Press Release
CRFM Secretariat, Belize City, 29 March 2012

Regional Fisheries Organisation concludes three-day meeting in the Bahamas.

The Tenth Meeting of the Caribbean Fisheries Forum, the technical arm of the CRFM, was held in Nassau, The Bahamas, 26 – 28 March 2012, under the Chairmanship of Michael Braynen, Director, Department of Marine Resources, The Bahamas. The Bahamas will chair both the Forum and Ministerial Council of the CRFM for the next programme year 2012 / 2013.

The meeting was attended by delegates from Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos. Also present, were observers and fisheries experts from Bermuda, Bonaire, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organizations (CNFO), University of the West Indies, University of Southern Mississippi, the USA's National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), EU-sponsored ACP Fish II Project, and the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem (CLME) Project based in Colombia.

Minister of Agriculture and Marine Resources, Larry S. Cartwright, in addressing the opening ceremony, told the audience that the role of the Forum is to provide technical and scientific advice for the Ministers responsible for fisheries to make well-informed decisions and policies for the region. Minister Cartwright highlighted the fact that the marine resources of the Caribbean Sea have provided and continue to provide food for the people of the region, as well as generated exports and earned income. He noted that perhaps the greatest unexplored frontier is the sea, with the greatest potential for development, growth and progress being in these waters. Additionally, he mentioned that the bounty of the inland waterways, rivers, ponds, lakes and the aquaculture enterprises are natural assets which can support the region's future economic and social development.

The CRFM Executive Director, Milton Haughton, noted that although the fisheries and aquaculture sector is strategically important and offers great potential for enhanced contribution to the social and economic development of the region, it nevertheless faces numerous challenges for sustainable development. These he said, included, inadequate resources and staffing in the national fisheries departments; the prevalence of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing; the need to improve sanitary and phyto-sanitary standards to ensure safe, good quality fish and seafood and, therefore improve access to export markets. The Executive Director also highlighted the challenges posed by the invasive Pacific lionfish, which he said, in only a few years, had spread across the entire Caribbean and is causing untold negative impacts on local fish stocks and marine ecosystems. He also noted the impact of climate change and climate variability on the fisheries and marine ecosystem and possible link with the unprecedented large quantities of sargassum seaweed that negatively impacted the fisheries and tourism sectors in 2011.

The Forum discussed the progress to date on the region's commitment to combat IUU fishing within the framework of the Castries (St. Lucia) Declaration on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. It noted that three regional projects will commence this year with funding under the EU/ACP Fish II Project to implement the Castries Declaration on IUU Fishing.

The Forum also reviewed and endorsed plans for a high level meeting between Ministers responsible for fisheries from the CRFM countries and their counterparts in Central America Fisheries Organisation (OSPESCA). The meeting is intended to foster collaboration between these two regional fisheries bodies

and the development of coordinated action to tackle common problems such as the lionfish invasion, illegal fishing and conservation and management of shared fish stocks such as lobster, conch and tunas.

The meeting agreed that all Member States should conduct internal consultations on two recent international treaties concerning fisheries: the 2009 FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing; and the 2007 International Labour Organisation Convention (C-188) - Working in Fisheries Convention which seeks to ensure decent working conditions for persons working in fisheries. Both treaties were viewed as being of interest to CRFM Member States and fisherfolks, since they dealt with matters that have been identified as important at the regional and national levels in the CARICOM Region.

Recognizing the need to expand aquaculture to increase fish production and food security, improve income and employment, diversify farm production, and increasing foreign exchange earnings; the meeting agreed to establish an aquaculture working group to function as a think-tank and spearhead the development of aquaculture in the region.

Professor Jim Franks from the University of Southern Mississippi shared the latest research findings regarding the Sargassum seaweed that affected the region last year. Contrary to early belief, the seaweed appeared to have come not from the Sargasso Sea, but from the south and east of the Caribbean. He noted that the coastline and fishermen in the West African nation, Sierra Leone, were affected by massive quantities of the seaweed at the same time as the Eastern Caribbean Islands.

The Meeting expressed its appreciation and thanks to those donors which are making contributions to the sustainable development of fisheries in the region, by funding a number of important regional fisheries projects. These are being implemented by the CRFM and other partner organisations in order to achieve sustainable development of the region's fisheries resources. The projects include:

- *Government of Japan (JICA) funded project on the preparation of a Master Plan for coastal resource management;*
- *Government of Spain (AECID) funded diagnostic study on poverty in fishing communities;*
- *European Union funded ACP Fish II Project Strengthening Fisheries Management in ACP Countries*
- *FAO funded strategy, action plan and programme proposal on disaster risk management, climate change adaptation in fisheries and aquaculture in the CARICOM region*
- *GEF funded Sustainable Management of the Shared Living Marine Resources of the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem (CLME) and Adjacent Regions*
- *Government of Iceland funded Leadership and Stock Assessment Training Courses and scholarship programme.*

The meeting also reviewed and discussed the state of several commercial fish stocks and endorsed the scientific recommendations for their conservation and management, and future research. The latest available statistics showed that there are about 21,744 fishing boats in the CRFM countries. They produced about 141,000 tonnes of fish in 2010.

The Meeting concluded its deliberations by reaffirming Member States' commitment to supporting the sustainable development of the fisheries sector in the region for the benefit of the people.

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