

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? A SUMMARY OF ISSUES OF CONCERN AND RECOMMENDATIONS DEVELOPED DURING THE PANEL DISCUSSION OF THE LARGE PELAGIC FISHES SYMPOSIUM

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One of the goals of the Large Pelagic Fishes Symposium was to provide a forum for development of a list of Issues of Concern regarding large pelagic fishes and their fisheries in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico region. During the Symposium and ensuing Panel Discussion, it became clear that the level of consciousness concerning large pelagic fishes is of equal importance to that of other regional fisheries such as reef fishes and conch/lobster. Four major issues of concern regarding large pelagic fishes in the region surfaced during the Symposium. The Symposium Committee recommends that future resources and energy should be addressed to these identified concerns:

- 1) Fisheries policy-advisors and managers are not getting information from scientists in a timely fashion;
- 2) Approaches to reduce overfishing and its negative effects need to be strengthened;
- 3) Insufficient attention is being paid to instituting effective regional management; and
- 4) Initiatives to engage fishers in management processes and to help find solutions are inadequate.

Panel members and Symposium participants made a number of recommendations for addressing each of these issues. The recommendations related to helping resolve each issue of concern are listed below.

1. Fisheries policy-advisors and managers are not getting information from scientists in a timely fashion

- Abstract 3–4 scientific papers on key subjects each year into a 1 page summary emphasizing the management/policy scenario, and send these to managers to better inform them about cutting edge and critical issues or advances in science.^a
- Identify the structure of political systems, as they vary by country; recommendations need to reach the appropriate personnel in each country.^b

- Present scientific information to advocacy groups; encourage those groups to talk with managers to explore scientific/political relationships and needs.^{a,b}
- Maintain a coherent, long-term direction and include education and advocacy to get the message to appropriate users and stakeholders.^b
- Research results need to be better translated from science to assist management.
- Decision makers need to be better informed on the issues through workshops and hands-on experiences.^b

2. Approaches to reduce overfishing and its negative effects need to be strengthened

- Experts must speak with a clear, consistent voice to avoid confusion regarding scientific recommendations.^a
- Managers should make science-based decisions on resource management whenever possible; an attempt should be made to avoid political influence in this process.^b
- Scientists must communicate among themselves to avoid presenting conflicting information to managers and fishers.^a
- Managers should go into the field to see first hand the impacts of their decisions.
- When there is a fisheries collapse/closure, there must be economic solutions that are politically, culturally and socially acceptable for small-scale fishers.^b

3. Insufficient attention is being paid to instituting effective regional management

- Create the political will through “grass roots” support and fishers organizations to support regional management initiatives.
- Use the success of the CARICOM framework as a model for additional regional management.
- Deal more effectively with sovereignty/transboundary issues.

- Management should be formulated in the light of political and economic realities.
- Use a network analysis approach to provide new perspectives on problems and capacity-building so as to promote integrated management where appropriate.^b
- Politicians must support CARICOM/FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and make decisions based on this Code.
- Small-scale fisheries must be considered regionally and internationally when designing management plans.
- NGO's can be advocates in controversial situations, thus preserving the impartiality of scientists.^b
- Identify/develop key relationships and sources of support.^a
- Better integration of research efforts is needed to achieve regional goals.
- Promote additional and continued partnering between developing and developed countries.
- Assess critical gaps in management, including data collection systems.^a
- Small and large countries must have equal input into the establishment of rules that affect the region.

4. Initiatives to engage fishers in management processes and to help find solutions are inadequate

- Scientists and managers should hire fishers as consultants for their expertise on existing fisheries conditions.^a
- Establish scientist/fishers partnerships to increase communications and share knowledge bases by working together.^{a,b}
- Scientists should collaborate with existing fishers organizations.
- Managers should go sea with fishers to better understand problems first hand.
- Encourage fishers, as the ultimate stakeholders, to approach politicians in conjunction with scientists with problems as well as solutions for specific issues.^b

^aAreas in which established regional scientific organizations, such as GCFI and local chapters of the American Fisheries Society, can take a leading role to help address and/or implement a number of these recommendations are indicated in the lists above. The role of the scientific organizations would be to spearhead committee formation or dialogue that would significantly impact these concerns.

^bAreas in which regional, national and international NGOs, such as Environmental Defense, The Nature Conservancy, and the Billfish Foundation can have an important role in helping to address some of these recommendations are indicated in the lists above. These organizations are often uniquely positioned to address situations that cross scientific and political boundaries.

We hope these recommendations, which stem from a broad set of stakeholders throughout the Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico, will initiate and facilitate productive discussions that will allow for enhanced success in forging a more transparent bond between policy, management, and resource sustainability such that cultural, ecological, and economic realities may flourish.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank members of the Panel (B. Luckhurst, E. Prince, A. Kinch, H. Oxenford, L. Reynal, and moderator M. Haughton) for their insightful comments and suggestions during the panel discussion. Some of the recommendations presented above were suggested in Symposium presentations and many came from the audience participation session of the panel discussion. The Symposium Organizing Committee thanks everyone who participated in the Large Pelagic Fishes Symposium for sharing their ideas and suggestions.