Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism

ISSN: 1995-4875
CRFM SPECIAL PUBLICATION No. 32

CRFM STRATEGY FOR MAINSTREAMING BIODIVERSITY CONSIDERATION IN FISHERIES POLICY AND PRACTICE (2024-2030)

CRFM Secretariat | Belize, 2024

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CRFM Secretariat
Belize
2025

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Correct Citation:
CRFM, 2025. CRFM Strategy for Mainstreaming Biodiversity Consideration in Fisheries Policy and Practice (2024-2030). CRFM Special Publication No. 32. 18 p.

ISSN: 1995-4875
ISBN: 978-976-8293-77-0

Published by the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism Secretariat
Belize and St. Vincent and the Grenadines

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Caribbean region is known for its rich marine biodiversity, which plays a critical role in the livelihoods, food security, and economic development of its coastal communities. However, the increasing pressures from climate change and ocean acidification, pollution, habitat destruction, invasive species, IUU Fishing and other irresponsible fishing practices, as well as ghost fishing by abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear and overfishing, have led to significant declines in marine species and ecosystems.

To ensure long-term sustainability of fisheries and the preservation of marine biodiversity, it is essential to integrate biodiversity considerations into fisheries management. Mainstreaming biodiversity considerations in fisheries policies and practices is not merely desirable but is an imperative for ensuring healthy, productive and resilient marine ecosystems and fisheries capable of supporting the well-being and livelihoods of fishing communities across the region. This strategy aims to provide a framework for mainstreaming marine biodiversity into regional fisheries policies, practices, and governance in the CRFM Member States.

Healthy biodiversity is necessary for sustainable fisheries and aquaculture production as well as to ensure the resilience and long-term health and productivity of the ecosystems, especially considering the challenges arising from climate change and ocean acidification. Mainstreaming biodiversity for fisheries and aquaculture is therefore indispensable for food security, nutrition, livelihoods and the supply of many ecosystem goods and services that support blue growth and sustainable development in CRFM Member States. Fishing activities not only impact the population of targeted fish species but also impact non-target species and biodiversity in the marine environment. Irresponsible fishing practices are among the leading drivers of biodiversity loss in some areas.

Improved scientific knowledge and understanding of the complex and dynamic nature and functioning of marine and freshwater ecosystems, and the direct and indirect impacts of fisheries and other human activities on biodiversity and ecosystems health and resilience, have led to the conclusion that biodiversity loss is a major problem facing modern society, and that coordinated action is required to restore, protect and maintain biodiversity. In this context action is required to mainstream biodiversity considerations in fisheries management to minimize impacts on biodiversity, and sustain ecosystem function and services, including sustainable fisheries, protecting livelihoods and realizing the benefits of blue economic growth.

Ensuring healthy marine biodiversity and resilient and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture are relevant, both directly and indirectly, to the achievement of several of the Sustainable Development Goals and are also aligned with the 2050 vision of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD): living in harmony with nature. Ensuring there is a well-crafted, orderly plan for people and nature across sectoral and conservation initiatives will help shape biodiversity mainstreaming for decades to come.

The commitment of CRFM Member States to ensure that marine biodiversity and environmental protection are integrated into fisheries management are enshrined in both regional and international agreements and instruments to which the countries subscribe. These include the Agreement Establishing the CRFM, the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy, the Third CRFM Strategic Plan, 2022-2030, the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, the Caribbean Community Environmental and Natural Resources Policy, and in Wider Caribbean regional policy instruments such as the Cartagena Convention (1983), and the CLME+ Strategic Action Programme to which Member States subscribe, in addition to the international agreements such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982), the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992), CITES (1973), and the Ramsar Convention (1971).

The CRFM has been promoting a broad range of actions aimed at mainstreaming biodiversity considerations in fisheries and aquaculture policies and practices. The first general principle enunciated by the 2002 Agreement Establishing the CRFM is a commitment to *maintaining biodiversity in the marine environment using the best available scientific approaches to management'*. The Agreement also includes commitments to applying the ecosystems and precautionary approaches to fisheries to fisheries and aquaculture to ensure sustainable fisheries and environmental health.

The actions of the CRFM to support biodiversity mainstreaming include support to Member States in the formulation of policy and governance frameworks such as the recent Protocol on the Principle of Sustainable Use of Marine Living Resources under the CARICOM Common Fisheries Policy; the Ministerial Declaration on Eliminating Ghost Fishing; development and implementation of ecosystem-based conservation and management plans; and the development and delivery of projects such as the BE-CLME+ Project which is*, inter alia*, seeking to enhance marine biodiversity management through marine spatial planning and area based resource management and conservation systems, as well as, improving sustainable seafood value chains to strengthen the foundation for future blue economic growth. The CRFM has also been supporting Members in human and institutional capacity building, and to effectively engage with international institutions and agreements on issues relevant to the protection and mainstreaming of marine biodiversity.

In summary, marine biodiversity protection and conservation are integral to the sustainability and productivity of fisheries and aquaculture systems. By maintaining healthy ecosystems, ensuring sustainable harvests, and providing valuable genetic resources, marine biodiversity supports food security, economic livelihoods, and the resilience of marine environments. Failing to protect marine biodiversity could lead to the collapse of fish stocks, loss of livelihoods, and diminished ecosystem services, making its conservation essential for the future of global fisheries and aquaculture.

2. SUMMARY OF INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS TO SUPPORT BIODIVERSITY MAINSTREAMING IN FISHERIES

A. Global Agreements and Instruments

Ecosystems and biodiversity considerations have long been a focus of the global community and are reflected in several binding and non-binding instruments. The CRFM Member States are parties to, or subscribe to, several of these regional and international agreements and instruments aimed at the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources and protection of the environment and biodiversity. These agreements together provide a comprehensive policy and legal framework for countries to cooperate to protect their marine ecosystems and biodiversity in the marine environment and ensure sustainable development.

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (1982)

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is the primary legal framework governing human activities in, and use of, the world's oceans, and is also known as the "constitution of the ocean". It includes broad commitments to sustainable use of marine resources and protection of the marine environment. Article 194 of UNCLOS, imposes a requirement for States to implement measures consistent with UNCLOS to prevent, reduce and control pollution of the marine environment, including "those

necessary to protect and preserve rare or fragile ecosystems as well as the habitat of depleted, threatened or endangered species and other forms of marine life".

The BBNJ Agreement

The Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, or BBNJ Agreement (also referred to by some stakeholders as the High Seas Treaty or Global Ocean Treaty**)** is an international agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. This new agreement, which has not yet entered into force, was developed within the framework of UNCLOS. The Agreement includes a package of elements on marine genetic resources, including questions on the sharing of benefits; area-based management tools, including marine protected areas; environmental impact assessments; and capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology. The Agreement aims to achieve a more holistic management of high seas activities, which should better balance the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological resources.

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (1992)

The CBD is the primary legal frame for the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources. It addresses, *inter alia*, marine and coastal biodiversity, including the establishment of marine protected areas (MPAs), sustainable fisheries, and integrated marine and coastal area management. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), which was adopted at the December 2022 United Nations Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP15), is an Agreement aimed at implementing the commitments under the CBD.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) (1973)

The CITES convention is another important global agreement with the objective of ensuring that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. The agreement regulates trade in marine species such as queen conch, sharks, corals, and sea turtles.

Ramsar Convention (1971)

The main objective of the Convention is conservation and wise use of all wetlands, including coastal and marine wetlands, through local, regional, and national actions and international cooperation. It focuses on protection of coastal and marine wetlands, which are critical habitats for marine biodiversity.

Convention for the Protection of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) (1979)

The main objective of the CMS is to **c**onserve migratory species and their habitats, including those that migrate across the Caribbean. It deals with the protection of migratory marine species such as whales, dolphins, and sea turtles.

The International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (1946)

The main objective of this global Convention is to provide for the proper conservation of whale stocks and orderly development of the whaling industry. The Commission normally meets every other year to review the condition of whale stocks and to modify conservation measures, as appropriate to regulate commercial, scientific research, and aboriginal subsistence whaling.

The International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) (1973/1978)

The main objective of MARPOL is to minimize pollution from ships, including oil spills, garbage, sewage, and harmful substances. The focus is on the prevention of marine pollution and protection of marine environments and biodiversity from shipping-related activities.

The International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI)

ICRI is a non-binding instrument aimed at protecting and preserving coral reefs and related ecosystems and marine biodiversity through coordinated international efforts. The key areas of focus include coral reef management, monitoring, research, and raising awareness about the importance of coral reefs.

FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (1995)

The FAO Code of Conduct is a non-binding instrument which provides principles and standards for the sustainable use of fisheries resources based on the ecosystem's approach to fisheries. It addresses sustainable fisheries management, conservation of fishery resources, and protection of marine ecosystems and biodiversity.

B. Regional Agreements and Instruments

Cartagena Convention (1983)

The Cartagena Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment in the Wider Caribbean Region is a legally binding treaty. The objective of the Convention is to protect the marine environment of the Caribbean Sea through the reduction of pollution from ships, land-based sources, sea dumping, and other human activities. The Convention is supported by three technical Protocols on Oil Spills, Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) and Land Based Sources of Marine Pollution (LBS). The SPAW Protocol focuses on the protection of critical habitats, endangered species, and biodiversity in the region.

The Agreement Establishing the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism

The 2002 Agreement Establishing the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) is a regional agreement designed to promote the sustainable use and management of living marine and other aquatic resources of CARICOM States. The CRFM aims to promote sustainable use, management and conservation of fishery resources in the region, ensuring the long-term viability of the fisheries sector, and optimizing the economic and social benefits to Member States, recognizing the importance of the sector for food security, employment, and income generation. The CRFM Agreement includes a commitment to 'maintaining biodiversity in the marine environment using the best available scientific approaches to

management,' as well as to apply the ecosystems and precautionary approaches to fisheries and aquaculture to ensure sustainable fisheries and environmental health.

The Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy (CCCFP)

The CCCFP is the main policy document of the CRFM Member States establishing a roadmap for cooperative actions aimed at the achievement of the social, economic, environmental objectives, principles and standards regarding the use, management, conservation and protection of the marine living resources. It will enable participating States to collectively undertake the scientific research and studies necessary to determine the status of fish stocks, determine available fishing opportunities, and develop rational harvest strategies and fisheries management plans to ensure optimum sustainable use of the resources and to protect the ecosystems. Additionally, the States are better placed to coordinate their actions to develop and implement monitoring, control, and surveillance systems, and enforce conservation and management measures to protect their fishery resources. Likewise, the countries are better placed to coordinate their actions to improve the welfare and working conditions of fishers, improve competitiveness, effectively develop the fisheries and aquaculture value chains, build trade capacity, and negotiate market access arrangements to expand international and regional trade in fish and seafood.

The Caribbean Community Environment and Natural Resource Policy

The Community Environmental and Natural Resources Policy Framework has been developed as an integral part of the Caribbean Community Single Market and Economy (CSME). The purpose of this Policy Framework is to provide an enabling framework for environmental and natural resources management in the Caribbean Community, acknowledging the vital role that land, air, water and oceans play in maintaining the economic, social and environmental development of the Community. It, therefore, serves as the Umbrella Policy Framework for the sustainable management and use of the Community's environmental and natural resources. It provides the guiding principles and the long-term goals which will form the basis for the making of rules and guidelines to give overall direction to planning for the protection, conservation and sustainable use of the environmental and natural resources of the Community and its Member States. It, therefore, creates a basis for effective environmental and natural resources governance in support of the CSME.

FAO Western Central Atlantic Fisheries Commission (FAO WECAFC)

FAO WECAFC is a Regional Fisheries Body established by FAO Council in 1973, to promote the effective conservation, management and development of the living marine resources of the area of competence of the Commission, in accordance with the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, and to address common problems of fisheries management and development faced by Members of the Commission, including the implementation of the EAF approach to fisheries and promoting the mainstreaming of marine biodiversity in fisheries management and aquaculture.

The CLME+ Strategic Action Programme (CLME+ SAP) (2015-2025)

The Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems (CLME+) Strategic Action Programme (SAP) is a comprehensive, long-term strategy aimed at promoting the sustainable management of marine resources and ecosystems in the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems. The CLME+ SAP aims to enhance the governance and management of shared living marine resources to ensure their sustainability and the health of marine ecosystems. It adopts an ecosystem-based management (EBM) approach and fosters regional collaboration among countries and stakeholders to address transboundary

issues, such as overfishing, habitat degradation, and pollution through enhanced governance arrangements and the implementation of measures to conserve and restore critical habitats and enhance the resilience of marine ecosystems, supporting biodiversity conservation and the livelihoods of communities.

Eastern Caribbean Regional Ocean Policy (ECROP)

The ECROP provides a coordinated approach to ocean governance in the Eastern Caribbean, promoting the sustainable use of marine resources and the protection of marine biodiversity. The main focus areas include integrated coastal zone management, marine spatial planning, and sustainable fisheries.

OECS Biodiversity and Ecosystems Management Framework (OECS-BEF) (2020-2035)

The Vision of the OECS-BEF is "healthy and resilient biodiversity and ecosystems in the OECS provide goods and services that support socio-economic development and livelihoods for its people while conserving the rich natural heritage of the region". The main themes covered include: 1.) Protection, maintenance and restoration of ecosystems, 2.) Invasive species management, biosafety and biosecurity; 3.) Climate resilient ecosystems; 4.) Fair and equitable access to and sharing of benefits from biodiversity resources; and 5.) Assessing and integrating biodiversity and ecosystems into national development processes.

Summary

These legally binding agreements and non-binding instruments together provide a robust framework for CRFM Member States to protect, manage and sustainably use their marine biodiversity and ensure the mainstreaming of commitments in fisheries policies and plans. They cover a wide range of issues, from pollution control, habitat protection, area-based management, to sustainable fisheries and the livelihoods and welfare of stakeholders, to conservation and protection of threatened and endangered species.

Through these instruments, CRFM Member states can work together regionally and globally to address the challenges facing fisheries, marine biodiversity and ecosystems and ensure their conservation and sustainability for blue economic growth for future generations.

3. POST 2020 GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK (GBF)

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), which was adopted at the December 2022 United Nations Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP15), and is binding on the 196 CBD States Parties, sets out an ambitious roadmap to achieve the global vision of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050. It was developed to promote the timely and effective implementation of the CBD, which is a legally binding international agreement with three main objectives of: (1) the conservation of biological diversity; (2) the sustainable use of its components; and (3) the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources.

The GBF outlines several key commitments aimed at protecting and restoring biodiversity loss including in the marine environment. It is an updated version of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, which was the previous global biodiversity agreement spanning the period 2011 to 2020. The Aichi Targets had 20 goals, including protecting 10% of the world's oceans by 2020. The GBF is a more ambitious agreement than the Aichi Targets and aims to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity by 2030 and achieve nature recovery by

2050. It is the main international instrument to achieve the goals of the CBD for global biodiversity protection, restoration, conservation and sustainable use.

Each signatory country, including the CRFM Members, is primarily responsible for implementing the commitments within its jurisdiction. This involves updating or developing, implementing and enforcing national level biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs), integrating biodiversity considerations into all sectors of government policy including fisheries, aquaculture and blue economic development policies and programmes, and reporting on progress to the CBD.

Effective implementation of the GBF, especially in Small Island Developing States, will require coordinated efforts and collaboration across multiple sectors and organizations, including government departments, private sector enterprises, local and indigenous communities, non-governmental and civil society organizations, regional organizations and international development partners. with an emphasis on accountability, funding, and transparent monitoring to achieve its ambitious targets.

Four Goals of the GBF

The GBF consists of four goals and twenty-three targets, known as the "Global Biodiversity Targets," which cover a wide range of issues related to biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. The four goals, which set out a vision for biodiversity by 2050 are:

Goal A: Substantially increase the area of natural ecosystems by maintaining, enhancing or restoring the integrity, connectivity and resilience of all ecosystems. Reduce tenfold the extinction rate and risk of all species and increase the abundance of native wild species. Maintain the genetic diversity of wild and domesticated species and safeguard their adaptive potential.

Goal B: Ensure nature's contributions to people are valued, maintained, and enhanced, with those contributions currently in decline being restored.

Goal C: Share the monetary and non-monetary benefits of the utilization of genetic resources, digital sequence information on genetic resources, and traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources with Indigenous people and local communities. Additionally, ensure traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources is appropriately protected.

Goal D: Ensure all parties (specifically developing countries) have adequate means to implement the GBF. This includes financial resources, capacity building, technical and scientific cooperation, and access to technology. Protect and conserve biodiversity and ecosystems.

The GBF 2030 Targets

The twenty-three targets to be achieved by 2030 cover a range of issues, including the protection of forests, oceans, and freshwater ecosystems, the reduction of pollution, the promotion of sustainable agriculture and forestry, and the integration of biodiversity conservation into development planning. These commitments aim to halt and reverse biodiversity loss in marine ecosystems, ensuring their protection.

The GBF recognizes the importance of biodiversity to human well-being and economic development and emphasizes the need for a more integrated and holistic approach to sustainable development. It calls for increased collaboration and cooperation among governments, civil society, indigenous peoples and local communities, and the private sector to achieve the shared goals of conserving biodiversity and ensuring sustainable development for all.

This framework will have significant implications for Caribbean fisheries, which rely heavily on the region's rich marine biodiversity and ecosystems, and are vitally important for food security, livelihoods, trade, culture, and social and economic development.

One of the key targets of the GBF is to protect 30% of the world's oceans by 2030 through the creation of marine protected areas (MPAs) and other effective area-based conservation measures. The Caribbean is home to a wide range of marine ecosystems, including coral reefs, seagrass beds, and mangroves, all of which are essential habitats for fish and other marine species.

The creation of new area-based management tools such as MMA or MPAs or OECMs, and enhanced management and / or the expansion of existing area-based tools can help to protect marine biodiversity and ecosystems, as well as the fish populations and fisheries that depend on them. However, it is critically important that such actions are developed and implemented in a collaborative manner with the full involvement and informed consent of fisherfolk and fishing communities as well as other stakeholders.

Another important Target of the Post-2020 GBF is to ensure that the use of natural resources, including fish stocks, is sustainable. Irresponsible fishing practices, IUU fishing, overfishing, marine pollution, habitat degradation, climate change, and ocean acidification have had a significant impact on fish stocks globally and in the Caribbean region in recent decades, leading to declines in some species and degradation of important marine ecosystems such as coral reefs. The post 2020 GBF emphasizes the need to manage and harvest fish and other marine resources sustainably. It calls for eliminating overfishing, minimizing bycatch, and reducing the impact of fisheries on marine ecosystems by adopting sustainable fishing practices and implementing measures to reduce bycatch and protect vulnerable species.

The restoration of degraded marine ecosystems is another target of the Post 2020 GBF. There is a commitment to restore at least 30% of degraded marine and coastal ecosystems by 2030, with the aim to enhance their resilience and ability to provide essential services, including carbon storage. These would include coastal ecosystems such as coral reefs, mangrove and seagrass beds in Member States that have been degraded over the years due to several factors already mentioned.

The reduction of marine pollution is another relevant target. The GBF aims to significantly reduce marine pollution, particularly from plastics and excess nutrients to levels that do not harm biodiversity and ecosystem functions.

The Post 2020 GBF recognizes the interplay between biodiversity and climate change and includes a commitment to integrate marine biodiversity considerations into climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies, including the protection of blue carbon ecosystems like mangroves, seagrasses, and salt marshes.

Addressing invasive species is another important target. The GBF includes commitments to control or eradicate invasive alien species in marine environments, which can have detrimental effects on native biodiversity and ecosystem health.

The GBF also calls for the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of marine genetic resources, ensuring that conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity benefit all, especially indigenous peoples and local communities.

The Post-2020 GBF also recognizes the importance of traditional knowledge and the role of indigenous peoples and local communities in conservation efforts. In the Caribbean, many fishing communities have traditional knowledge and practices that have enabled them to sustainably manage fish stocks and marine

resources for generations. The Framework, therefore, calls for the integration of traditional knowledge and practices into conservation and management plans, which could help to support the continued livelihoods of these communities.

It is particularly important that Fisheries Departments/Divisions and Environment Departments / Agencies in the CRFM Member States work in a more collaborative and coherent manner than in the past to address the implementation of the Framework at the national levels to achieve the goals and targets concerning fisheries and marine biodiversity.

Fisheries Department/Divisions and Ministries responsible for fisheries should therefore be proactive in reaching out to the national Environment Departments and Agencies, and Ministries responsible for the Environment, to improve consultation and collaboration and to arrive a consensus on the issues of common interests, and more importantly on the actions to be pursued by national governments, private sector actors, community-based organisations and stakeholders in respect of biodiversity.

In summary, the Global Biodiversity Framework has the potential to contribute to improving the health, productivity and resilience of the fisheries and marine ecosystems on which the CRFM Member States depend for food, livelihoods and economic activity, and on which they are relying for enhanced societal benefits by further development of the blue economy. However, achieving these goals will require a collaborative effort among governments, NGOs, fishing communities, indigenous people and other stakeholders, as well as significant investments in education and awareness raising conservation and sustainable management practices.

BBNJ agreement in the context of the GBF

In considering our strategy for mainstreaming marine biodiversity in fisheries policy and practice is important to understand the BBNJ agreement in relation to the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). In this regard we note the following:

1. **BBNJ Overview:** The BBNJ (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction) agreement aims to protect marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.
2. **GBF Context:** The Global Biodiversity Framework is a global strategy to halt biodiversity loss and promote sustainable use of ecosystems.
3. **Synergy:** Both agreements emphasize the importance of conserving biodiversity and ecosystems, highlighting their interdependence.
4. **Implementation:** The BBNJ agreement provides a legal framework (including new legal instruments for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity) that can support the goals set out in the GBF, particularly in marine areas. Both frameworks require effective implementation mechanisms, including monitoring, reporting, and compliance measures.
5. **Target Alignment:** The targets of the GBF can be enhanced through the measures established by the BBNJ, especially regarding marine protected areas; as such the BBNJ agreement promotes coherent policies for marine and terrestrial biodiversity.
6. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Both frameworks encourage the involvement of various stakeholders, including indigenous peoples and local communities.

7. **Monitoring and Reporting:** Effective monitoring and evaluation are crucial for both frameworks to assess progress and adapt strategies as needed; and the BBNJ agreement may contribute to the monitoring mechanisms outlined in the GBF for assessing biodiversity health.
8. **Funding Opportunities:** Implementation of the BBNJ can open new funding avenues that align with GBF objectives; and the BBNJ agreement addresses funding mechanisms to support biodiversity initiatives.
9. **Capacity Building:** Both agreements stress the need for capacity building to effectively manage and protect biodiversity.
10. **Global Cooperation:** The BBNJ agreement fosters international collaboration, which is essential for achieving the GBF's global biodiversity targets.

4. VISION AND OBJECTIVES

VISION

This Strategic Document aims to achieve a sustainable and resilient fisheries sector that conserves marine biodiversity, supports healthy ecosystems, and ensures food security, nutrition and livelihoods and other social and economic benefits from the region's ocean resources for present and future generations within the framework of the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy.

OBJECTIVES

- To promote the adoption of ecosystem-based approaches to fisheries management and development, and aquaculture that consider the health of marine ecosystems and their biodiversity as central to fisheries management.
- To ensure that fisheries and aquaculture systems in Member States are conducted in a manner that reduce negative impacts on biodiversity, make the best use of the biological diversity, and contribute to the conservation, sustainable use, management and maintenance of healthy biodiversity to support food security, nutrition, livelihoods and resilient ecosystems for present and future generations, by mainstreaming biodiversity considerations in fisheries policy and practices.

5. STRATEGIC ACTIONS

1. Updating of the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs)

1) NBSAP should be reviewed and updated to incorporate the commitments under the GBF. Fisheries Administrations should seek to work with the national environment agencies and other government agencies, fisherfolk organizations, private sector, NGO and other key stakeholders to update or develop their NBSAPS taking into account the issues and challenges in the fisheries sector.

2) Ensure that NBSAPs are aligned with the latest Kunming-Montreal global biodiversity targets.

3) Undertake a thorough assessment of the current state of biodiversity and fisheries, including species, habitats, and ecosystems, using the latest scientific data and traditional knowledge.

4) Seek to include commitments to establish and effectively manage protected areas, Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs), and other spatial management tools in the NBSAP, taking into account the needs of the fisheries sector and sustainable blue growth.

5) Incorporate climate change adaptation and mitigation measures into the NBSAP to address the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification on marine biodiversity and ecosystems.

6) Seek to ensure that the NBSAP are consistent and aligned with the relevant fundamental principles and policy commitments enshrined in the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy and its Protocols, and other governance policies of the CRFM including but not limited to the Regional Gender Action Plan and Strategy.

2. Strengthen Policy, Legal and Institutional Frameworks

1) Review and update as deemed necessary existing fisheries and aquaculture policies, regulations, and institutional arrangements to support and facilitate the integration of biodiversity considerations into fisheries planning and management.

2) Review and enhance governance structures and institutional arrangements that support cross-sectoral coordination of biodiversity and fisheries management efforts.

3) Encourage and support cross-sectoral collaboration between fisheries, environment, tourism, local communities, indigenous people, private sector, NGOs, and other relevant sectors to address fisheries and marine biodiversity challenges.

4) Review existing fishing practices and encourage the adoption of those fishing practices that minimize impacts on marine biodiversity and support the recovery of depleted species and habitats.

5) Strengthen frameworks to prevent and manage the introduction of alien invasive species.

3. Develop and Implement Marine Spatial Plans (MSP)

1) Support the development of MSPs and ensure they are aligned with existing national and international policies and best practices, and create a supportive framework to implement agreed conservation, management and development measures.

2) Ensures MSP is part of a broader governance structure, enhances compliance, and promotes consistency across different sectors.

3) Implement zoning strategies that allocate specific areas for different activities, such as fishing, conservation and biodiversity protection, dive operators, tourism, and other economic activities as necessary.

4) Reduce conflicts between users, protect sensitive habitats and species, and ensure sustainable use of marine resources.

5) Incorporate Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) into broader MSP frameworks to ensure they are considered in the context of other marine uses and biodiversity conservation priorities

6) Ensure meaningful consultation with local communities and indigenous people in the process of developing MSPs where relevant and incorporate their traditional ecological knowledge and concerns in the plans.

4. Enhance Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management (EBFM)

1) Develop and implement EBFM plans for key fisheries, incorporating biodiversity considerations such as habitat protection, bycatch reduction, prevention of ghost fishing by abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear, and the management of non-target species.

2) Integrate marine managed areas such as marine protected areas (MPAs), Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) and spatial management tools into fisheries management strategies to protect critical habitats and biodiversity.

3) Encourage the adoption and use of fishing gear and techniques that reduce bycatch, habitat damage, ghost fishing and other negative impacts on marine biodiversity and ecosystems.

4) Ensure meaningful consultation with local communities and indigenous people in the process of developing MSPs where relevant and incorporate their traditional ecological knowledge and concerns in the plans.

5) Support the development and implementation of sustainable fisheries certification schemes and eco-labeling initiatives that incentivize biodiversity-friendly practices.

6) Promote the use of ecosystem indicators and reference points in fisheries assessments and management decisions.

5. Establish, Expand or Strengthen Marine Managed Areas (MMAs)

1) Designate new MMAs and expand existing ones including MPA as considered appropriate, focusing on ecologically significant and vulnerable areas, to provide refuges for marine species, enhance biodiversity conservation, and support the sustainable fisheries and recovery of overfished stocks.

2) Provide technical and policy support to managers of MMAs including capacity-building, access to resources, and incentives to strengthen the management and enhance their biodiversity conservation and fisheries management outcomes.

3) Promote and support the involvement and participation of local fishers, indigenous peoples, indigenous peoples, women, youth and fishing community's involvement in the process of identification, development and management of area-based management systems.

6. Identify and Support Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs)

1) Establish clear criteria and guidelines for identifying, recognizing, and monitoring OECMs in line with international standards, such as those set by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

2) Conduct assessments to identify areas where existing management and usage practices deliver effective biodiversity conservation outcomes, such as community-managed fisheries, cultural

sites with biodiversity conservation value, and areas managed by the private sector, which are not officially designated as marine protected areas.

3) Expands the network of biodiversity conservation areas by recognizing existing OECMs and establishing new ones as deemed necessary to achieve national objectives.

4) Ensures that OECMs meet a consistent standard of effectiveness in contributing to conservation goals and provides a framework for evaluating and reporting on their outcomes.

5) Promote and support the engagement of local communities, indigenous peoples, fisheries stakeholders, women, youth and NGOs and other conservation organizations in the identification, management, and monitoring of OECMs.

6) Develop and implement monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track the effectiveness of OECMs in achieving conservation outcomes and contributing to sustainable fisheries management.

7) Raise awareness about the role and benefits of OECMs among stakeholders and the public.

8) Facilitate the exchange of knowledge and best practices through workshops, networks, publications, and social media posting.

7. Raise Awareness and Build Capacity

1) Develop and implement targeted outreach and education programs to raise awareness and understanding of the importance of marine biodiversity and its role in sustainable fisheries. Education and awareness raising initiatives should target all stakeholders, including fishers, coastal communities, policymakers, officials, private sector and the public, and build capacity for engagement in practical actions.

2) Provide training and capacity-building opportunities for fisheries officers and fisheries managers, environmental officers, CNFO and other fisherfolk, private sector actors, as well as other stakeholders on integrating biodiversity into fisheries management.

3) Support community-based initiatives and participatory approaches that empower local communities to play an active role in biodiversity conservation.

8. Strengthening Partnerships and Collaboration

1) Strengthen and improve existing partnerships and collaboration with donors and international development partners (IPD), and regional and national stakeholder organizations to secure the resources needed and to support and implement the priority actions and projects to support mainstreaming biodiversity in fisheries and aquaculture.

2) Promote the development of regional agreements and frameworks for the sustainable use, conservation and management of shared marine biodiversity where necessary.

3) Facilitate the exchange of knowledge, technologies, and best practices among Member States and stakeholders through regional workshops, networks, and other available platforms.

4) Engage with international organizations, donors, and partners to mobilize resources and technical assistance for marine biodiversity conservation in fisheries. This should include the

exchange of information and maintaining dialogue with existing and new partners, donors and IDP.

5) Participate in relevant regional and international meetings and for a, involving partners, donors and IDP addressing marine biodiversity, cooperation and provision of support to countries.

6) Develop and maintain good working partnerships with other regional and sub-regional organizations as well with national agencies of Member states to design and implement joint projects aimed at supporting actions and project supporting biodiversity and fisheries management.

7) Actively engage and build partnerships and collaboration with government departments and agencies, and NGO that are working on environmental and biodiversity conservation, restoration, protection and sustainable use.

9. Enhance Monitoring and Data Collection for Evidence-Based Decision-making

1) Review and improve data collection, monitoring, and reporting on marine biodiversity and fisheries to support informed decision-making and adaptive management.

2) Develop standardized protocols for monitoring marine biodiversity in fisheries, including the collection of data on bycatch, species composition, and habitat conditions.

3) Strengthen national and regional capacities for data analysis, reporting, and dissemination to support evidence-based decision-making, and conservation and management actions.

4) Establish a regional database for marine biodiversity and fisheries data to facilitate information sharing and collaboration among countries.

5) Ensure the available data on marine biodiversity and fisheries is readily accessible and available to stakeholders for their use.

10. Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

1) The successful implementation of this strategy will require careful implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The CRFM Secretariat should undertake the following upon approval of the strategy:

2) Assign a senior staff member specific responsibility to coordinate development of a Plan of Action (POA) and oversee its implementation. The POA should include a monitoring and evaluation framework to track progress towards the strategy's objectives, assess the effectiveness of actions, and make adjustments as needed. The POA should be designed and implemented in accordance with the Results-based Management Policy of the CRFM.

3) Ensure regular reporting on the strategy's implementation to the CRFM Governance Bodies (Forum and Executive Committee, and Ministerial Council) as well as other stakeholders, to ensure transparency and accountability in the process.

4) The CRFM Secretariat should work with the Member States, The Resource Mobilization Sub-Committee, development partners and the private sector to mobilize financial and technical resources to support the strategy's implementation.

6. CONCLUSION

Mainstreaming marine biodiversity considerations in Caribbean fisheries is essential for sustainability of the region's marine resources and the well-being of its people. This strategy provides a roadmap for integrating biodiversity into fisheries management and governance, ensuring that the region's rich marine ecosystems are conserved for future generations. Through collective action, regional cooperation, and a commitment to sustainable practices, the CRFM Member States can lead the way in balancing biodiversity conservation with the economic, social cultural benefits of the marine living resources.

The CRFM 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".

The CRFM consists of three bodies – the Ministerial Council, the Caribbean Fisheries Forum and the CRFM Secretariat. CRFM members are Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

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