase I: NexTrak R1 Receiver Range-Testing with the V6-2x Transmitter

STATION 8: Miscellaneous

- 19:00 **Beatrice Padovani Ferreira:** Spawning Patterns of Acoupa Weakfish *Cynoscion acoupa* (Lacepède 1801) in The North Coast of Brazil
- 19:15 **Pedro Chevalier:** Structure and associations of reef fish assemblages at three stations of the Faro Maya reef, Laguna de Maya Wildlife Refuge, Cuba
- 19:30 **Victor Sho:** Using participatory mapping to help guide management interventions in a data-limited recreational fishery.
- 19:45 **Aubrey Taylor:** Scaling the Fishing Vessel Ocean Observing Network (FVON) to Support Resilient Caribbean Fisheries

GCFI79 POSTER SESSION B | 20:00 - 21:00 (EST)

STATION 1B: Habitats and Ecosystems

- 20:00 **Adriana Santos-Martínez:** Changes in the structure of the fish assemblage in coral barriers of San Andrés Island, Seaflower Biosphere Reserve: restoration in search of ecosystem services
- 20:15 **Antonella Rivera:** From Water-Quality Monitoring to Sanitation Action: Lessons from Honduras and the Mesoamerican Reef
- 20:30 **Charlotte Dromard:** Monitoring agricultural pollutions using plankton as a bioindicators of contamination in Guadeloupe
- 20:45 **Amilcar Levi Cupul-Magaña:** Temporal variation 2013-2025 in the taxonomic and functional diversity of reef fishes associated with natural and anthropogenic disturbances in San Andrés Island, Colombia

STATION 2B: Changing Perspectives

- 20:00 **S. Kodi Edwards**: Inspiring Ocean Stewards: Building Ocean Literacy in St. Kitts and Nevis
- 20:15 **Charlotte Dorville:** Reconnecting to Blue Heritage: Sensory and Cultural Pathways to Coastal Belonging in Martinique
- 20:30 **Krista Sherman:** Unveiling the state of Bahamian Science: 50 years of Research
- 20:45 **Danielle de Kool:** Changing Reefscape of Bonaire as a Result of SCTLD and Bleaching

STATION 3B: Marine Litter & Citizen Science

- 20:00 **Maíra Borgonha**: DeepSeasters: Innovation, Citizen Science, and Gender Equity in Ocean Observation
- 20:15 **Nick Kemble:** TrashBlitz Caribbean - A Two-Year Model for Turning Cleanup Data into Local Solutions
- 20:30 **David Betson**: TrashBlitz Belize: A Locally Led Citizen Science Campaign to Reduce Plastic Pollution Through Refillable Schools
- 20:45 **Juliana Sintura-Arango**: Invisible threats to Caribbean Fisheries: Microplastics Contamination across Commercial Fish Species in the Colombian Caribbean

STATION 4B: Pelagics and Aquaculture

- 20:00 **Anna Millender:** Bull Shark diet in the north-central Gulf of Mexico
- 20:15 **Jeremy Higgs:** Food Ecology of the Finetooth Shark within the northern Gulf of Mexico
- 20:30 **David Wells:** Early Insights into Movement Patterns of Oceanic Whitetip Sharks (Carcharhinus longimanus) from the Turks and Caicos Islands
- 20:45 **Nicolás Gómez Andújar:** Puerto Rico's fisherfolk's engagement towards oyster aquaculture as a complementary livelihood

GCFI79 POSTER SESSION B | 20:00 - 21:00 (EST)

STATION 5B: Miscellaneous

- 20:00 **Nia Browne:** Success and Challenges Associated with the Implementation of Electronic Monitoring Systems in the Barbados Longline Fleet
- 20:15 **Mark Ram:** Hard shores, fewer fish? Mangroves outperform hardened shorelines in supporting coastal fish biodiversity in Guyana
- 20:30 **Rovindra Lakenarine***: An observer-based assessment of Ray Bycatch in a tropical shrimp trawl fishery
- 20:45 **Alfredo Rodriguez:** Length-Based Stock Assessment of Six Shallow-Water Demersal Fishes in the Colombian Caribbean Sea

STATION 6B: Sustainable Fisheries Project

- 20:00 **Antonello Sala:** Experimental assessment of alternative codends in Guyana's Chinese seine fishery.
- 20:15 **Antonello Sala:** Fuel use and catch performance in small-scale driftnet fisheries in Trinidad and Tobago
- 20:30 **Janelle Daniel-Govia:** Mesh size effects on protected fauna and fish species in Trinidad and Tobago driftnet fisheries.
- 20:45 **Nerissa Lucky:** Performance of square-mesh panel BRDs in Trinidad and Tobago industrial shrimp trawl fishery: quantitative results from panel configurations and implications for panel placement.

STATION 7B: Virtual

- 20:00 **Grisel Rodriguez-Ferrer:** Using Sargassum as a Biodegradable Medium for Cleaning Marine Mammal Carcasses in the Caribbean
- 20:15 **Ruben Azcarate:** Implementation of Hybrid Reefs as a Scalable Solution for the Rehabilitation and Protection of Eroded Marine–Coastal Ecosystems: The San Andrés Case, Colombian Caribbean
- 20:30 **Richmond Basant:** Ballast water management in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) of the Caribbean

WEDNESDAY 4TH NOVEMBER, 2026

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS SESSION | 8:00 - 10:00

Hosted by: UNEP Caribbean Environment Programme

Moderated by: Susanna Perera Valderrama

- 8:00 **Susana Perera Valderrama**: Opening Words
- 8:10 **Francklin Barbier**: Sea turtle conservation success through collaboration with local fishers and youth in Les Basses, a fishing community in southern Haiti's Baradéres-Cayemites Marine Protected Area
- 8:20 **Dorka Cobián Rojas**: Coral reef responses to the 2023 Caribbean marine heatwave in Guanahacabibes National Park, Cuba
- 8:30 **Ewan Tregarot:** A de facto marine protected area resulting from chlordecone contamination in Martinique promotes functional redundancy and the potential resilience of reef fish communities
- 8:40 **Alexandra Pineda-Muñoz**: Genomic insights from surviving Acropora palmata populations to guide conservation and restoration in San Andrés Island, southwestern Caribbean
- 8:50 **Rocio Prieto-Gonzales**: Enhancing knowledge and strengthening collaboration for cetacean and ocean conservation across the Wider Caribbean: the CAMAC project
- 9:00 **Daniel Zendejas**: EarthRanger: Bringing technology together to protect wildlife
- 9:10 **Alessandra Polo**: Towards 30x30: establishing large-scale offshore marine protection in St Kitts and Nevis
- 9:20 **Jeffrey Bernus**: Basin-scale megafauna surveys across the Caribbean: preliminary results from the Calypso Project and implications for Marine Protected Area
- 9:30 **Julian Walcott:** Bridging the Gap: A Competency-Based MPA Management Training Curriculum to Advance the Blue Economy in the Wider Caribbean
- 9:40 **Moderated Discussion and Questions**

COFFEE BREAK | 10:00 - 10:30

WEDNESDAY 4TH NOVEMBER, 2026

SPECIAL SESSION SESSION | 10:30 - 12:30

Advancing 30×30 in the Caribbean: regional approaches to offshore MPA designation and management

Hosted by: Blue Marine Foundation and The Caribbean Cetacean Society

This special session will bring together government representatives, conservation organisations, and regional experts to examine how the Caribbean region can meaningfully advance progress towards the global 30x30 target, with a particular focus on the opportunities and challenges of offshore marine protected area (MPA) designation and management.

While many Caribbean nations have committed to 30x30, translating this target into effective, well-managed offshore MPAs remains a shared technical and governance challenge. This session will explore practical approaches to implementation, including policy development and long-term monitoring and enforcement.

The session will highlight recent progress in the Caribbean, using Curaçao as a flagship case to examine the process of developing a large-scale offshore MPA. This includes insights into the technical, governance, and operational considerations involved, as well as lessons that may be relevant across the wider Caribbean region. A dedicated segment will focus on recent developments in Curaçao, Aruba and the Dominican Republic.

LUNCH BREAK | 12:30 - 14:00

LUNCH EVENT | 12:00 - 14:00

UN Ocean Decade Lunch Workshop: Shaping Solutions for the Tropical Americas & Caribbean

This interactive lunchtime workshop will bring together experts and practitioners from across the Tropical Americas and Caribbean (TAC) to share perspectives on three priority Ocean Decade Solution areas: i) protecting ocean life from coast to deep sea, ii) enhancing sustainable ocean food systems, and iii) supporting resilient coastal human communities and ecosystems. Through facilitated discussion, participants will identify key regional priorities, challenges, opportunities and potential solutions. The perspectives gathered will provide inputs to the TAC Regional Solution Blueprint report, currently being developed in preparation for the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in April 2027. Participation is particularly encouraged from experts and practitioners with expertise in marine and coastal biodiversity; sustainable fisheries, aquaculture and ocean food systems; and coastal resilience, including climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction. A complimentary lunch will be provided to pre-registered participants.

WEDNESDAY 4TH NOVEMBER, 2026

FIELD TRIPS | 14:00 - 18:00

Sponsored By:

Carmabi Field Trip: The first destination is the Curaçao Mangrove Park at Rif. Upon arrival, participants will receive a guided tour of the mangrove area, with explanatory insights on: the ecological importance of mangroves; local flora and fauna; coastal protection and marine environment conservation. Following the tour, participants will have the opportunity to kayak through the mangroves. Next, the group will travel by bus to Carmabi. Here, participants will attend a guided tour and a presentation highlighting the organization's work, the marine environment, and nature conservation efforts.

Sea Aquarium Field Trip: Participants will receive a guided tour featuring comprehensive information on marine life, native species, and local marine ecosystems. The program includes visits to: the Queen Conch Hatchery and other relevant sections of the Sea Aquarium.

Aqualectra Field Trip: Participants will take a guided tour of the water production facility and receive an explanation of the drinking water production process and operational management. Following the tour, an interactive workshop will take a deeper dive into water production and water management and the importance of sustainable water usage.

Reef Renewal Curaçao Field Trip: Participants will first attend a short presentation by Reef Renewal Foundation Curaçao (RRFC), a non-profit that helps protect and restore Curacao's coral reefs through coral propagation, outplanting and education. After the presentation, participants will join a guided snorkel tour of the restoration site, including 16 coral nursery trees, 25 vertical rope nurseries and more than 1,000 Staghorn and Elkhorn corals planted on the reef.

WORKSHOP | 14:00 - 18:00

The Future of Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries and Fisheries Science
Hosted by: University of Waterloo

The purpose of this workshop is to conduct a foresight exercise on the future of Gulf and Caribbean fisheries and fisheries science. Foresight analysis is a structured and strategic approach to exploring the potential implications of multiple, plausible future scenarios (Lambert et al. 2019). We propose a full-day long foresight exercise that is broken into two sessions. The first session would focus on the future of Gulf and Caribbean fisheries. The purpose of the first session is to bound the range of plausible future scenarios specifically for fisheries in the region (e.g., how will fisheries change in the future?). The second session will build on the morning session to determine the fisheries science necessary to improve capacity under each scenario of future fisheries.

WEDNESDAY 4TH NOVEMBER, 2026

CINEFISH FILM FESTIVAL | 19:30 - 21:00

- **Catch 22:** Lisette Keus is determined to protect the corals of Curaçao by catching a devilish invader. Creating an educational concept to raise awareness about the the vulnerable underwater ecosystem and letting local fish species off the hook. But not everyone agrees with her ideas.
- **Climate Calamity:** This Voices From The Shore Theatre Collective piece dramatises climate change as a human rights crisis. Mother Earth laments the impact of anthropogenic effects on the world's climate setting the tone for a series of women fisherfolk voices.
- **Defending Puerto Rico's Ocean Economy:** The need to harness the power of a thriving ocean economy is the inspiration for the film by the Asociación Pesquera de Culebra.
- **Fishing For The Future** follows gillnet illumination trials in Trinidad and Tobago, where fishers and researchers are testing green LED lights as a practical way to reduce sea turtle bycatch. The film explores how working directly with fishers to test solutions on the water can help protect marine wildlife while supporting sustainable fishing livelihoods.
- **Insurance That Protects Lives**: The video shows how artisanal fishers from FEPACOIBA have strengthened their resilience to climate change. Personal stories highlight the positive impact of insurance policies tailored to their needs, providing protection and peace of mind to families
- **Mantas of the Mexican Caribbean**: Discover the thrilling revelation of a potential third species of manta ray! Known as the 'Caribbean' manta, this mysterious ray shares the deep blue with oceanic manta rays yet thrives in habitats similar to reef mantas.
- **Perspective**: A short film based on the island of Anegada, a small coral based island situated in the northeastern Caribbean. The film features both terrestrial and marine wildlife all shot on island to demonstrate the immense diversity small islands can host
- **Protecting Curaçao against plastic waste:** Limpi Recycling works hard to rid streets, fields and beaches from plastic waste and thus preventing it from polluting and damaging the environment.
- **Reefs in Transition** explores two complementary research projects investigating the future of coral reefs in Guadeloupe, Lesser Antilles. From nutrient pollution and the expansion of macroalgae to the crucial role of the sea urchin *Diadema antillarum* in reef resilience
- **Restoring the reefs around Curaçao:** Reef Renewal Curaçao is bringing back lost coral around the island. By placing fragments of existing corals in smart "mid-water nurseries" the growing process is sped up and corals can come back quicker. Their goals are big but their fight is big too.
- **Seafood Nation**: This short film explores the Bahamian fishing industry through the perspectives of diverse stakeholders, including commercial and recreational fishers, consumers, restaurant owners, scientists, and marine resource managers.
- **The Big South Story:** While the Turks and Caicos Islands are known as popular holiday destinations, the small island of South Caicos is only now making the transition to tourism. But with the impacts of climate change making this traditional way of life increasingly difficult, what does the future hold for the nature and community of South Caicos?
- **WOW Bonaire- RoffaReefs and Piskabon** features nature and restoration efforts on Bonaire. We follow RoffaReefs at their field work; the eggspedition for fish eggs. And learn more about Piskabons efforts for sustainable fisheries using FADs.

THURSDAY 5TH NOVEMBER, 2026

REEF FISHERIES & FSAS | 8:00 - 10:00 |

Moderated by Dr. Joanna Pitt

- 8:00 **Ximena Renán (V):** Preliminary results on age and growth of Northern red snapper from Gulf of Mexico
- 8:10 **Danielle Morley:** Five years of evaluating a seasonal spawning aggregation closure at Western Dry Rocks, Florida Keys
- 8:20 **Isabel Cervantes-Camacho (V)** Age and growth of Epinephelus morio: an overexploited grouper species in the southern Gulf of Mexico
- 8:30 **Xaymara Serrano:** Assessing Residency and Movement Patterns of Gray Snapper off Southeast Florida to Identify Spawning Aggregations
- 8:40 **Jeroen Ham** Utilizing DNA barcoding of fish eggs to infer spawning patterns - Opening a sequencing lab on Bonaire
- 8:50 **Markus Min:** Developing an AI-powered workflow to turn diver-collected video into population estimates for Nassau Grouper
- 9:00 **Krista Sherman:** Assessing the Effects of Size-Based Fishing Regulations on Overexploited Nassau Grouper Populations
- 9:10 **Laurent Cherubin:** A synthesis of AI developments for bioacoustics and the monitoring of fish spawning aggregations
- 9:20 **Maíra Borgonha**: Eight Moves for the Conservation of Goliath Groupers in the Ocean´s Decade
- 9:30 **Moderated Discussion and Questions**

COFFEE BREAK | 10:00 - 10:30

SPECIAL SESSION | 10:30 - 12:30

Caribbean Blue Economy Financing
Hosted By: The Caribbean Biodiversity Fund

This special session is designed to catalyze private sector engagement in the Caribbean blue economy by introducing practical ways for businesses, fisheries operators, NGOs, and research institutions to participate, collaborate, and showcase opportunities through the Caribbean Blue Economy Hub under the Blue Economy Financing (BluEFin) Project by the Caribbean Biodiversity Fund. The session will highlight how marine conservation and restoration can drive both ecological resilience and economic value, while reinforcing the importance of protecting the region's natural marine ecosystems. It will include examples of investment-ready projects, blended finance approaches, and partnership models emerging through the Caribbean Blue Economy Hub. Participants will gain insight into available capacity-building support, sustainable financing options, and emerging investment opportunities tailored to the region's ocean-based sectors. With a focus on elevating visibility, building strategic partnerships, and advancing project development, the session aims to inspire action and cultivate a strong pipeline of innovative fisheries- and ocean-based initiatives.

LUNCH BREAK | 12:30 - 14:00

THURSDAY 5TH NOVEMBER, 2026

LUNCH EVENT | 12:30 - 14:00

Understanding AI: An Introduction for Fisheries Professionals

Artificial intelligence is increasingly being discussed across research, management, and conservation. This accessible, nontechnical lunchtime session will introduce AI and generative AI, consider where these technologies might be relevant to fisheries work in the Gulf and Caribbean, and discuss important limitations and considerations, including accuracy, uncertainty, data quality, bias, and privacy. The session will leverage Ai2's EarthRanger and Skylight programs to provide a foundation for further discussion rather than prescribe specific tools or approaches.

GCFI MEMBERSHIP MEETING | 14:00 - 15:00

Want to learn more about GCFI and how our organization works? Join us at the GCFI79 Membership Meeting!

Open to all conference attendees, this meeting offers an opportunity to learn more about GCFI's governance, operations, financial position, and the work of our various committees. Hear updates on the organization's activities, achievements, and future priorities, and discover opportunities to become more involved in shaping GCFI's future.

Whether you are a long-standing member, a newcomer, or simply curious about GCFI, we encourage you to attend, ask questions, share your perspectives, and be part of the conversation!

Your voice matters in shaping the future of GCFI!

AQUACULTURE SESSION | 15:00 - 16:10

- 15:00 **Nicolás Gómez Andújar:** Spatio-temporal spat collection and growth performance P. imbricata and C. rhizophorae oyster mariculture in Puerto Rico
- 15:10 **Becky Holt (V):** The State of Queen Conch Aquaculture in the Caribbean: A Decade of Building Regional Capacity Through Science, Partnerships, and Innovation
- 15:20 **Kennedy Bliss:** The Cape Eleuthera Queen Conch Conservancy: A Holistic, Community-Based Approach to Conserving an Iconic Species in The Bahamas
- 15:30 **Megan Considine:** Scaling Restorative Aquaculture: Tools and Strategies for Development in the Caribbean
- 15:40 **Robinson Bazurto:** The use of the Algal Turf Scrubber (ATS) system to enhance nutrition for the aquaculture of queen conch (*Aliger gigas*)
- 15:50 **Manuel Jove:** Sunlit Substrates as a Living Supplement: Algae-Covered Tiles Improve Growth of Hatchery-Reared Queen Conch (*Aliger gigas*) in Curaçao
- 16:00 **Moderated Discussion and Questions**

COFFEE BREAK | 16:10 - 16:30

Mini Film Screening: Don Chilton: Conch Shell Reverie

THURSDAY 5TH NOVEMBER, 2026

INVERTEBRATES SESSION | 16:30 - 15:40

Moderated by Dr. Megan Davis

- 16:30 **Kevin McCarthy:** Using a recruitment index for dynamic management of Spiny Lobster in Puerto Rico
- 16:40 **Adyan Rios:** Classification analysis used to extend fishery-dependent indices of abundance for Caribbean Spiny Lobster in St. Thomas and St. John, USVI
- 16:50 **Orian Tzadik:** Managing *Aliger gigas* in the ESA Era: Lessons in Regional Diversity and Transboundary Governance Across the Wider Caribbean
- 17:00 **Matthew Ajemian:** Tracking predation on queen conchs in the Great Caribbean using novel techniques
- 17:10 **Annabel Cox:** Assessing the status of Queen Conch (*Aliger gigas*) in Barbados: Preliminary findings from repeat surveys two decades later
- 17:20 **Kate Heffner:** Assisted Emigration of Queen Conch to the Northernmost Known Mating Aggregation in the US
- 17:30 **Diana M. Beltran Rodriguez:** Genetic connectivity in US Caribbean queen conch (*Aliger gigas*): Implications for management and forensic assignment
- 17:40 **Claire D'Agostino:** Beyond the Shell: Connecting Fisheries and the Public Through Living Collections
- 17:50 **Moderated Discussion and Questions**

FRIDAY 6TH NOVEMBER, 2026

COMMUNICATION & EDUCATION SESSION | 8:00 - 9:30

- 8:30 **Kim Dunleavy:** Self-management and Ergonomic choices to manage back pain – adapting videos for fishing and aquaculture sectors
- 8:40 **Louise Chourot:** Coral Reefs in Martinique : A Socio-Ecosystemic Study on Human Perceptions
- 8:50 **James Reinhardt:** Scaling Return 'Em Right: A Model for Improving Recreational Release Success
- 9:00 **Farah Arosemena-Murfee:** Developing stronger global networking: The International Fishing Industry Safety and Health (IFISH) innovative exchange hub
- 9:10 **Grace Stringer:** Fishing for Accessibility: Comparing Fish Community Structures at Disability Accessible and Inaccessible Public Fishing Sites
- 9:20 **Amanda Roome:** Beneath the Surface: Mental Health in Commercial Fisheries
- 9:30 **Sara Bonilla Anariba:** Below the Surface: Using Photovoice to Reveal Women's Roles, Knowledge, and Barriers in Marine Protected Area Management in the Mesoamerican Reef
- 9:40 **Catherine Sandiford-Tull:** Addressing gendered priorities and barriers to strengthen economic opportunities and social resilience within the post-disaster recovery efforts in Barbados
- 9:50 **Antonella Rivera:** From monitoring to management: Queen conch and Caribbean spiny lobster research to inform MPA action in the Bay Islands National Marine Park, Honduras
- 10:00 **Moderated Discussion and Questions**

COFFEE BREAK | 10:20 - 10:45

SCIENCE & INNOVATION SESSION | 10:45 - 12:30

- 10:45 **Jennifer Loch**: From Divers to Data: Innovations in Fish Length Monitoring through the SMILE Project (Size Matters: Innovative Length Estimates)
- 10:55 **Dennis Sammy:** Decision-making in the small-scale fisheries sector: "Leveraging the Right Tool for Sustainable Management and Blue Economic Growth"
- 11:05 **Eduardo Boné Morón:** Future-Proofing Small Vessels for Fisheries and Marine Conservation: Electrification and Innovative Technologies
- 11:15 **Sander van Lopik:** A collective effort to measure new life by fishers, divers and scientist: eggspedition.org
- 11:25 **Nicolás Gómez Andújar:** Lessons learned from community-led fishing traceability in Culebra, Puerto Rico
- 11:35 **Lucy Scott:** Building a Regional Marine Data and Information Infrastructure (MDII) for Integrated Ocean Governance in the Wider Caribbean: Progress under the Ocean Coordination Mechanism
- 11:45 **Laurel Field:** Assessing spatial and temporal trends of coral bleaching in Bonaire
- 11:55 **Milena Hernandez-Ortiz:** Innovation and Standardization for Mangrove Management: A Methodological Guide for Colombia
- 12:05 **Brian Walker:** Evaluating spatiotemporal patterns of commercial fishing fleets in the Gulf of Mexico for tropicalization.
- 12:15 **Moderated Discussion and Questions**

FRIDAY 6TH NOVEMBER, 2026

LUNCH BREAK | 12:30 - 16:00

PELAGICS SESSION | 14:00 - 15:00

Moderated by: Dr. Jeremy Higgs

- 14:00 Mandy Karnauskas: Factors driving dolphinfish availability in the Western Central Atlantic
- 14:10 Abby McGregor: The Dulac, Louisiana Pelagic Longline Fishery: Historical Changes, Fishers' Attitudes, and the Graying of the Fleet
- 14:20 Corey Gosciminski: Understanding Impacts of Changing Environments and Fishing Pressure on the Dolphinfish (*Corpyhaena hippurus*) in the U.S. Caribbean and Beyond
- 14:30 Benjamin Jones: Six decades of fishery change inferred from fishers' recollections of their best catches
- 14:40 Grisel Rodriguez-Ferrer: Enhancing the Data Collection for Marine Recreational Fisheries in Puerto Rico
- 14:50 Moderated Discussion and Questions

EMERGING ISSUES SESSION | 15:00 - 16:15

Moderated by: Eduardo Bone-Moron

- 15:00 Nicolás Gómez Andújar: Reuse of sargassum as a natural solution for soil conservation and coastal resilience in Culebra, Puerto Rico.
- 15:10 Donald Johnson: Tracking Holopelagic Sargassum in the north Tropical Atlantic
- 15:20 Rachel Brewton: Impacts of Sargassum inundation events on coastal water quality in the Florida Keys
- 15:30 Sharon Hutchinson: The Lost Gear Problem in Gillnet Fisheries: Why Does It Persist?
- 15:40 Magali Combes: Assessing the plastic threat in the Lesser Antilles : first study of surface waters microplastics in Martinique
- 15:50 Jeffrey Bernus: Same dolphins, same shores: long-term site fidelity of bottlenose dolphins on Bonaire revealed by citizen science
- 16:00 Moderated Discussion and Questions

COFFEE BREAK | 16:15 - 16:45

GCFI79 CLOSING & AWARDS CEREMONY | 16:45 - 18:00

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