CARICOM / CRFM COUNTRIES TO MEET IN ST. LUCIA TO VALIDATE REGIONAL MASTERPLAN FOR SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT

CRFM Secretariat, Belize City, 14 January 2011. Approximately fifty (50) senior officials from the Fisheries Departments and Representatives of regional fisherfolk organizations from the fifteen CARICOM Member States, along with Representatives from Regional, and Inter-governmental Organizations and Institutions with an interest in fisheries and aquaculture development will meet at the Bay Garden Hotel, Rodney Bay, St. Lucia, 16 - 17 January 2012, to validate a Regional Master Plan for sustainable development of coastal fisheries resources in the Region. The workshop to review and validate the Master Plan is being convened by the Belize-based Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) Secretariat in collaboration with the Japanese International Development Agency (JICA).

The objectives of the workshop are to:

1. Examine and discuss the contents of the Draft Master Plan
2. Review the results and lessons learnt from the pilot projects that were implemented during the preparation of the Master Plan;
3. Agree on priority activities and recommendations for implementing the Master Plan; and
4. Arrive at consensus on the way forward in implementing the Master Plan.

In 2000 the CARICOM Governments and Japan signed a partnership agreement entitled "*A New Framework for Japan - CARICOM Cooperation for the Twenty-first Century*". Under this agreement the Government of Japan provided funding and technical assistance to CARICOM through a development study to prepare a Master Plan for sustainable use of fisheries and aquaculture for coastal community development. The Study commenced in March, 2009, with the appointment of IC Net Limited, a Japan-based consulting firm, as the Japanese Executing Agency for the Study. Since then IC NET has been working with the CRFM Secretariat to deliver the Project in the countries. The workshop in St. Lucia next week will be the final major activity under this regional project.

During the workshop the participants will receive and discuss presentations on the research work and pilot projects done in the countries since the commencement of the project. These will include presentations on aquaculture development in Belize and Jamaica, development and management of pelagic fishes such as tuna and diamondback squid using fish aggregating devices in Dominica and St. Lucia, and activities to strengthen the fisheries data and information management systems in Guyana and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Mr. Milton Haughton, the newly appointed Executive Director of the CRFM believes that the Master Plan is coming at a critical time in the economic development of the region when CARICOM countries need to diversify their economic base and develop the full potential of indigenous sectors such as fisheries and

aquaculture. He noted that the three strategic goals of the Master Plan are: 1) diversification of fishery and development of underutilized species, 2) development of aquaculture and creation of alternative income sources for fishers and coastal communities, and 3) sustainable use and management of the resource systems through community based resource management approaches with governments and local communities working in partnership.

Mr. Haughton also noted that the process by which the Master Plan was prepared was significant. It was not done using the normal academic approach with consultants and government officials, but instead involved practical hands-on collaborative activities with fishermen and fish farmers working cooperatively to plan and implement pilot projects to test the technical and economic feasibility of different options. This resulted in tangible benefits, such as the actual provision of resources and transfer of knowledge and technology to the fishermen and fish farmers. It also enable them to explore innovative ways of doing business using new technology, diversifying their activities, applying cooperative, business oriented and sustainable approaches to fishing and aquaculture, and improving their earnings.

In May 2012, the Ministers Responsible for fisheries of the CARICOM countries, meeting as the CRFM Ministerial Council, approved the Draft Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy. The Master Plan will be another important regional policy document to strengthen the region's commitment and provide a structured approach to ensure sustainable development of fisheries and aquaculture and the provision of tangible benefits to the people of the region. Successful implementation of the Master Plan will contribute to ensuring optimum utilization, long-term conservation, improved income, and food and nutrition security in the CARICOM Member States.

The Final Draft Master Plan with priority actions and recommendations for follow–up coming from the workshop will be presented to the next Meeting of the CRFM Forum (Chief Fisheries Officers of CARICOM countries) and the Sixth Meeting of the CRFM Council of Ministers scheduled for March and April 2012 respectively in the Bahamas.