

Introductory Comments

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Caribbean Island nations are beginning to more carefully evaluate the role that marine recreational fisheries (MRF) can play in their fisheries and tourism development programs. The 1983 Western Central Atlantic Fisheries Commission report recommended that Caribbean countries formulate effective marine recreational fishing statistics collection methods, assess the economic importance of saltwater sport fishing, and examine the role of recreational fisheries in tourism development. Tourism is recognized as a good foreign exchange earner having high economic multiplier effects (FAO, 1983).

A good case can be made for development of marine recreational fisheries in the Caribbean (Schmied, 1985). Among other reasons, sport fishing could be further developed as a tourist attraction to help maintain the appeal of the Caribbean to U.S. travelers who account for nearly 65% of all overnight visits to the region. Saltwater sport fisheries development could also help increase the supply of fresh seafood to local markets, stimulate growth of support industries (bait, tackle, charter boat businesses, etc.), and help generate additional public support for improved management and conservation of Caribbean fishery resources and associated habitat. These sentiments are echoed in a number of Caribbean marine resource development studies (Dalhousie 1982, 1984a, 1984b, 1985, Woods Hole 1984).

In response to growing interest, the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI) has held several technical sessions on marine recreational fisheries development as part of its annual meeting. The 1982 GCFI annual meeting in Nassau, Bahamas, included such a session which resulted in a recommendation that the GCFI member countries assess the extent and quality of MRF in their areas to determine whether a worthwhile need and opportunity for MRF development existed. Further, it was recommended that another major MRF session be held by 1985 to evaluate and discuss MRF development progress.

The 1985 GCFI meeting in Martinique included a program focusing on MRF development in the Caribbean. The session was well attended and sparked considerable interest among fishery officers and attendees. Unfortunately, while several speakers attempted to assess the extent of MRF development within their respective countries, the effort was handicapped due to a lack of published data. Further, it became apparent that if MRF development was to proceed, better working relations with tourism interests would be required.

Subsequent to the 1985 meeting, an ad hoc planning group was established to develop an MRF technical session for the 1986 meeting. The result was an excellent program geared toward integrating marine recreational fisheries and tourism development efforts. Attendees at last year's meeting in Bermuda, were pleased with the session and indicated that while many countries were attempting to develop MRF, specific technical assistance on various topics would be needed to continue the initiative.

In considering a topic for this year's meeting, we received a list of issues and problems obtained through a survey of fishery officers I conducted last fall. The purpose of the survey was to determine the nature and extent of marine recreational fisheries and associated development efforts in the Caribbean. Notably, of the 17 countries that indicated they were developing MRF as a tourist attraction, all were using tournaments as one of several development tools. Collectively these 17 countries reported 228 tournaments being held annually. In spite of this seemingly large number of tournaments, many fishery officers indicated they could use technical assistance on how to do a better job of planning, organizing, promoting and conducting tournaments. This session will hopefully meet that need.

I am very pleased to say we have some excellent, highly qualified speakers that have traveled long distances to share some of their experiences with you concerning the nuts and bolts of tournaments. This evening we have a bonus session. Between 7 and 9 p.m., we will have discussions and demonstrations of fish tagging, computerized record keeping for tournaments, torryster use, and other techniques to determine the freshness of tournament caught fish. Further, we hope to continue sharing tournament experiences over a keg of beer. We hope to see you there this evening.

Lets get on with our program!