

Technical experts give thumbs up for management review of seabob (shrimp) trawl fisheries of Guyana and Suriname

On 4 December 2020, CRFM's Continental Shelf Fisheries Working Group (CSWG), supported by over 20 national, regional and international fisheries experts, commended both Guyana and Suriname for their organized approaches to sustainable management of the countries' Atlantic seabob (shrimp) trawl fisheries. These seabob trawl fisheries are certified by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), which recognizes good standards in fisheries management practices. The MSC label gives Guyana's and Suriname's seabob products the competitive edge on the international market!

The regional peer expert group reviewed the progress made on management plans, with special attention being given to how the countries were addressing MSC conditions and recommendations, and piloting agreed new harvest control rules adopted in 2019. The countries were also commended for their active engagement with private sector partners for management cooperation, and with the regional and international NGO and donor communities for research support.

A strong commendation came from the National Coordinator for the REBYC-II LAC¹ project in Suriname, Dr. Tomas Willems. Willems remarked that *"It is great to see Suriname and Guyana working together on the management of their seabob fisheries, exchanging information and lessons learned, and jointly tackling research and stock assessment. Assuming that stocks of many more species are potentially shared among the countries of the Guianas - North-Brazil shelf, the seabob fishery provides an important example of how cross-border collaboration can look like in practice."*

During the review of 4 December, both Suriname and Guyana, were able to demonstrate well organized plans and approaches for guiding their seabob trawl fishery management activities. The two countries did highlight some delays and disruptions to their activities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic situation. The industry pointed out that the pandemic had affected its operations as well. The Working Group meeting heard that Suriname had to extend the pilot trial period for the harvest control rule to allow for more comprehensive evaluation of performance of the rule through the natural fluctuations of catches through time, that is, through both low and high seabob production months. Notwithstanding, the pilot trials had allowed Suriname to adjust and refine its systems and procedures for data and information management to cope with the monthly monitoring of catch rates and estimations of the harvest control rule index. The outputs were then used to determine if and by how much the industry would have to adjust its

¹ REBYC-II LAC project is the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation supported Project entitled, "Sustainable Management of Bycatch in Latin America and Caribbean Trawl Fisheries"

fishing effort levels over time. Guyana had not yet begun pilot trials of its harvest control rule, but indicated that such trials would begin in 2021.

During the review, some key issues of concern were raised in respect of the harvest control rule application and of the catch rate data. If the harvest control rule required industry adjustment actions, the time lag for action was 2 months, but the industry indicated that this time lag may in fact be too long. The Working Group recalled that the best available data and science were applied to the 2019 assessments, and also recalled that its 2019 meeting had identified certain additional data and information, which if made available, could help to improve the quality of the catch rate estimation and, in turn, the quality of seabob assessment results and associated harvest control rules.

In conclusion, the Working Group commended the countries for their planning, monitoring, and reporting efforts, and for the completed harvest control rule trials. The Working Group also agreed to convene a meeting early in 2021, which would devote attention to data and information improvements for the next full seabob stock assessment.

The Continental Shelf Working Group Meeting was chaired by CRFM's Deputy Executive Director, Susan Singh-Renton. Singh-Renton noted that *"In 2019, the CRFM responded to a request by both Guyana and Suriname for regional coordination and peer review of scientific assessments of the seabob shrimp stocks fished by their trawl fisheries. The scientific assessments were successfully facilitated by CRFM's Continental Shelf Fisheries Working Group, which then also agreed to keep under review the implementation of agreed inter-sessional activities, and this work is ongoing. The inter-sessional activities have been planned to ensure that all the MSC conditions and recommendations are fully met"*.

Photo Caption: Seabob trawler operating off the coast of Suriname (Photo Credit: Tomas Willems, National Coordinator for the REBYC-II LAC project in Suriname)

