

**Report of the Fisheries for Fishers (F4F) Fishers Forum:
Collaborative science towards sustainable fisheries
66th Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI)
Corpus Christi, USA, 4-8 November 2013**



2013

Acknowledgements

The core planning committee of the 66th GCFI Fishers Forum (Will Heyman, Mitchell Lay and Patrick McConney) and others on the GMA Committee appreciate the support of its main sponsors and supporters:

Individuals

- Alejandro Acosta, Emma Doyle, Jim Franks, Bob Glazer and many other GCFI members
- Angelica Mendez, Andres Maldonado, Don De Maria and Benny Gallaway were the invited conference session speakers who, in addition to Mitchell Lay, made excellent presentations
- Bertha Simmons, Katherine Blackman, Maria Pena, Nathalie Zenny and Vernel Nicholls assisted with note-taking, personal translation and much more that helped the Forum to run smoothly

Organisations

- Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations (CNFO)
- Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES) of The University of the West Indies
- Florida Institute of Technology
- LGL Ecological Research Associates
- Sea Grant Texas at Texas A&M University
- The Nature Conservancy (TNC)
- Too Big To Ignore (TBTI) Global Partnership

Several other individuals and organizations, too numerous to mention, assisted with the GCFI activities as usual. Fishers' households and crew were strongly supportive behind the scenes. We thank you all.

Cover photo features GMA 2014 winner Eddie Toomer and wife beside previous winners Andres Maldonado, Angelica Mendez, Don de Maria and Mitchell Lay (GMA Committee chairman).

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1. Background

From its inception 66 years ago, the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI) has addressed issues of concern to fishers and other fish workers along the fish chain from harvest to postharvest, in addition to the interests of fisheries scientists and marine resource (fisheries and MPA) managers. The fishery scope includes recreational and commercial large and small-scale fisheries of the Wider Caribbean. Over time the focus also changed from development challenges to science, management and conservation. Allied topics such as aquaculture and marine protected areas (MPAs) were added to the programme. The annual meeting of the GCFI is the leading forum at which fishers, resource managers, researchers, students and others interested in regional fisheries and related matters regularly exchange information.

Since the introduction of the Gladding Memorial Award (GMA) in 2004, which recognises regional and local fishers who are conservation minded and promote sustainable utilisation of marine resources, the conference has evolved to include the Fishers Forum in 2007 and the Fisheries for Fisheries (F4F) initiative in 2009. F4F incorporates the Fishers Forum conference session, GMA ceremony, Fishers Field Trip and a F4F planning session. This report describes these events held at the 66th Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI), Corpus Christi, USA, 4-8 November 2013. Appendices provide additional details. This report is available for free download from the GCFI web site (visit www.gcfi.org).

2. Purpose

The 2013 Fishers Forum was designed to highlight and enhance collaboration among fishers, scientists and managers to achieve sustainable fisheries and improve livelihoods. There are clear links between fisheries science and the development and implementation of fisheries management. Engaging fishers and other stakeholders throughout these processes increases the efficiency and reduces the cost of collecting high-quality management-relevant data, builds legitimacy of the science and management processes among stakeholders, and increases compliance.



The 2013 Fishers Forum brought together leaders from industry, science and management to (a) highlight successful examples of collaborative science programs that lead to sustainable fisheries management, (b) analyze elements for success and challenges to such programs, and (c) support expanding opportunities for collaboration. The Fishers Forum provided an opportunity to address major issues in monitoring and evaluation from the bottom-up by sharing the experiences and views of leading fishers from around the region. This allowed GCFI members and the F4F Initiative to develop practical actions to address issues in consultation with fishers and other stakeholders. F4F aims for fishers to play an

increasing role in local through to regional fisheries science, management decision-making, and project implementation for sustainable resources and livelihoods throughout the Gulf and Caribbean region.

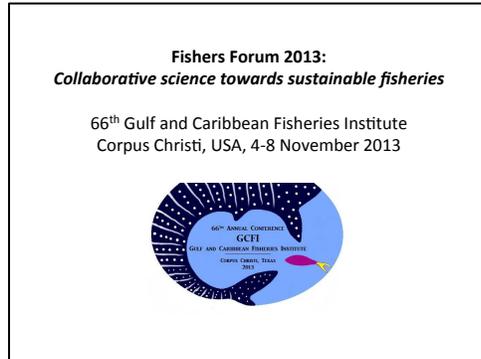
3. Process

The 2013 Fishers Forum, as in previous years, was developed and implemented through a process of broad participation and partnership. Texas Sea Grant, the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations (CNFO), Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES), Too Big To Ignore (TBTI) global research partnership, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), LGL Ecological Research Associates, Florida Institute of Technology, Sea Grant Texas and others support the 2013 Forum.

Tangible outputs from the Forum were aimed to include a written report and multi-media communications for the GCFI web site to highlight the fisher who demonstrated outstanding leadership in promoting sustainable fisheries and was presented with the Gladding Memorial Award; tangible recognition of a true fisher ambassador. The Forum was designed to maximize networking, interaction, and exchange among

fishers across the Gulf and Caribbean. This strengthens the network of individuals and organizations that transcends international borders, languages, cultures and specific fisheries, thereby contributing to regional stewardship of marine resources. The full programme is in Appendix 1.

4. Conference session



The Fishers Forum conference session was within the GCFI main programme on Monday 4 November starting at 1615 with Will Heyman as Session Chairman (Appendix 1). After a brief introduction of the Forum concept and acknowledgement of sponsors, he explained the theme “Collaborative monitoring and evaluation in a changing climate” to be addressed by the five speakers.

First up was Don de Maria, the first GMA winner, who dealt with collaboration directly. Among his points were:

- There used to be a general feeling among fishermen that scientists couldn’t catch fish in a barrel and a similar feeling among scientists about fishermen not knowing fish biology, but both of these stereotypes were changing
- A good example of scientists and fishers working together was with Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) and in the Tortugas Marine Reserve
- There is still some mistrust between scientists and fishermen
- Fishermen that have gone on trips with scientists have come back with a whole new view of scientists.
- Fishers and scientists share a common love for the ocean that transcends differences
- If fishers and scientists keep working together they can keep doing good things

Mitchell Lay is a GMA winner, the current chair of the GMA Committee and leader of the CNFO. He spoke on collaborative shark research in Antigua and Barbuda and said that:

- Sharks are critically important to ecosystems of the oceans
- CNFO consists of national fisherfolk organizations in the region that are networked to have representation in fisheries governance issues



- Questions to answer are: Does Antigua and Barbuda need a national plan of action for conservation of sharks as mandated by FAO? Should CNFO play a role?
- Edward Brooks was engaged to obtain preliminary data on sharks
- The work supported by a FAO small grant involved the Fisheries Division, CNFO, dive operators, recreational fishers, shark experts and fishers
- Methods included a survey (targeting commercial, recreational fishers and dive industry) and baited remote underwater video to look at resources (37 deployments from Oct to Dec 2012)

- Results showed that shark resources are fairly stable or increasing; 80% of commercial fishermen caught sharks primarily for food
- Underwater video provided sightings of 31 sharks of 3 different species as well as stingrays
- Official data on sharks are poor to non-existent, there is no commercial use for stingrays
- There is a need to expand this assessment and share the information to assist decision-making

Angelica Mendez, one of the two female GMA winners to date, spoke on collaboration on Guatemala and the importance of fishers considering research such as what is presented at GCFI.



• Her fishers network organization is located in Izabal, a small place very rich in biodiversity in the Guatemalan Caribbean

• Artisanal fishers saw the need to create an organization to disseminate information amongst fishers who hardly got beyond the 6th grade primary education in communities are quite distant from each other

• There are over 5,000 fisher households on the coast that became integrated mostly out of need

• The network was founded by representatives of 12 organizations (all legally established) in 2004

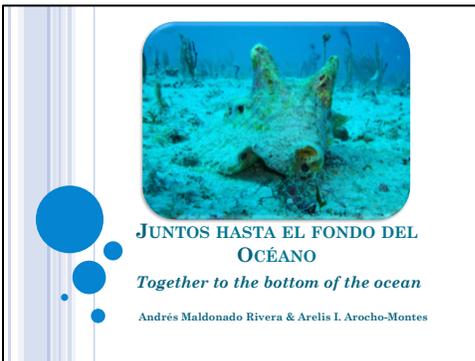
• From 2004 to 2012 there was organizational

strengthening and capacity building, technical and management workshops.

- The fishers promote closed seasons with the fishing authorities and meet to discuss regulations.
- Worked on a proposal for co-management of fishing areas; from a fishers forum in 2012 there was a cooperation agreement between government and fishermen for protection of La Graciosa Bay and Santa Isabel Lagoon
- Held three national forums of artisanal fishers along with Honduras and Belize – this has led to respect in the fisheries sector
- Congratulations are due to researchers who work with fishers but more information has to be shared

GMA winner Andres Maldonado spoke on his experience as a conch fisherman for over 40 years.

- Local ecological knowledge of fishers allows us to collaborate and strengthen science; it is difficult but not impossible



• He gathered information on the conch fishery and provided tit to the lab in Puerto Rico regarding conch spawning activity to guide management of the fishery, which entails getting government to change the established time for the closed season now in the fishery regulations of Puerto Rico

• Fisher observations on the spawning peak of conch were shared in a publication by Sea Grant

• Fishers are catching lionfish in large quantities; restaurants serving them to the public; fishers work with CFMC and Sea Grant on demonstrations for cleaning and tools for dealing with lionfish

• Fishers made the first reports on a parasite being

seen in yellowtail snapper – the small fish – this needs further research now by scientists

- Regarding alternative information dissemination methods – Facebook page can update on closed seasons and sharing information; producing a video tape on hardships of queen conch fishers
- Believes if we don't share what we have learnt in our lives then we have lived in vain



Benny Gallaway, although not a fisher, presented his experience of years of useful collaboration between scientists and the shrimp industry in the Gulf region. A few highlights are that:

• Collaborative studies between the National Marine Fisheries Service and shrimp industry have been funded by Congress

• Non-random interviewing of shrimp fishers was used to estimate catch per unit effort (CPUE)

• Electronic logbooks helped to resolve issues of spatial allocation of fishing effort

• Many examples of collaboration demonstrate the

clear mutual benefits that can be achieved

Patrick McConney moderated the discussion session that followed. Matters covered included the problem of shifting baselines, use of irresponsible fishing gear, fishers instead of scientists initiating research, improving the dissemination of information from scientists to fishers following collaboration and more.

The Fishers Forum conference session attracted the participation of most GCFI attendees, so over 200 people stayed for the session. It seems to be well institutionalised as a regular feature of the conference.

5. Gladding Memorial Award



The GMA was presented immediately upon the close of the Fishers Forum conference presentations and discussion. GMA Committee chair, Mitchell Lay, introduced the event. Don de Maria gave a touching personal account of the life and times of Peter Gladding who was a close personal friend of his and a mentor to many in the fishing fleet. Participants then received an audio-visual profile of Eddie Toomer from the USA, the 2013 GMA winner (see Appendix 2). His is especially well known for his ground-breaking work on Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs). Jim Franks presented the award on behalf of the GCFI Board and GMA Committee. The new GMA winner

then shared additional information about himself in a moving thank you speech. The GMA award presentation ended the day for the conference.

6. Fishers field trip

The Fishers Field Trip is eagerly anticipated by both fishers and others (scientists, students, managers) who do applied fisheries research or work around fishing facilities. It is designed primarily to allow the fishers attending GCFI to get to know more about fishing in the host country and to interact with fisherfolk there to share information and fellowship without language and culture being barriers. Generous in-kind support from Texas Sea Grant (especially Texas Sea Grant Extension Agent, Gary Graham) and other local organisers provided transportation and other benefits for participants on the field trip. About 40 people went on the field trip that took place on Tuesday 5 November from nearly lunchtime to late afternoon (Appendix 3).



At Palacios the group learnt about shrimp trawling and by-catch reduction. There are small/artisanal boats (day trips with 2 crew members) and large/industrial boats (30 to 90-day trips, with 3 to 5 crew members). The large boats have a target of 30% by-catch reduction. Three to four different by-catch reduction devices (BRDs) are currently used in the fishery, like TEDs that allow escapement of both turtles and large fish, or “ghosts” that scare small fish to escape from the net. The type, design and deployment of fishing gear can allow up to 40% fuel saving. We examined technology onboard a large shrimp trawler.

Vessels at the small harbour in Fulton were landing mainly oysters from wild stocks using dradges. About 40 vessels fish in the area and there is a catch limit per day (50 bags per day and per vessel). Oysters are mainly sold fresh, but can also be

frozen. Some explanation was given on sanitary issues and ways of sanitizing the oysters using high pressure tanks. Recently they had to stop fishing due to a nearby bloom of organisms that were harmful. No public health problems have been reported from oysters.

Port Aransas, the last stop, is primarily a recreational fishing harbor. One problem the fishermen are facing is the impoverishment of the area because of the removal of oil platforms that used to function as artificial reefs that shelter many species. Some species are said to have declined due to the removal of the platforms that owners are now towing to shore to scrap. Fishermen now need to go at least 40 miles offshore to find the same species. The quota on red snapper has been problematic as they are caught very easily (accidentally) in some areas. The size of snappers has increased and therefore the quota is reached much faster, shortening the season. Another issue raised was shared quotas in the Gulf that lead to competition among States for resources.

7. F4F implementation session

The GCFI F4F Initiative implementation session was held on Wednesday 6 November with a small but very committed set of participants (Appendix 4). The aim was to move forward with implementing the F4F draft strategic plan. Will Heyman and Mitch Lay chaired the session, recalling the increasing impact that the GMA especially has had, along with the 2009 Fishers Summit. Mitch Lay asked the fishers attending the meeting to review the fishers activities at GCFI and suggest ways forward for improvement.



Fishers present said that the conference session was highly educational and very important for fishers to keep in the overall GCFI programme. The format of the session reflected the growth and strengthening of the Forum. Likewise the field trip received high praise for its organisation and the information exchanged in a very practical setting. Most praise was heaped upon the gear technology aspects of the trip that helped to showcase fisher innovation and adaptation. One complaint was the length of the field trip given the considerable distances travelled by bus.

Turning to the future, several recommendations were suggested for the way F4F could move forward:

- Produce a magazine (maybe electronic) to inform people about who fisherfolk are in the region. In Puerto Rico there is a magazine that highlights fishermen and what they do. We need more of such communication.
- Locate sponsors and provide opportunities for other fishers to attend GCFI and to educate fishers
- Educate organisations in our respective countries, e.g. GCFI can help inform fisheries authorities
- Increase time allotted during the Fishers Forum field trip to allow fisherfolk to have a better sense of the fishery and allow for more extensive discussion
- Create an online Fishers Forum (e.g. on Facebook) to network, share ideas, activities, learn new fishing methods and modify existing methods and practices
- More fisher involvement is needed in organising the Forum, and more time is needed for fishers to make logistical arrangements to attend GCFI
- Fishers participating in the Fishers Forum should make themselves available upon return to their countries at local/community fishers events to share the information gathered at GCFI
- GCFI could assist with studies on species (e.g. sea cucumbers, queen conch, jellyfish) in order to inform decision-making in data-poor areas such as parts of Honduras
- More involvement of artisanal fishers in conservation projects should be facilitated by F4F
- Traditional types of fishing and the historical importance of fishing needs to be highlighted more
- Stress the importance of gathering fishers from all over to exchange knowledge and experiences
- Use the information gathered from the field trip to create opportunities for fisher exchanges
- Find ways for fishers to increase their voices in decision-making where they did not receive respect and due consideration
- Find newer or better ways of involving artisanal fishers in policy/legislation at all stages
- Improve upon existing mechanisms for fisherfolk to influence policy/decision-makers
- Document the benefits and disadvantages for fisherfolk of oil exploration in different locations

Will Heyman asked whether anyone would be willing to actively participate in organising activities for the event as Forum leadership was exhausting and required more direction from fisherfolk themselves. The time of commitment was questioned and it was indicated that persons could assist within their capacity. Using internet communication and forums could be cost-effective.

There were further discussions on the Fisher Ambassador Programme, fisher exchanges and promotion, and fund-raising:

- *Fisher Ambassador Programme.* Fisherfolk who played a major role in addressing issues such as poaching etc. could visit other countries and speak to these issues. These persons may be GMA winners and possibly up to three winners could attend a meeting to speak to the issue. Some representation at other meetings was possible but funding would be required. Currently Mitch and Don were attending meetings in a personal capacity, but not identified as Fisher Ambassadors.
- *Fisher exchanges.* The exchange is a wonderful and powerful tool. An exchange would be perfect for fisherfolk to address some of their gear issues. As a result of the exchange fisherfolk would be better able to understand how gears work. Such practical experience can transform an industry. It was agreed that these fisher exchanges would make an impact at the local level and are critical.
- *Promotion and fund raising.* Suggestions were made for activities that can be done in the next six months to support the Forum with limited or no funds. Suggestions included:
 - Town hall meetings to discuss GCFI activities and inform the Bahamian government
 - Invite someone from the international media to interview fishers about their trip to GCFI
 - Try to convince wealthy expatriates to contribute to sponsoring Forum-related activities
 - Use a theme for 2014 such as empowering small-scale fisheries in line with global trends

Will confirmed that approximately US\$60,000/ a year was estimated for five fishers to attend GCFI and for other activities such as operational expenses, field trips, GMA winners and the ambassador programme. He recommended establishing a sub-committee on funding and volunteers included Emile, Benny and Denny Rankine. He added that others might be called upon. All present were encouraged to join the CNFO Yahoo e-group. Participants were also encouraged to exchange photographs that could be used to share information on GCFI based on their experience in Corpus Christi. The meeting adjourned with the understanding that the GMA Committee would follow up with the recommendations to the extent possible.

8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Fishers Forum programme

Monday 4 November, 1615-1800: Fishers Forum conference session and Gladding Memorial Award

Time	Session theme: Collaborative monitoring and evaluation in a changing climate
1615	Introduction to F4F and the 2013 Fishers Forum theme - Will Heyman, Session Chairman
1620	The value of fishermen and scientists working together - Don de Maria, Fisher, Florida USA
1640	Collaborating on sharks in Antigua and Barbuda - Mitchell Lay, Fisher, Antigua and Barbuda
1650	Collaboration in the Guatemala fishers network- Angelica Mendez, Fisher, Guatemala
1700	Together to the bottom of the ocean - Andres Maldonado, Fisher, Puerto Rico
1710	Collaborative science supports shrimp industry management– Benny Gallaway, Scientist, USA
1720	Discussion and session close - Patrick McConney, Moderator
1745	Gladding Memorial Award Presentation - Eddie Toomer, winner; Mitchell Lay, Committee Chair
1800	Close

Tuesday 5 November, 1100 – 1800: Fishers Field Trip

Led by Texas Sea Grant Extension Agent, Gary Graham, fishers will visit commercial shrimp fisheries, oyster processing plant, and for-hire recreational fishing operations between Corpus Christi and Palacios, Texas. The trip will provide an opportunity for fishers from throughout the Gulf and Caribbean to interact with fishers from the Texas coast, fostering information exchange and regional sharing of perspectives.

Wednesday 6 November, 0830-1000: F4F implementation session

Time	Activity
0830	(Re-) Introduction to F4F aims, implementation and intended outcomes
0840	Summary of key learning from Forum conference session and field trip
0900	Discussion and decisions on F4F strategy and work plan implementation
1000	Close

For further information on the Fishers Forum, the GMA and the 66th GCFI visit: www.gcfi.org

Appendix 2: Gladding Memorial Award press release

[Corpus Christi] (November 7, 2013). The Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute awarded life-time commercial fisher, Mr. Eddie Toomer from Venice, Florida with the Gladding Memorial Award for sustainable fisheries. Mr. Toomer received the prestigious award during the 66th Annual Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute Meeting in Corpus Christi, TX, 4 – 8 November 2013, as recognition for his lifetime commitment to sustainable fisheries management.

Mr. Toomer is most renowned for his important contributions to the design of turtle excluder devices (TEDs) for shrimp trawlers. “TEDs maximize shrimp harvest while allowing endangered sea turtles to escape. Shrimpers use of TEDs has spared hundreds of thousands of endangered sea turtles around the world.” said Dr. Pamela Plotkin, Director of Texas Sea Grant and author of the book, *Biology and Conservation of Ridley Sea Turtles*.

“I feel fortunate to be a part of the history of the TED,” said Mr. Toomer. “Finding a successful design was achieved by joining the practical experience and creativity of fishers, with the design ideas and studies of scientists.”

Dr. Larry McKinney, director of the Harte Research Institute at Texas A&M Corpus Christi, that hosted this year’s annual meeting said, “Eddie Toomer has joined ranks with 13 other commercial fishermen from around the Gulf and Caribbean, who have also won the prestigious Gladding Memorial Award for their outstanding contributions to conservation and sustainable fisheries management. We at the Harte Institute share a vision of sustainable management of Gulf and Caribbean marine resources and recognize the value and importance of collaboration between scientists and fishermen.”

More than 400 scientists, marine managers, fishermen, students, conservation NGO representatives, and seafood chefs from 35 countries and territories attended the GCFI meeting in Corpus Christi. “This annual regional meeting is an outstanding opportunity for fishers and researchers to come together. It gives us the chance to exchange current information on the use and management of marine resources and to work together to solve some of the most important issues we face,” stated Bob Glazer, Executive Director of GCFI.

“The Gladding award was developed to honor Peter Gladding, a commercial fishermen from the Florida Keys, who was instrumental in designing and promoting the Tortugas Ecological Reserve in the Florida Keys” said Don DeMaria, who was awarded the first Gladding Award in 2007, and continues to support conservation by working with scientists and serving on advisory panels for regional Fisheries Management Councils.

Toomer has had diverse experiences as a fisherman. He built and captained a 57’ shrimp boat (see photo), worked as a commercial crabber and has owned and operated a seafood restaurant. He still runs as a recreational charter fishing business and captains sport fishing trips.



*Captain Eddie Toomer
with the catch of the day*

“Eddie comes from good stock. His mom and dad and a dozen or so others are responsible for the 3,000,000 acre no trawling pink shrimp nursery area. We were conservationists before the word was ingrained into society” said Bob Jones, Executive Director of the Southeastern Fisheries Association that represents commercial fishing interests in the region.

For further information, please see www.gcfi.org or contact Will Heyman wheyman@lgl.com, or Emma Doyle, emma.doyle@gcfi.org.

Appendix 3: Field trip programme and participants

10:45 Depart-Omni Bayfront Hotel

11:00 Welcome: Dr. Gary Graham

12:00 Lunch on Bus

1:00 Arrive Palacios, TX: Visit with Texas Shrimpers, tour shrimp boats

2:00 Board Bus

3:00 Alby's Seafood, Fulton Texas: Visit Oyster and Fish Processing Plant

4:00 Board Bus

4:30 Arrive Fishermen's Wharf, Port Aransas, meet Mike Nugent (Port Aransas Boatman's Association) and tour for-hire recreational charter boats.

6:00 Board Bus

6:30 Arrive Omni Bayfront Hotel



Mitchell Lay

Vernel Nicholls

Henderson Inniss

Todville Peets

James Nicholas

Azzard Mohammed

Angelica Mendez

Andres Maldonado

Don DeMaria

Eddie Toomer

Adrian La-Roda

Emile Knowles

Denny Rankine

Keith Carroll

Brian Turnquest

Denise Chin

Kim Baldwin

Gary Graham

Bob Glazer

Pieter Van Baren

Luke Clerveaux

Armin Tuz Sulub

Alejandro Acosta

Zaidy Khan

Mandy Karnauskas

Leda Dunmire

Jay Lugar

Tarub Bahri

Karl Aiken

Nathalie Zenny

Bertha Simmons

Fernando Bretos

Iris Monnereau

Nancy Cummins

Benny Gallaway

Kyle McCain

Patrick McConney

Will Heyman

Appendix 4: F4F implementation session participants

Name	Organisation	E-mail
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