

7th Meeting of the Fisheries Commission BES

Bonaire, March 14th, 2018

Open summary

The Fisheries Commission BES (FCBES) is an advisory body established to enhance the joint management and policy-making of fisheries in the Caribbean Netherlands. In this body Bonaire, St. Eustatius, Saba and the national government can discuss and advise the minister. The Commission consists of four members, being the three representatives of the island governments plus an independent Chair, and the Secretary. The members representing the three island governments are appointed by their respective government, Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba. The Chair is appointed by the Ministry after consultation with the Commission members. The Ministry fulfills the role of the Secretariat. The FCBES convenes at least once per year. This summary is intended for open distribution, therefore it does not contain privacy-sensitive aspects of the meeting.

(Skype) presentation on the science supporting a number of recommendations – Dolfi Debrot

Marine biologist Dr. Dolfi Debrot of Wageningen Marine Research (WMR) was asked to review a subset of the recommendations made by EcoVision, and provide the Commission with remarks based on his scientific knowledge.

Controls on fishing operations recommendations

Fishery controls are only a means to an end. Therefore the first thing to do is to set goals for a fishery. As a rule fishery goals cannot be achieved based on one measure. And different combinations of measures can be used to achieve the same goal. The choice of measures to implement can best be guided by which set of measures can be implemented effectively. This will depend on several factors and constraints such as finances, available capacity, possibility for enforcement and stakeholder support. With good stakeholder support all other constraints will become less problematic. Fisheries management in data poor situations cannot wait for science. An adaptive approach is needed based on the best information available and based on a cautionary approach.

Lobster

As much as possible, integrate management across different jurisdictions, user groups and seek international consistency. But do not weaken your management downwards to the level of international “compromise management” if yours is already better. Fishing methods like spear guns, hookah, or scuba are not unsustainable by definition. Traditional gears like traps are often among the most unsustainable... With proper management, different gears and systems can be allowed. The problem is that the more systems the more complicated data collection is and the more difficult to implement effectively. During the reproductive season, many species will aggregate and be very vulnerable to fishing. Hence, it makes sense to implement closed seasons during those periods. Very important is to introduce limits on total effort using a limit on numbers of licenses, numbers of traps, etc.

Queen conch

This species can be harvested sustainably from the bank if properly managed and effort is limited and controlled to within certain areas and to a specified TAC.. Suggest aligning measures with the regional measures recommended. Sustainable economic use will generate community support for management.

Tuna and other highly migrating pelagic species

Longlines and driftnets are very unselective gears and kill many species indiscriminately. Good to fully ban these with only a few exceptions for instance to allow small-scale use of gillnets for selected purposes like the development of a flying fish fishery. There should remain no financial incentive to target or land endangered species. Most fishing on the bank occurs in relatively shallow water (less than 40 m). At those depths, safe release of endangered fish caught in traps can be feasible if done with care. Hence, for the most part, size limits and species bans for selected species can help protect and restore these dwindled stocks.

Sharks

Sharks are endangered and effective management needs to be developed. It should be based on “best” data but cannot wait for “perfect science”. Goals need to be set, measures implemented and periodic evaluations to gradually improve the measures using the approach of adaptive management. Seek sustainable management for unconventional and unharvested species like tripneustes sea urchin. Make FPAs larger with better management and collect the data that can demonstrate their effectiveness. Without the proper data and without proof that they function, ultimately there will be no support for such measures. Develop FAD fishing based on a plan to help divert fishing away from vulnerable reef fishes and towards unconventional pelagic fishery sources. This will allow more fish production with less negative ecological impact.

Recreational fisheries and the use of FADs

FADs if properly implemented and managed represent an opportunity to increase fishery production while simultaneously making it more sustainable. Recreational fisheries should also be managed using a license system and other regulations. Establish bag limits only for vulnerable species, but monitor all catches to give early warning if problems develop so that additional measures can be considered.

International agreements and regional cooperation

Yes promote and extend international participation and collaboration. Require fishermen to provide data and allow independent data collection.

Discussion on the fisheries management plan conform evaluation Ecovision

In the recommendations by EcoVision, there is a lot of focus on management plans. The two central questions to be discussed by this commission are:

- Is there a need for a management plan, and if yes how should such a management plan and the process to establish it look like?
- What should the tasks of the Fisheries Commission BES regarding this management plan be?

Process and form of a fisheries management plan.

Saba: For a fisheries management plan the first task is to organize meetings with stakeholders. The vantage point should be to focus on the aspects that have added value for the fishermen. Let the fishermen come with proposals during these stakeholder sessions, and evaluate those. After that, the management plan can be discussed. Finally, the semantics of a ‘management plan’ suggests that this directly determines the way fisheries is managed, while the plan is more focused on the direction that we strive towards with our fisheries sector. Therefore the name ‘Sustainable Fisheries Plan’ is suggested.

St. Eustatius: It is necessary to have a fisheries management plan as this is a recommendation of the EcoVision report, which is based on many stakeholders. Furthermore it is important to have legislation and a plan to have an overall direction. St. Eustatius does not have the finances to have its

own consultants for its fisheries, therefore such a plan can provide guidelines which otherwise remain absent. Data collection can thus also be standardized through such a plan, increasing the value of the data. The preference of St. Eustatius is to have the management plan somewhat follow the setup of the nature management plan, meaning there is an umbrella part for the whole Caribbean Netherlands with specific parts for each island, of course in consultation with its stakeholders. The umbrella part should be set by the Fisheries Commission BES.

Bonaire: As each island is different, the management plan needs to address the specifics of each island well. The common ground for the whole Caribbean Netherlands is sustainability, but the implementation will be different. Therefore Bonaire agrees with the name proposed by Saba. Also Bonaire agrees with a setup as also described by St. Eustatius, first a more general outline and then specific plans for each island. Bonaire also suggests that Piskabon should be given the ability to perform several of the tasks that will be stipulate in such a management plan. This can be agreed on in a Service Level Agreement (Dutch: zorgcontract) with the local government.

The Commission agrees on the name 'Sustainable Fisheries Plan' and asks the Secretariat to make a concept for the umbrella document.

Tasks and responsibilities of members of the FCBES.

Currently there is no mandate for the members of the FCBES to discuss and advise on other things than stipulated in the Decree on the Fisheries Commission BES. If the desire of the members is to expand the tasks and responsibilities, a formal request has to be submitted to the Minister. The Commission requests the Chair to write a proposal of this request. Regarding stakeholders and (standing) observers, the Members expressed no desire to fixate this but rather to stimulate the participation of stakeholders as observers to the FCBES.

1. Other topics discussed: **Fishing permits procedure.** St. Eustatius expressed the need to formalize and standardize our method of licensing. Furthermore, St. Eustatius has requested the Ministry to create an Administrative Decree which will establish and provide a legal basis to St. Eustatius, so that they can issue their own fishing permits. Such an Administrative Decree will set the minimum requirements for a permit. The Commission proposes to establish a decree for the three BES islands in which the regulations for issuing fishing permits are regulated. Because all three BES islands are very different, there are two options. The first is to establish one regulation that stipulates the requirements for the issuing of permits in general for the three BES islands. The second is to establish three separate regulations that stipulate for each island in specific the requirements for the issuing of permits
2. **EDF fund.** In the 11th European Development Fund Program, there are 3 main focus areas: 1) Climate resilience, 2) Sustainable energy, 3) Marine biodiversity. The Chair proposed to explore if Yarari can have a role in this EDF Program, as this area includes the EEZ of all three BES islands. It would also be useful to discuss the involvement of the ABC islands in this program. Suggestions are: FAD's, a VMS system, use of drones, a project regarding the Sargassum issues.
3. **Social Mapping.** The World Wildlife Fund has performed a social mapping study on all the three BES islands and will (probably) publish the results in the second half of 2018. The report can provide information on how feasible it is to invest in the fisheries sector, what the chances are for spin-off of projects and what actions are better from a socio-economic perspective. Saba noted that the setup of the interviews held on Saba was very limited. For both Saba and

St. Eustatius it felt as if the social mapping was a study on and for Bonaire with also some additional information on Saba and St. Eustatius, rather than a social mapping of the fisheries sector for the whole Caribbean Netherlands.

4. **Sargassum.** Bonaire expressed the concern for natural disaster action plans, due to the recent Sargassum events on Bonaire and other Caribbean islands. The Chair noted that this can be discussed in the EEZ Commission. Also natural disaster action plans might be something that can be part of the EDF program.
5. **Transparency.** Piskabon emphasized the need for transparency. The Commission agrees that transparency and outreach is important, taking into consideration that some information of the FCBES is closed. Therefore the minutes of the FCBES cannot be shared openly. The Commission suggests to openly distribute a summary of this meeting, and asks the Secretariat to create 2 versions of documentation: a closed version (i.e. the minutes; this document) and an open version with a disclaimer.

Next Meeting Date and Venue

The next meeting is scheduled to take place November 27th on Bonaire.