

Moving forward regional voluntary commitments towards better sustainable management fisheries in the Western Atlantic, the case of queen conch and fish spawning aggregations

Avanzando en los compromisos voluntarios regionales hacia una mejor ordenación sostenible de las pesquerías del Atlántico occidental, el caso del caracol rosado y las agregaciones reproductiva desove de peces

Faire avancer les engagements volontaires régionaux vers une meilleure gestion durable des pêches dans l'Atlantique Ouest, le cas du lambi et des agrégations de ponte de poissons

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

The Wider Caribbean is a region recognized for its great cultural diversity and inhabited by more than 134 million people who live on or near the coast in addition (CANARI 2020); a region that welcomed approximately 31.5 million stay-over visitors in 2019, who approximately spent more than 40 billion dollars in 2019. (Caribbean Tourism Association. 2020). It is a world's premier cruise tourism destination, commanding over 60% of the world cruise market. The region possesses productive, diverse, and well-developed coral reefs, seagrasses, mangroves, beaches, pelagic and deep-sea ecosystems that have resulted from complex interactions happening inside a semi-enclosed, tropical, and very active oceanographic environments. This rich biodiversity is supporting several fisheries considered to be a significant provider of food, livelihoods, income, and subsistence in the Western Atlantic region area, where approximately 500,000 people are employed directly in the primary sector (capture fishery), with another three million jobs in ancillary activities (WECAFC 2022). Yet the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR) is a net importer of fisheries products. In terms of volume the region imported almost 2 billion tonnes of fisheries products with a value of around USD 8.1 billion, while exports represented around 974 thousand tonnes with a value of USD 4.8 billion (WECAFC 2022).

With more than 170 species subject to growing exploitation, many since pre-Columbus times, that are simultaneous facing increased environmental challenges, including impacts from pollution, climate change, or illegal, unreported, or unregulated (IUU) fishing, among others, the entire ecosystem functioning is in peril. Therefore, effective ocean governance is urgently needed in response to the complex fisheries characteristics, and the diverse multitude of stakeholders, acting under multiple geo-political and legal frameworks to overcome current declining trends in fisheries resources.

OBJECTIVES

This work is aimed to present a strategy to improve regional fisheries management through the establishment of two task forces in support of the Regional Working Groups on queen conch and spawning aggregation, thus facilitating governance processes required to overcome long-time challenges and limitations in regional fisheries management.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Regional fishery management plans are currently being implemented with the support of key stakeholders (technical and political) belonging to several Regional Working Groups addressing at least 11 of the main fisheries within the Wider Caribbean Region (FAO, 2023). These joint Working Groups are comprised of national representatives as well other regional organizations such as the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC), Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM), the Organization of Fisheries for the Central American Isthmus (OSPESCA), and the U.S. Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC), to improve governance and actions related to the region's key fisheries. Between 2016 and 2022, four regional fisheries management plans have been developed and formally adopted, while another four are being developed.

However, their implementation remains voluntarily and given the lack of resources (human, technical, financial) or political will, the reversal of negative trends is yet to be achieved. To boost the implementation of regional management plans, for instance, in the case of queen conch or fish spawning aggregations, two Task Force Committees have been dedicating increased coordination and communication efforts, with the provision of technical advice and mobilizing funding.

Each Task Force Committee have representation of the [WECAFC Secretariat](#), [NOAA Fisheries](#) and its associated [CFMC](#),

the Working Group Convener, a strategic group of experts, and a Scientific liaison, thus following a participative approach. They conduct periodic meetings, agree on short-term assignments, follow an adaptative planning strategy, look for founding opportunities including writing and submitting proposals in coordination with the WECAFC Focal Points, and provide technical advice as required.

During the past two years when those Task Force Committees have been operative, the following achievements can be highlighted: a) Support for the establishment of a Queen conch Statistical, Scientific and Technical Advisory Group; b) drafting and approval small grants to improve communication; c) drafting, submission, approval and implementation of a small grant for improved collection of queen conch landing data; d) drafting and submission of a grant to support the implementation of the Regional Fish Spawning Aggregation Fisheries Management Plan; and e) established communication with representatives of fisheries officers from several countries along with coordination with other Working Groups.

CONCLUSIONS

The establishment of these Task Force Committees are found instrumental in strengthening the efficiency of fisheries and ocean governance in the region by:

- Advancing understanding of the complexity in fisheries management
- Addressing region specific needs
- Improving communication and coordination
- Exchanging of information and ideas
- Reaching broader audiences
- Building trust
- Capitalizing on voluntarily commitments & online tools

On the other hand, they are challenged by some barriers, including:

- Slow partner responses
- Overlaying multiple responsibilities
- Need support for translations
- Time differences

The examples presented here demonstrated the importance of working collaboratively and in coordination at various levels (national, subregional, and regional), and moving within existing ocean governance structures, thus advancing its goals and expectations.

KEYWORDS: Regional fisheries management, queen conch, fish spawning aggregation, fishery management plans

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