



WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION (WECAFC)

Recommendation WECAFC/XVIII/2022/5 on WECAFC Fisheries Data, Statistics and Information

Cover note

Fisheries for members of the Western Central Atlantic Fisheries Commission, in particular for African, Caribbean, Pacific (ACP) countries and the Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) from the Caribbean are important for food security and nutrition, as source of livelihoods, income earnings, and also source of foreign exchange for national governments.

For many years, the Caribbean regional data deficiencies and limited statistical information have been impeding national policy-making and fishery management in a regional context of shared marine resources.

The “Review of fisheries management performance and conservation in the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) area” in 2015 identified a number of challenges in data and statistics in support to fisheries management, including: inadequate legislation; challenges for cooperation with stakeholders with regard to acquisition of data and information on a routine basis; a weak data and information base for supporting fisheries management. The need to strengthen and maintain a quality statistical monitoring system was considered key to the success of immediate fisheries management needs¹.^[1]

Despite some regional European Union (EU) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) programmes aiming at improving statistics in the Caribbean region, a lack of capacity to collect and exchange data and information, and to analyze the status and trends of fishery resources and regional data policies remains. In the meantime, environmental trends as well as extreme weather events suggest that climate change and variability are already impacting the region’s fisheries, in some cases severely.

During WECAFC 14 (6–9 February 2012, Panama) and 15 (26–28 March 2014, Trinidad and Tobago), the EU expressed the need for increased attention to improved fisheries data and information collection as the basis of better fisheries management in the region. The identified data gaps continue to undermine any significant effort to improve fishery management. This need was considered so pressing that one of the four technical Focus Areas in the WECAFC Strategic Plan 2014-2020 was dedicated to this topic and the current Programme of Work

¹ Singh-Renton, Susan & McIvor, Ian. (2015). Review of Current Fisheries Management Performance and Conservation Measures in the WECAFC Area.

includes activity 2.4, “Improved fishery and aquaculture data collection, analysis and dissemination at regional and national level,” in support of this subject.

WECAFC 16 (Guadeloupe, France, 20-24 June 2016) agreed to establish a working group for fisheries data and statistics matters (FDS-WG), based on the ongoing work of the WECAFC-FIRMS (Fisheries and Resource Monitoring System) Partnership and supported by the development of a regional database (RDB) in collaboration with the WECAFC Members and partners in the region.

The most recent Commission session (17th) (Miami, July 2019) adopted 11 regional fisheries management recommendations, including among others for the conservation and management of sharks and rays, the management of Caribbean spiny lobster, the management of shrimp and groundfish resources of the North Brazil-Guianas Shelf, improved compliance with trade measures for Queen conch, the sustainability of fisheries using moored fish aggregating devices, the sustainable management of spawning aggregations and aggregating species. In order to support these conservation and management measures, the Commission also adopted the WECAFC interim Data Collection Reference Framework (iDCRF), and an interim List of Main Species for data collection in the WECAFC area. The proposed actions if supported will contribute towards continued improvement in the quality of statistics and data available for monitoring and management in the region, building on the initiatives undertaken through the WECAFC-FIRMS and FDS-WG activities.

Following this 17th WECAFC Commission, the second session of the FDS-WG2 met virtually three times between October 2020 and March 2022 to address the requested improvements of the iDCRF, the operationalization of the regional database, and the steps for increasing Members capacities. In its Concluding meeting (10 March 2022), the FDS-WG2 adopted draft recommendations as laid out in this document.

The Commission is asked to:

NOTE that reliable and timely fisheries data, statistics and information are instrumental to supporting national science-based policy-making and management, and development and monitoring of Regional Fisheries Management Plans;

RECALL that WECAFC 17 urged WECAFC Members to provide national data and statistics to the Regional Database in line with the interim DCRF and to support and promote the WECAFC-FIRMS partnership as a collaborative platform for collating and sharing scientific information throughout the region and leveraging of ongoing regional projects.

1. Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF)

RECALLING that the objective of the Commission is to promote the effective conservation, management and development of the living marine resources within the area of competence of the Commission, in accordance with the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication, and to address common problems of fisheries management and development faced by members of the Commission;

MINDFUL that qualitative and quantitative improvement of regional data and statistics requires harmonization and standardization at national and regional level with the definition of minimum data requirements in support of evidence-based decision-making;

MINDFUL of the global Reference Harmonization standard being developed by the FAO’s Coordinating Working Party on Fishery Statistics under which WECAFC, ICCAT, FAO and other RFBs collaborate for harmonizing and streamlining data collection and reporting frameworks including consideration of multiple reporting burdens;

REAFFIRMING the commitment of CARICOM States to improving evidence-based decision-making through regional cooperation as expressed in multiple regional policy documents including the “Strategic Action Programme for the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystem”, the CARICOM Strategic Plan, 2015 -2019, the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy (CCCFP) and the CRFM Strategic Plan, 2013-2021;

RECOGNIZING the continued efforts by the WECAFC members to increase their capacities to collect, analyze and report fisheries data and statistics;

RECALLING the endorsement of the WECAFC-FIRMS partnership by WECAFC 15 in 2014;

FURTHER RECALLING Recommendation WECAFC/17/2019/22 “ON WECAFC INTERIM DATA COLLECTION REFERENCE FRAMEWORK;”

FURTHER RECALLING Recommendation WECAFC/XVII/2019/5+6+7 “ON THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF SHARKS AND RAYS IN THE WECAFC AREA” related to reporting data and information on sharks and rays including for non-contracting parties to ICCAT;

FURTHER RECALLING Recommendation WECAFC/XVII/2019/9 “ON THE MANAGEMENT OF CARIBBEAN SPINY LOBSTER IN THE WECAFC AREA” section 4 related to Catch Documentation Schemes;

ADOPTS in conformity with Article 6 of the WECAFC Revised Statutes the RECOMMENDATIONS that:

1(a) Recognize the DCRF serves a minimum of two purposes, including i) a capacity building tool, which can be used by Members as a reference standard to set-up national data collection and information systems for all aquatic marine species, and ii) an instrument to support the scientific mandate and priorities of WECAFC-CRFM-OSPESCA.

1(b) Recognize the DCRF, its appendices, and associated documents titled, “Data sharing and access policies” and “Lists of fisheries and stocks within the WECAFC competence area,” are living documents based on a modular task-oriented structure articulated around clear supporting bases for reference list of species, with parts more mature than others, and as such conducive to a staged and incremental approach to implementation of the DCRF for some Members.

1(c) Endorse the Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF) and its appendices (WECAFC/XVIII/2022/9) as presented to this meeting, including in particular Appendix 2, "WECAFC subareas" and Appendix 3, “WECAFC Reference list of main species.”

1(d) Recommend the following general principles for the delineation of WECAFC sub-areas and divisions:

- That the WECAFC subareas and divisions are identified, as far as possible, consistently with the major ecosystems in the region as the starting point for defining their delineations, and as the overarching principle.

- That in defining the subareas and divisions, established maritime boundaries and 200 nautical mile EEZ limits are utilized (where they are established and are not disputed) and other default limits as the prevailing principle, in combination with, where required or preferred, simple longitudinal, latitudinal or oblique straight lines in the cases where:

(a.) there are no established maritime boundaries, to avoid issues of undefined/disputed maritime spaces; and

(b.) there are locally recognized and important ecosystem boundaries, together with other considerations, such as WECAFC Member countries' data collection capacities, that would limit adequate reporting.

- That some of these subareas and divisions remain to be finalized and are subject to further discussion and modification. This document and any proposal for, or final delineation of, any subarea or division is without prejudice to the WECAFC Members' maritime claims and boundaries.

- That these delimitations do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of FAO or WECAFC or its Members concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers and boundaries.

1(e) Further recommend regarding statistical delineations:

- That the above general principles should be followed for further proposals on the final statistical limits, subject to approval by the WECAFC Members directly involved.

- The adoption of a provisional list of subareas and divisions, that include correspondence to the Large Marine Ecosystems, or marine ecoregions, as identified in DCRF Appendix 2, and promotes the use by all WECAFC Members in their national data collection of the newly established WECAFC geographic subareas and divisions as per DCRF Appendix 2.

- That, to the extent possible, reporting is done at the finest possible division level to ensure the availability of spatial granular data required for scientific purposes.

1(f) Recommend the use by all WECAFC Members in their national data collection on the evolved categorization of WECAFC Reference list of aquatic species developed by the FDS-WG as DCRF Appendix 3, which consists of three groups and several subgroups with defined bases for selection:

- Group 1, "Main Reference Species," are key species to the region, other than those included in Group 3, and of specific interest to the WECAFC mandate for which members are strongly encouraged to statistical reporting:
 - Subgroup Basis 1: Species with fisheries management plans endorsed.
- Group 2, "Other Reference Species," other than those included in Group 3, are Species of interest for WECAFC that could be elevated to the Group 1, with three Subgroups:
 - Subgroup Basis 2: Species of interest to historical WGs of regional bodies (WECAFC, CRFM, OSPESCA, including through their Interim Coordination Mechanisms)
 - Subgroup Basis 3: Species in high seas (areas beyond national jurisdiction)/straddling / shared and not under mandate of another RFMO
 - Subgroup Basis 4: Species for WECAFC region originating from 1978 working party on fishery statistics and/or of interest for other reasons (e.g., of local interest including high commercial value, for biodiversity reasons, or for importance of impacts from/due to climate changes)
- Group 3, "Other species of interest for WECAFC Members," are...
 - Subgroup Basis 5 - Species under the mandate of other RFMOs, including for mandatory reporting (e.g., ICCAT), such as tuna and tuna-like species and pelagic sharks.

1 (g) Strongly encourage WECAFC Members to proceed with the use of DCRF for monitoring and reporting, with prioritization for provision of data for Tasks III (Fleet), II (Catch by species and Effort), and IV (Biological data), with high priority on Group1 species.

1 (h) Recommend continued participation in the FDS-WG and specifically to support the intersessional work plan as related to interactions with thematic working groups relating to:

- national vessel mappings to regional fleet segment classifications, promotion of species and associated subareas for priority reporting, species biological parameters.
- further tailor the DCRF and associated data sharing policies in consideration of the use of relevant data sets by those working groups.

2. WECAFC Regional Database (WECAFIS)

RECALLING that the objective of the Commission is to promote the effective conservation, management and development of the living marine resources within the area of competence of the Commission, in accordance with the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication, and to address common problems of fisheries management and development faced by members of the Commission;

NOTING that the 16th session of WECAFC held in Guadeloupe, France, 20-24 June 2016, agreed to establish the Regional Fisheries Data and Statistics Working Group (FDS-WG);

FURTHER NOTING that FDS-WG acts as a steering committee for the Regional Database as per its Terms of Reference;

MINDFUL that sharing of information in support to management and monitoring of Regional Fisheries Management Plans requires an instrument for data dissemination and sharing;

NOTING that data access and sharing in the region is to “facilitate regional fisheries data and information exchange to support evidence-based fisheries policy-making at national and regional levels, while ensuring non-disclosure and/or careful handling of sensitive fisheries data and information;”

RECOGNIZING the important role of WECAFC, CRFM, and OSPESCA to validate regional inventories and to support and facilitate consistency and harmonization with national inventories and their publishing through FIRMS as a contribution to the global monitoring framework requested under SDG14.4.1;

RECALLING Recommendation WECAFC/17/2019/22 “ON WECAFC INTERIM DATA COLLECTION REFERENCE FRAMEWORK” section 4 related to the Regional Database;

FURTHER RECALLING Recommendation WECAFC/XVII/2019/11 “ON THE MANAGEMENT OF SHRIMP AND GROUND FISH RESOURCES OF THE NORTH BRAZIL-GUIANAS SHELF IN THE WECAFC AREA” section 1 related to the Regional Database;

RECALLING Resolution WECAFC/XVII/2019/8 “ON THE WECAFC-FIRMS PARTNERSHIP;”

ACKNOWLEDGING that WECAFC Regional Database is a fully functional information system;

REITERATES the promotion to WECAFC MEMBERS of provisioning of national data and statistics to the WECAFC-CRFM-OSPESCA Regional DataBase (RDB) according to Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF);

ADOPTS in conformity with Article 6 of the WECAFC Revised Statutes the RECOMMENDATIONS that:

2(a) The Western Central Atlantic Fisheries Information System (“WECAFIS”) has the mandate to disseminate data and statistics covered by DCRF with due consideration of DCRF data access and sharing rules, as well as FIRMS information on status and trends of fisheries and stocks under the WECAFC competence area.

2(b) The WECAFIS be published in the Data section of the new WECAFC website.

2(c) Members publish DCRF data in WECAFIS for Task I, and for Task II.1 and Task II.2, Task III.1 and Task IV.1 with high priority for Groups 1 species to reinforce management of shared stocks, and promote proceeding with related tasks including:

- carrying out mappings of national vessel types to regional fleet segment classifications

2(d) Members recognize the important role of WECAFC, CRFM, and OSPESCA to validate regional inventories and to support and facilitate consistency and harmonization with national inventories and their publishing through FIRMS as contribution to the global monitoring framework requested under/ SDG14.4.1.

2(e) WECAFC Members are therefore encouraged to:

- Update or further develop their inventories of fisheries and develop status reports on national fisheries and publish in FIRMS
- Update or further develop new List of Stocks and stock status reports be updated and published in FIRMS
- Engage in training opportunities towards completion of WECAFIS-DCRF data templates towards progressing operationalization of the DCRF and WECAFC-FIRMS data templates to enrich FIRMS content

2(f) SAG is encouraged to review and provide recommendations in light of other processes as regards the information/content on list of stocks and stock status

3. WECAFC Capacity Building for collection and production of data, statistics, and information

RECALLING that WECAFC’s mandate covers all living marine resources, without prejudice to the management responsibilities and authority of other competent fisheries bodies and other living marine resources management organizations or arrangements in the area

CONCERNED about the challenges that WECAFC members still face to collect data and produce statistics on all living marine resources

ACKNOWLEDGING continuing technical support from FAO and financial support from donors, including the EU and the USA, to develop WECAFC Members’ capacities for production and collection of data, statistics, and information;

RECALLING the important steps taken by the WECAFC, OSPESCA, and CRFM members in the recent years in terms of increasing their capacities to collect, analyze and report reliable and timely fisheries data and statistics

RECALLING Recommendation WECAFC/XVII/2019/11 “ON THE MANAGEMENT OF SHRIMP AND GROUND FISH RESOURCES OF THE NORTH BRAZIL-GUIANAS SHELF IN THE WECAFC AREA section 2 related to capacity building on stock assessment and bioeconomic analysis of priority fisheries

FURTHER RECALLING Recommendation WECAFC/17/2019/22 “ON WECAFC INTERIM DATA COLLECTION REFERENCE FRAMEWORK” section 7 related to strengthening of national capacity

ADOPTS in conformity with Article 6 of the WECAFC Revised Statutes the RECOMMENDATIONS that:

3(a) Members reiterate recognition that the WECAFC-FIRMS project provides a collaborative platform for collation and sharing of scientific information, leveraging ongoing regional projects, and prioritizing national data needs.

3(b) Members are encouraged to acknowledge the development by the FDS-WG of criteria and related scoring to support the identification and prioritization of capacity-building investments and projects that improve science-based decision-making and support the further development of these criteria as a dashboard for monitoring needs and mobilizing resources for the benefit of WECAFC and its Members.

3(c) Members recognize that further investments should be made to build national capacities of WECAFC Members for data collection, analysis, and reporting with priorities on implementing DCRF and feeding the WECAFIS through the SAG process.