

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE WECAFC Working Group on the management of deep sea fisheries 2015 -2018

1. Background and justification

Deep sea fisheries in the high seas are those where the total catch includes species that can only sustain low exploitation rates, and that are conducted using fishing gears that either contact or are likely to contact the sea floor during the course of the fishing operations. Eighty-nine percent of the waters in the WECAFC area of competence have a depth of 400 meters or greater. Eighty-six percent of the water surface area has a depth greater than 1000 meters. Fifty-one percent of the WECAFC area is considered high-seas. The information available about deep sea fish stocks and their catches in the WECAFC area is insignificant.

Hardly any data on deep sea fish stocks and catches in the region are collected or reported. The vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) in the deep sea areas and particularly in the high seas areas in the WECAFC competence area have not been identified. The current gaps in knowledge and information on this subject may have serious effects for the management of stocks and sustainability of fisheries operations in the waters concerned. While in many regions countries and Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) have made efforts to increase knowledge and information on this subject, this is not the case in the WECAFC area.

The 2008 FAO International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-sea Fisheries in the High Seas provide guidance on management factors ranging from an appropriate regulatory framework to the components of good data collection programs and include the identification of key management considerations and measures necessary to ensure conservation of target and non-target species, as well as affected habitats. Making a joint effort towards implementation of these internationally accepted voluntary guidelines is highly necessary in the WECAFC region.

2. Role of the Working Group

The objective of the Working group is to inform and provide guidance for the management of deep sea fisheries by WECAFC members, in such a manner as to promote responsible fisheries that provide economic opportunities, while ensuring the conservation of marine living resources and the protection of marine biodiversity and to facilitate the implementation of the FAO International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-sea Fisheries in the High Seas.

2.1 Specific Terms of Reference for the period 2015 to 2018

The work of the Working Group will be guided by the FAO International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-sea Fisheries of the High-seas and in particular will address the following aspects:

- a) Collect and review of existing (past and present) data and information on the deep sea fisheries in the WECAFC area, in addition to identifying the potential of such fisheries in the region.
- b) Meet and analyse the data and information collected and make recommendations for the sustainability of the deep sea fisheries in the WECAFC region.
- c) Identify priority areas for future work and international funding and support for the work identified.
- d) Organize in 2014 a WECAFC Technical Workshop on Bottom Fisheries in the High Seas Areas of the Western Central Atlantic to present and discuss the findings and recommendations of the working group, and to obtain inputs from the WECAFC members.
- e) Develop a Chapter on the Western Central Atlantic for the 2015 FAO Worldwide review of bottom fisheries in the high seas.
- f) Report to the Commission at its next session, its conclusions and recommendations for further activities.

3. Mode of Operation

3.1 Membership of the Working Group

Membership shall consist of all Members of WECAFC, including Overseas Territories and Departments, with an interest in deep sea fisheries. Membership may also include representatives of deep sea fisheries stakeholders of Members, Non-members, as well as relevant regional and regional organizations and experts.

Working Group members from WECAFC members

The members of the Working Group, on behalf of WECAFC members, will have expertise in deep sea fisheries and its management, deep sea fish species and the vulnerability of stocks, VMEs and/or high seas legal frameworks, in their respective countries. They will play an important role through the following activities and commitments:

- Participate in agreed activities of the Working Group, and ensuring the participation of appropriate other experts from the country (if required);
- Support implementation of the draft recommendations prepared by the Working Group at the national level;
- Assist by hosting Working Group meetings on a rotational (periodic) basis (as appropriate).

Working Group members from partner organizations and institutions

The Working Group members from partner organizations at international and regional level will provide (in-kind) expertise, participate in information and data collection, facilitate funding, collaborate in the organization of workshop(s) and funding of experts participation (if appropriate), support the co-ordination and communication in the Working Group and support the decision-making process in the Wider Caribbean Region in order to reach well-balanced outputs and recommendations that are acceptable to the region and can account with the support from the various partners in terms of implementation and follow-up.

3.2 Election of Convener of the Working Group

The Working Group shall elect a Convener from among its Members to serve over the two-year period.

The first task of the convener would be to seek for experts among the WECAFC Members on deep sea fisheries and its management, deep sea fish species and the vulnerability of stocks, VMEs, high seas legal frameworks, as well as to contact potential partner organizations and solicit their interest to join in this working group.

3.3 Role of FAO/WECAFC Secretariat

- a) To coordinate activities of the Working Group, among WECAFC and Non-WECAFC Members, at the wider regional level;
- b) To assist with mobilization of resources for the activities of the Working Group;
- c) To assist with convening of meetings of the Working Group;
- d) To liaise with the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and particularly on their ongoing work to describe Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) in the Wider Caribbean Region promote technical assistance and support to research and resource assessment through collaboration with regional and international research partners;
- e) To liaise with the FAO, UNEP and World Bank staff working on the GEF programme on “Global sustainable fisheries management and biodiversity conservation in the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ)”
- f) To liaise with other Regional Fishery Bodies (RFBs) active in the Wider Caribbean Region and neighbouring areas will be involved as much as possible in the work of the group; these RFBs include amongst others OSPESCA, CRFM, CFMC, ICCAT, NAFO, NEAFC and CECAF.
- g) To coordinate the formulation and adoption of recommendations by the Working Group so as to facilitate the decision-making process at the level of WECAFC Area 31.

3.4 Working Group Meetings

Face-to-face meetings of the Working Group are foreseen to be convened at least once every two years, or as required, if resources are available. Where possible the use of available ICT tools to facilitate electronic meetings should be maximized. Meetings shall be chaired by the Convener of the Working Group.

4. Amendments to these Terms of Reference

1. The Terms of Reference may be amended as required by Members at the level of WECAFC, following each two-year period coinciding with meetings of the WECAFC.