



Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism



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PRESS RELEASE

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*Towards Sustainable Development of
Fisheries for the People of the Caribbean!*

CRFM Ministerial Council's 18th Meeting addresses climate resilience, fisheries crimes, and Caribbean blue economy

Belize City, Friday, 26 April 2024 (CRFM)—Ministers of responsible for Fisheries, Aquaculture, and the Blue Economy from Member States of the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) deliberated today, Friday, 26 April, at the 18th Regular Meeting of the Ministerial Council of the CRFM on the priority actions needed to advance sustainable development of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, while addressing critical matters such as evidence-based decision-making; climate resilience, including insurance for fishers; illegal unreported, and unregulated fishing; Sargassum seaweed; bolstering regional and global trade; capacity building and knowledge management; and growing the Caribbean blue economy.

Senator the Honourable Avinash Singh, Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, Trinidad and Tobago, Outgoing Chair of the CRFM Ministerial Council, handed over the chairmanship to Honourable Josephine Olivia Connolly, Minister of Tourism, Environment, Fisheries and Marine Affairs, Culture and Heritage, Agriculture and Religious Affairs, The Turks and Caicos Islands.

During today's proceedings, the Ministers approved 32 resolutions providing policy direction and guidance on a wide range of matters such as the updated CARICOM Common Fisheries Policy; training of personnel; improving sanitary and phytosanitary systems for seafood safety and trade; the development of safe products made from Sargassum for use in the agriculture sector; empowering small-scale fishers; collaboration with regional and international development partners; and the assessment and management of various fish species, including pelagic species, shrimp and groundfish, dolphinfish, and flyingfish. The resolutions also addressed the CRFM's request to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) for the RV Dr. Fridtjof Nansen to conduct a comprehensive, independent marine resource survey in CARICOM; combating illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and fisheries crimes; the World Trade Organization Fisheries Subsidies Agreement; engagement between the CRFM Member States and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA of the USA), regarding



Photo: Minister Connolly via X

Honourable Josephine Olivia Connolly of The Turks and Caicos Islands elected Chair of the CRFM Ministerial Council



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recovery of queen conch stocks; and the development of international legally binding instruments on plastic pollution.

The Council also deliberated upon the latest developments with respect to the decision by US authorities to list the Queen Conch as a threatened species under its Endangered Species Act, which has implications for trade. The Council, therefore, provided direction to CRFM Member States for ensuring a coordinated and collaborative approach across the region to the ongoing engagement on the rules and measures that the US authorities would impose to address the conservation, management, and recovery of the species.

The Ministers also provided guidance on several CRFM projects, including the New Zealand-funded Sargassum Products for Climate Resilience Project, being implemented by the CRFM in partnership with the New Zealand Institute of Plant and Food Research, to support valorization and use of Sargassum seaweed; the CAF / FAO / CRFM / GEF Caribbean Blue Economy Project entitled: Promoting National Blue Economy Priorities through Marine Spatial Planning in the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem Plus (BE-CLME+ Project), as well as other new initiatives for strengthening climate resilience in the Fisheries sector of CRFM Member States and strategically positioning small-scale fisheries and aquaculture within the Caribbean blue economy landscape.

Another important item on the Ministerial Council's agenda was improving data collection on Fisheries through strengthening data collection and management systems in CRFM Member States and promoting aquaculture development.

The Executive Director of the CRFM, Milton Haughton, said, "The ocean space and marine resources constitute the most valuable natural resources available to our countries, and we need to continue to accelerate actions to both protect and realize the full potential of these valuable resources, recognizing that pollution, habitat destruction, climate change, and irresponsible fishing pose significant threats to the health and productivity of our oceans and benefits they provide to our economies." He also expressed satisfaction with the ongoing positive developments in the region in building capacity, strengthening collaboration and partnerships, mobilizing resources, and implementing policy reforms to achieve sustainable development and conservation of the marine resources.

In his opening remarks to the Council, Minister Singh reflected upon the CRFM's achievements during the past year: "Significant strides have been made. We hosted critical meetings, including the 17th Regular and the 13th Special Meetings of the Ministerial Council, during which we adopted 39 resolutions [and 2 special resolutions intersessionally] aimed at enhancing the management and sustainability of our marine resources. This past year also saw the implementation of 31 capacity-building events, the participation of over 2,300 stakeholders, and the completion of several strategic assessments and surveys that are critical for informed decision-making."

He added that, "The fisheries and aquaculture sector remains a cornerstone of economic stability and food security in our region, employing hundreds of thousands and contributing significantly to our national GDPs. Our recent data show a promising increase in both production and employment within the sector, reinforcing the importance of our continued focus and investment."

The latest information compiled by the CRFM Secretariat on the status and trends across Member States indicates that the ex-vessel value of marine capture fisheries production was 527 million US dollars during 2022, as well as 47 million US dollars in value from both inland aquaculture and mariculture, accounting for a total production value of 574 million US dollars.



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Fisheries and aquaculture employ roughly 6% of the labor force in CRFM Member States and contribute up to 3% to national GDPs, with an estimated 550,000 workers benefiting through their active participation, including 138,000 employed in direct production and the others engaged in the supply of goods and services. Notably, the estimated growth in employment for the fisheries and aquaculture sector during 2022 was about 3%.

The Council also approved the CRFM's Whistleblower Policy 2024, and the new biennial work plan and budget for the 2024-2025, intended to promote further growth and sustainable development of the fisheries and aquaculture sector across the Caribbean.

– ENDS –

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ABOUT THE CRFM:

The [Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism](#) (CRFM) was officially inaugurated on 27 March 2003 in Belize City, Belize, where it is headquartered, following the signing of the Agreement Establishing the CRFM on 4 February 2002. It is an inter-governmental organization whose mission is to promote and facilitate the responsible utilization of the region's fisheries and other aquatic resources for the economic and social benefits of the current and future population of the region.



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