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EVALUATION AND PRIORITY NEEDS SESSION

Reports of Individual Evaluation Teams

Report of the Evaluation Team on Resources and Harvesting

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It is currently believed that the overall productivity of the Caribbean Sea and part of the Gulf of Mexico is low, but that many underutilized stocks of fishes exist there which could be utilized. These include some large, widespread stocks of coastal and pelagic fishes such as sharks, mackerels, and sardine-like fishes, as well as hundreds of smaller, scattered stocks of coastal demersal fishes.

Based on this premise the Evaluation Team considers that possible development opportunities are as follows:

1. *Mackerels* – Three to four species exist throughout the region, however full exploitation is limited to a few areas. Development of fisheries is suggested using gear such as gillnets, trolling, and live bait.
2. *Sharks* – Sharks have economic value as food, hides, and as novelties for the tourist trade. The resource is considered extensive in coastal continental areas. Harvesting techniques could include longlines and handlines.
3. *Sea urchins* – This resource is common throughout the region and is considered valuable for human consumption and/or the pet food trade.
4. *Conch* – Conch stocks require urgent conservation measures. This species has very great potential value if stocks can be increased to harvestable levels. The reproductive capacity of this species is great, thus the period of rehabilitation of the stocks should be short.

For all available resources, opportunities for development should be evaluated with respect to factors needed for their effective utilization and management, including stock abundance estimates. Such estimates would be derived largely from catch and economic statistics in existing fisheries. It is strongly recommended that all countries give attention to improving such statistics and implement collection of such statistics where currently none exist.

The Evaluation Team also suggested that related topics should be addressed and recommendations made, especially as to effective development and management. These include:

1. Encourage host countries to participate fully in programs sponsored by external agencies.
2. Encourage education and demonstration of improved gear and technology, and marketing.
3. Evaluate pot (trap) fisheries in areas of heavy use so as to determine their effects on the resources.

It was noted that coastal zone management is of special concern to small-scale fisheries. Based on this, the team endorses a regional educational program. Emphasis should be placed on the Caribbean islands where the balance of nature is fragile and commercial and industrial development is greatest. Special impacts are the effects of pollution on coral reefs, stripping of mangroves, and extraction of beach sand.

The Hawksbill Turtle

It was the belief of the Evaluation Team that the current status of the western Atlantic hawksbill turtle warrants urgent conservation measures. Once stocks of this species have been re-established at acceptable levels, there is a high potential economic value for regional small-scale fisheries for this species, given proper management. The high reproductive capacity of hawksbill turtles suggests that stock rehabilitation could occur over a relatively short period of time. This, and the high potential value of the turtle, can provide a conservation incentive to fishermen now taking this species from steadily declining stocks. Such a program will require the active participation of all countries of the Caribbean region if it is to be successful. This could be accomplished by assigning a coordination role to some regional or international entity that would be charged with initiating communications with officials throughout the Caribbean region, act as a center for information and statistics, and would provide a forum for annual reviews of progress and accomplishments. We recommend that the Directors of the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute consider accepting this responsibility as one area of increased involvement in Gulf and Caribbean regional fisheries problems. Successful accomplishment of these conservation objectives and the rehabilitation of valuable stocks to levels of MSY would serve as a demonstration project for attacking future conservation and management problems in the Gulf and Caribbean area.