

Time to Focus on Fisheries – Complete and Apply the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy

By Milton Haughton

Our Caribbean fisheries impact so many lives throughout the region, particularly through the number of jobs connected to the fishing sector. There is direct employment of fishers and thousands more in the wholesale, processing, transport and retail side of the seafood business. Next come the vast numbers of citizens employed in tourism and hospitality, serving our visitors who come to the Caribbean to enjoy the rich marine biodiversity by snorkeling and diving, or catching fish at sea or on a dinner plate. Nearly everyone in the region enjoys eating seafood. It's not only tasty; it's also very nutritious.

The connection to our fisheries clearly runs throughout Caribbean societies. With much of our culture, tradition and livelihoods depending on the fisheries, it is only right for us to do all that we can to protect and conserve fish stocks and ecosystems from degradation due to irresponsible fishing, pollution, habitat degradation and climate change.

Implementation of the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy (CCCFP), a regional treaty on conservation, management and sustainable utilisation of fisheries resources, will help Caribbean Nations preserve fisheries, protect fisher incomes and create more wealth. Provisions of the CCCFP are to facilitate transformation of the sector so that it is more market-oriented, more internationally competitive and more environmentally sustainable.

The policy, which was mandated by the CARICOM Heads of State, has been approved at virtually every level of government in the affected nations. All that remains to bring it into force is the signature of at least eight CARICOM heads of state.

Times are hard all over the world. Nations are trying to identify new ways to grow their economies. The Caribbean fishing sector presents real opportunities for growth and wealth creation through diversification, innovation and cooperation. Greater fisheries-generated employment and income not only improve the livelihoods and welfare of fishers--they also expand the overall regional economy. Improved conservation, licensing, regulation and enforcement called for in the CCCFP will better protect fish stocks and fisherfolk livelihoods threatened by losses in fishing opportunities caused either by illegal, unreported or unregulated fishing, or by other nations securing those opportunities first because of their apparent better management practices. Ratification of the CCCFP will help fishers and fishing communities to prosper and succeed on all desired levels.

Through cooperation, fishers can increase fish processing in the region and expand into value-added products to keep more of the profits here at home and create even more good jobs. Aquaculture business ventures are also encouraged by CCCFP. Caribbean fisherfolk can diversify their products by pursuing under- or unexploited species of fish. The CCCFP calls for more scientific research, market research to develop greater market access, marketing, planning and sector trade development, all to support fishers. Furthermore, through improved science, the CCCFP will expand the data and information used in decision-making and resource management, enabling States to protect their interests, for example, during international negotiations for catch quotas.

Caribbean citizens can share in the social and economic improvements in the welfare of fishers through employment and income generation, along with strengthened food and nutrition security. Together, we all can move toward securing a brighter, more prosperous future and sustainable fisheries through ratification and implementation of the treaty.

Please let your leaders know that you support immediate implementation of the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy. The time has come.

Mr. Haughton is Executive Director of the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM), an inter-governmental organisation whose mission is to "Promote and facilitate the responsible utilisation 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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