Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism

# PRESS RELEASE

## CRFM Executive Director addresses FAO's Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in Rome

Belize City, Belize, 15 September 2026 (CRFM)—The Executive Director of the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM), Dr. Marc Williams, recently attended the Thirty-seventh Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI), a body under the FAO Council. During the weeklong meeting, held from 7–11 September 2026 in Rome, Italy, Dr. Williams spoke on the state of fisheries and aquaculture; illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing; the role of regional fisheries bodies; and support for small-scale fisheries and aquaculture.

*CRFM Executive Director, Dr. Marc Williams, attending COFI session*

In speaking on the state of world fisheries and aquaculture and progress in the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and related instruments, Williams said: "When FAO speaks of Blue Transformation, science-based governance, resilient aquatic food systems, and sustainable value chains, it speaks directly to the vision that CRFM Member States have embraced."

He added that reliable statistics, stock assessments, digital information systems, electronic logbooks, traceability, and interoperable fisheries databases are the essential infrastructure of responsible management in the twenty-first century.

"The CRFM stands ready to work alongside FAO and all our international partners to ensure that the Blue Transformation becomes a living reality that delivers prosperity, resilience, food security, and hope for generations yet to come," Williams said.

He also spoke on progress in addressing IUU fishing through international, regional and national actions, adding that: "Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing is an assault on justice, sustainability, and the dignity of those who harvest our marine resources responsibly."

He said that confronting IUU fishing requires resolve, regional solidarity, and international cooperation that leaves no haven for illegal operators.



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“History shows that those who exploit our oceans often cooperate across jurisdictions; therefore, those who protect them must cooperate even more closely. Let us strengthen our commitment to the Port State Measures Agreement, reinforce collaboration through Regional Fishery Bodies, advance implementation of the BBNJ Agreement, and continue our shared pursuit of Sustainable Development Goal 14,” Williams said.

He affirmed the CRFM’s determination to work alongside the FAO and the wider international community to build a future where responsible fishers are rewarded, illegal operators are denied opportunities, and the rule of law extends across every ocean, coastline, and fisheries value chain.

The CRFM Executive Director also spoke on the role of the FAO and other regional fisheries bodies in supporting implementation of international agreements relevant to fisheries and aquaculture.

He noted that the expanding international architecture for fisheries and ocean governance places growing expectations on regional organizations. This architecture includes 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 the BBNJ Agreement), biodiversity commitments, trade obligations, climate adaptation, and sustainable development.”

The CRFM embraces these responsibilities because we recognize that effective governance depends on strong institutions that can integrate science, digital innovation, fisheries statistics, compliance, ecosystem-based management, and stakeholder engagement into coherent regional action,” Dr. Williams said, adding that “Together with FAO, our sister Regional Fishery Bodies, and our international partners, we can build governance systems that are adaptive to climate change, responsive to emerging challenges, and firmly anchored in cooperation rather than competition.”

He said that small-scale fisheries and aquaculture are indispensable pillars of nutrition, employment, cultural identity, poverty reduction, and resilience. He reaffirmed the CRFM’s commitment to working with the FAO, CRFM Member States, and development partners to build inclusive, climate-resilient, technologically advanced, and socially just fisheries and aquaculture sectors.

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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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