

COMMON OCEANS

NEWS

Caribbean Billfish Project kicks off



Billfish species including blue and white marlin, sailfish and spearfish, make significant contributions to the Caribbean economies, livelihoods and food security through two very distinct fisheries- commercial and recreational. Billfish are also important incidental by-catch species from large scale tuna long-line fisheries operating both within and beyond national jurisdictions. Declining trends due to overfishing have been recognized in most billfish species across the Atlantic. This represents a threat to the fisheries sector and to the overall sustainability of respective contributions to regional economies.

The Caribbean Billfish Project is a 1.95 million USD project component of the GEF-funded, World Bank implemented, Ocean Partnership for Sustainable Fisheries and Biodiversity Conservation Models for Innovation and Reform. The Ocean Partnership is part of a larger framework, the [Common Oceans Program](#), a comprehensive GEF-funded initiative coordinated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) working with a variety of partners including governments, regional management bodies, civil society, the private sector, academia and industry to work towards ensuring the sustainable use and conservation of ABNJ biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The Caribbean Billfish Project aims to develop business plans for one or more long-term pilot projects aimed at sustainable management and conservation of billfish within the Western Central Atlantic Ocean. The divergence in value between the commercial and recreational subsectors represents a significant 'entry point' and opportunity for conservation and value creation which this project aims to exploit. The completed business plans will incorporate the economic, technical and financial rationale and feasibility to attract investment involving private and public capital.

The 3- year Caribbean Billfish Project consists of the following 4 components:

1. *Generating value and conservation outcomes through innovative management.*
2. *Strengthening regional billfish management and conservation planning.*
3. *A functional and responsive Consortium on Billfish Management and Conservation.*
4. *Business plans developed for pilot investments in sustainable management and conservation of billfish.*

The project document was developed in 2012-2013 by the WECAFC/CRFM/CFMC/OSPESCA¹ Working Group on Recreational Fisheries, in close collaboration with World Bank experts, and the process accounted with the participation of all important stakeholders, including also the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), the International Game Fish Association (IGFA), the Caribbean Network of Fishers Organizations (CNFO) and many others. The project proposal was endorsed and welcomed by the 15th session of WECAFC, held in March 2014 in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago.

The WECAFC Secretariat provides for the Project Management Unit (PMU) at the FAO Subregional Office for the Caribbean (SLC) in Barbados and the IGFA will provide the secretariat of the to-be-established Consortium on Billfish Management and Conservation (CBMC) in Ft. Lauderdale, United States of America.

The project was launched by inviting interested governments (of the 34 WECAFC members) and partner organizations to appoint focal points and/or contact persons for the project in March 2015. Moreover the project started a joint survey on Fisheries Legislation and Fisheries Institutional frameworks in the Caribbean, as joint effort of project partners CRFM, OSPESCA and WECAFC/FAO.

Some activities that are scheduled to take place in the coming months include:

- 21st of May 2015 - *Workshop on Creating Fisheries Value by Reforming Management Institutions Across Small Scale Billfish Fisheries in the Caribbean: A Brainstorming Session and Recruitment of Collaborators. At the North American Association of Fisheries Economists (NAAFE), 8th Biennial Forum, Ketchikan, Alaska.*
- June-July 2015 - *Assessment study of the economic impact of recreational fisheries in The Bahamas*
- June 2015 (dates to be announced) *1st meeting of the Consortium on Billfish Management and Conservation. At the IGFA headquarters in Ft Lauderdale, Florida.*
- 9-11 November 2015 - *2nd Regional Workshop on Billfish management and conservation, to be held in parallel with Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI) 68th annual conference in Panama City, Panama.*

¹ WECAFC= Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission;
CRFM = Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism;
CFMC = Caribbean Fisheries Management Council of the USA;
OSPESCA = Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization of the Central American Isthmus

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