

CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM¹ Working Group on Queen Conch (QCWG)

Panama City, Panama, 23–25 October 2012

Declaration of Panama City

The Members of the CFMC/OSPESCA/WECAFC/CRFM Working Group on Queen Conch:

Recalling the Terms of Reference of the joint Working Group, as established by the 14th session of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (Panama City, 6-9 February 2012);

Noting with concern the ongoing challenges in ensuring sustained and legal utilization of Queen Conch (*Strombus gigas*) resources, complying with CITES Appendix-II provisions for international trade in the species, and the limited progress made in terms of regional collaboration and coordination of the management of the resource;

Mindful of the socio-economic importance of the Queen Conch fisheries for the Wider Caribbean Region;

Reiterating the declaration of San Juan, made by the First International Queen Conch Conference, held in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in 1996, where several Caribbean countries agreed to cooperate in the management of the Queen Conch for the benefit of all nations involved, and the recommendations of the International Queen Conch Initiative - CITES workshop, held in Montego Bay in 2003 that were communicated in CITES Notification to the Parties No 2006/055 and that all range States of Queen Conch are invited to implement;

Recognizing that in recent years, national efforts for the management and conservation of Queen Conch have increased in the region, leading to encouraging developments such as better stock protection, improved understanding of the species ecology and management needs, and enhanced enforcement to combat illegal catch and trade, and that most of this progress made was CITES driven;

Further recognizing the efforts at local, national and regional level to manage Queen Conch fisheries in line with the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement, the precautionary approach and the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) as regionally promoted by the Working Group members, the 2009 FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing, and the provisions of CITES for international trade in the species;

¹ This is a joint species specific Working Group of the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council (CFMC), Organization for the Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector of the Central American Isthmus (OSPESCA), Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) and the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM).

Mindful of the obligations and available opportunities to the countries that are Party to the SPAW Protocol to work collaboratively to implement plans for conservation of Queen Conch, which is listed in Annex III of that Treaty;

Convinced that scientific research on the biology, life cycle, conservation and management of Queen Conch should continue to inform fisheries decision makers on *inter alia* suitable harvest and fishery strategies, precautionary controls, appropriate fishing capacity, and measures to enhance enforcement and compliance;

Appreciating the agreement on a Joint Action Plan of CRFM and OSPESCA, concluded in September 2012, which emphasizes the need for joint work *inter alia* on Queen Conch research and sustainable management, and the ongoing work by CFMC, CITES and WECAFC towards sustainable utilization of the resource;

Committed to individually and collectively taking measures and actions to further improve the management and conservation of the Queen Conch resource in the Wider Caribbean Region;

1. RECOMMEND the immediate implementation, as applicable, of the recommendations made by the Queen Conch Expert Workshop, held in Miami, USA, 22-24 May 2012, and reviewed and validated by the Working Group during the meeting in Panama City on 23-25 October 2012, taking into account recommendations made by the Working Group on paragraphs 1 and 5 (see Annex);
2. RECOMMEND that WECAFC, OSPESCA, CRFM and CFMC support the development of a regional plan for the management and conservation of Queen Conch, in accordance with the best available scientific evidence to be presented to the 15th session of WECAFC for review, consideration and regional adoption;
3. RECOMMEND that the Conference of the Parties to CITES take account of and discuss the information and “draft decision” provided by Colombia at its 16th meeting, and adopt recommendations as appropriate to support the sustainable utilization, conservation and international trade in Queen Conch;
4. RECOMMEND that OSPESCA and CRFM support the development and adoption of sub-regional regulations for Queen Conch, and support the implementation of these regulations by their member States;
5. RECOMMEND that the fisheries authorities in the region increase awareness and build capacity among fishers on Safety-at-Sea and in particular address risk management in and alternatives to compressed air diving for Queen Conch and seek assistance where necessary;
6. RECOMMEND the Queen Conch range States, CITES and FAO to cooperate closely and work jointly on the improvement and standardization of trade data and statistics (through regionally agreed conversion factors) for Queen Conch and its derivatives such as pearls, shells and opercula;

7. RECOMMEND that fisheries authorities with support of CRFM, OSPESCA, CFMC and WECAFC strengthen the participation of fishers in the decision making related to implementation of measures for management and sustainable utilization of Queen Conch.

REQUEST THE RESPECTIVE SECRETARIATS to present this declaration for endorsement to the 15th Session of WECAFC, which is scheduled to be held in Trinidad and Tobago in 2014, as well as to the next session of the Caribbean Fisheries Forum of CRFM and the next ministerial meeting of OSPESCA and communicate it to the CITES Secretariat for further dissemination; and

SOLICIT the support for, and the direct and immediate implementation by the countries in the Wider Caribbean Region of the above listed recommendations.