Press Release

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Illegal fishing, Lionfish, Aquaculture, Lobster & more….on the agenda of the Caribbean Fisheries Forum this week in The Bahamas

The Caribbean Fisheries Forum, which is the technical advisory body of the regional fisheries organization, the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM), is holding its 10th Annual Meeting at the Breezes Hotel in Nassau, The Bahamas this week. The heads of 17 national fisheries authorities of CARICOM Members & Associate CARICOM Member States are expected to hold intensive discussions over 3 days to evaluate ongoing work and agree on common future approaches, both at the national and regional (CRFM) levels, covering a wide range of fisheries governance and management issues.

A multitude of issues fills the Forum's agenda this week, with some of the key ones being: illegal fishing; the lionfish invasion problem; a regional agreement on the management of Caribbean spiny lobster; governance capacity and reforms for the large pelagic (tunas and billfishes) and flyingfish fisheries of the Caribbean; scientific findings on the status of key shrimp, flyingfish and lobster stocks in the region; improving the data, and science information base for more informed planning and decision-making; institutional and human resources to satisfy the multitudinous needs; and the establishment of regional aquaculture working group to promote the expansion of both marine and fresh water aquaculture in the region.

In addition, major recent and developing concerns for fisheries managers throughout the region will no doubt fuel the debates. One of these is the negative impact of the huge masses of floating seaweed observed in coastal waters of Eastern Caribbean Island States in 2011 and already seen again in 2012. There is also grave concern about the very low catches of flyingfish being experienced so far in 2012, and what this may be signaling for the longer term health of this fishery and also the health of our Caribbean marine ecosystem in general.

Representatives from a number of international, regional and national fisheries organizations, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organizations (CNFO), the University of the West Indies (UWI) and the USA's National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), are also in attendance to observe and contribute to the 2012 annual Forum deliberations. In addition, representatives of regional projects executed by the CRFM, such as the EU-sponsored ACP Fish II Programme and the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem (CLME) project are on hand to gauge the progress of their project activities and to identify additional actions for successful completion of agreed plans.

The ACP FISH II Programme is primarily focused on strengthening national and regional fisheries governance and management systems through, among other things: updating of fisheries policies and management plans; evaluations of the management and scientific processes for some fisheries; and capacity building activities. The CLME project is funding a number of pilot projects and case studies aimed at establishing the systems and mechanisms for good governance and management of the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem, including support for CRFM Case Studies on large pelagic fish resources and the Eastern Caribbean flyingfish. These two CRFM Case Studies are well advanced, and are focused on strengthening the governance and management framework, as well as the scientific information base, needed to promote the ecosystem approach to management of large pelagic fish and the Eastern Caribbean flyingfish resources in the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem.

The Forum's 10th Annual Meeting will end on the 28th March, and its findings and recommendations will be submitted for endorsement and further action by CRFM"s Ministerial Council during its next meeting, tentatively scheduled for May 2012.

The CRFM is a regional organization devoted to promoting sustainable development and conservation of the fisheries resources of the CARICOM countries through regional cooperative actions.

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