



WESTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC FISHERY COMMISSION (WECAFC)

Recommendation WECAFC/XVIII/2022/3 on Increased efforts in the implementation of the Regional Queen conch fishery management and conservation plan in the WECAFC region

“Managing queen conch fisheries presents a broad range of challenges, including the complex biology of the species, uncertainty of catch and effort data, illegal trade, weak surveillance and enforcement mechanisms, unsustainable fishing practices, and even the frequency of severe dive accidents impacting on the quality of life and living conditions of entire towns. Problems in the fishery are dynamic, adding to the complexity of the issues which fishery sector managers have to face and for which they typically do not have enough human, technical and/or financial resources.¹” “Queen conch fisheries are believed to be fully developed in most areas, and that the alleged increase in levels of illegal fishing often occurs due to a lack of knowledge, awareness and enforcement.²”

The need for coordinated management of the queen conch has long been recognized by fisheries scientists and managers in the Wider Caribbean region. The Regional Queen Conch Fishery Management and Conservation Plan provides a set of management measures that can be applied at the regional or sub-regional level for the sustainability of queen conch populations, the maintenance of a healthy fishery and the sustenance of fishers and fishers’ communities. As the Plan is progressively implemented, improvement in the long-term governance of queen conch fisheries across the Caribbean is expected, as stated in strategy 4B of the Strategic Action Plan (SAP) of the “Sustainable Management of the Shared Marine Resources of the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem (CLME) and Adjacent Regions.”

The 14 management measures recommended in this Regional Queen Conch Fishery Management and Conservation Plan were analysed by experts participating in the Second Meeting of the WECAFC/CFMC/OSPESCA/CRFM Working Group, held in Panama from 18 to 20 November 2014. Implementation status of the 14 management measures have been discussed at the Third and Fourth meetings of the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES Working Group on Queen respectively held

¹ Prada, M. C.; Appeldoorn, R. S.; Van Eijs, S. & Pérez, M. M. 2017. Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper No. 610. Rome, FAO. 70 pp.

² Theile, S. 2005. Status of the queen conch, *Strombus gigas* stocks, management and trade in the Caribbean: A CITES review. Proc. Annu. Gulf Caribb. Fish. Inst., 56: 675–694.

in 2018 and 2019. In general, Members have made improvements in the management of their fisheries at the national levels through implementation of the measures. However, given the differences in scales, gears, products, markets and geographic locations of Member States, harmonization of management measures at the regional level has not occurred yet. The degree of implementation of the Regional Queen Conch Regional Management and Conservation Plan was preliminarily evaluated using quantitative values collected in 2019-2020, and the Working Group found that some progress was made.

To help address the issue of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, it is important to note the management measure for traceability of queen conch throughout the value chain identified in the Regional Queen Conch Management and Conservation Plan. Traceability can be advantageous by helping to ensure that seafood caught by legal versus illegal fishing practices can be distinguished, allowing legally harvested products to fetch higher prices³. This management measure is also aligned with the objectives of the Regional Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU Fishing in WECAFC Member Countries (RPOA-IUU) (2019-2029) which are to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing in the area of competence of the WECAFC through effective information-sharing and regional cooperation; and contribute to promoting the effective conservation, management and development of the living marine resources in the WECAFC area, in accordance with the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

The Fifth meeting of the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES Working Group on Queen Conch was held during 13-14 December 2021 in Puerto Rico and online. The purposes of the meeting were to continue monitoring implementation of the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan, and to discuss implementation of the Recommendations developed by the Working Group and the Scientific, Statistical and Technical Advisory Group (SSTAG), as well as other items for collaboration called for in the Terms of Reference for the Working Group. Meeting participants also discussed the progress of activities as called for in the Work Plan for 2019 – 2021 and the implementation of Recommendation WECAFC/XVII/2019/12 on Improved Compliance with Trade Measures for Queen Conch and Recommendation WECAFC/XVII/2019/13 on Queen Conch Conversion Factor adopted at WECAFC17. An updated Work Plan for 2021-2024 was also developed. The Fifth Meeting of the Working Group agreed that any gaps in implementation of the management measures in the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan should be addressed and continued monitoring of the implementation status was required. There was also discussion about the ongoing issue of IUU fishing and the possibility of using genetic techniques to determine the origin of queen conch products. The Fifth meeting agreed that the QCWG should liaise with the IUU Working Group to develop a joint recommendation to address IUU fishing in queen conch fisheries in the region.

It is expected that additional human, technical and financial resources will be required by the Members and the WECAFC Secretariat in order to continue supporting the implementation of the management measures outlined in the Regional Queen Conch Fishery Management and Conservation Plan.

Failing to approve this recommendation will undermine the sustainable management and conservation of the queen conch resource and hinder the development of genetic tools to help combat IUU fishing in the queen conch fishery.

1. Continued support for implementation of the QC regional management and conservation plan

The Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC),

³ Prada, M. C.; Appeldoorn, R. S.; Van Eijs, S. & Pérez, M. M. 2017. Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper No. 610. Rome, FAO. 70 pp.

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;

RECALLING the establishment of the WECAFC Working Group on Queen Conch by WECAFC 14 in 2012;

REAFFIRMING the commitments made by Queen Conch range States at the sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP16, Bangkok, 3–14 March 2013) to implement the Decisions on “Regional cooperation on the management of and trade in the Queen Conch (*Strombus gigas*)” agreed at CoP16;

FURTHER REAFFIRMING Recommendation WECAFC/16/2016/1 and the Decisions 17.285–17.290 related to queen conch adopted at 17th Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP17, Johannesburg, 24 September–4 October 2016) (see FAO Technical Paper No. 610), calling upon WECAFC members to implement the Regional Queen Conch Fisheries Management and Conservation Plan;

COGNIZANT of the fact that National CITES Management Authorities are required to make a “Legal Acquisition Finding” before issuing an export permit for queen conch and noting that a resolution on guidance to CITES Parties for making Legal Acquisition Findings was adopted at CoP18 (Geneva, Switzerland 17–28 August 2019).

RECALLING the outcomes of the Third and Fourth meetings of the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM/CITES Working Group on Queen Conch, respectively held in Panama, 30th October- 1st November 2018 with support from the European Union, NOAA Fisheries and FAO; and in San Juan, Puerto Rico, from 16 to 17 December 2019 with support from NOAA Fisheries and FAO.

RECALLING that the Commission adopted Recommendation WECAFC/16/2016/1 “on the regional plan for the management and conservation of Queen conch in the WECAFC area – addendum to recommendation WECAFC/15/2014/3 on the management and conservation of queen conch in the WECAFC area; and Recommendations WECAFC/17/2019/12 on improved compliance with trade measures for Queen Conch and WECAFC/17/2019/13 on Queen Conch conversion factor.

NOTING with concern the limited implementation of the conservation and management plan for QC to date and that some WECAFC Members are facing significant challenges in implementing the plan.

NOTING the Regional Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing in WECAFC Member Countries (2019-2029) which was developed by the Joint WECAFC/CRFM/OSPESCA Regional Working Group on IUU (RWG-IUU) Fishing and endorsed at the 17th Session of the Commission;

RECALLING that the RPOA-IUU Fishing sets out 28 measures and actions to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing in the Wider Caribbean Region and to fulfil the WECAFC Members' obligations in the capacities as port, flag, coastal and market State under the aspects of Policy and legal framework, MCS and operations, Regional information-sharing and cooperation Capacity development;

ADOPTS in conformity with the provision of Article 6 (h) of the Revised Statutes of the WECAFC the RECOMMENDATION that:

Given the importance of evaluating the degree of implementation of the Regional Queen Conch Management and Conservation Plan, the quantitative values collected in 2019-2020 should be updated with additional data from all countries in the Wider Caribbean participating in the queen conch fishery using the information presented at the 2021 Working Group meeting. The update on the implementation status should be completed by January 2023.

Monitoring the plan's implementation should be done on an annual basis to increase communication, coordination, and planning towards the application of ecosystem-based approaches to fisheries of this valuable resource.

Genetic work utilizing the Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms (SNPs) technique or other similarly advanced genetic techniques should be considered in order to develop appropriate and validated genetic markers. This technique has the potential to identify spatial distribution of the species, and thus would provide useful information for queen conch connectivity and traceability. This would also support the development of Legal Acquisition Findings as required under CITES. The SNPs technique also has the potential to map the genes and provide information about population genetic structure and thus allow for identification of spatial variability (or distribution) of the species .

WECAFC Members are strongly encouraged to participate in the development of this genetic work, and in order to be statistically robust, at least 15 countries would be required to provide genetic samples of queen conch.

The QC Scientific, Statistical and Technical and Advisory Sub-group (SSTAG) should liaise with the Regional Working Group on IUU Fishing to further strengthen activities to counteract IUU fishing of queen conch and advance implementation of the 28 measures and actions identified in the RPOA-IUU fishing.