

CONTRIBUTION 2.1

The Regional Aspect of Fisheries Governance in the Wider Caribbean States

Robin Mahon^{1*} and Lucia M. Fanning²

*Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, UWI, Cavehill Campus,
Barbados¹*

Marine Affairs Program, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada²

*Corresponding author contact: prof.mahon@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The Wider Caribbean is the most geopolitically complex region in the world with 45 countries and states in close proximity to each other. Consequently, many fisheries management and development issues are transboundary. Many fisheries species straddle or migrate across national boundaries. These require close cooperation of the relevant countries for effective management. Other issues require close cooperation among countries for effective use of scarce human and financial resources. The institutional arrangements for fisheries are nested with three indigenous organisations covering most countries (CRFM, OECS and OSPESCA). However, major fishing countries such as the USA, Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico and Cuba are not members of any of these making the role of an umbrella organisation important. FAO WECAFC has played this role in the past. However, there are also transboundary biodiversity and pollution issues that are relevant to fisheries creating the need for engagement with the organisations that are responsible for these aspects as well. In the past 20 years through the GEF funded CLME Initiative significant progress has been made with developing a regional coordination mechanism for ocean affairs in the Wider Caribbean that is expected to provide the means of coordination for the many organisations and countries all of which have fisheries interests of one type or another. The establishment and operation of the coordination mechanism which is also to be funded by the GEF is now the major regional level institutional challenge facing the countries of the region.

KEYWORDS: *Wider Caribbean Region, polycentricity, regional coordinating mechanism, regional ocean governance*

CITATION: Mahon, R., and L. M. Fanning, 2026. The Regional Aspect of Fisheries Governance in the Wider Caribbean. Contribution 2.1, p47-54 *IN* CRFM, 2026. Volume I: Technical Papers. Presented at the CRFM 20th Anniversary Scientific Conference, 28-31 August 2023. CRFM Special Publication No. 37, CRFM Secretariat https://www.crfm.int/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=899

1. INTRODUCTION

The Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs) (jointly referred to as CLME+) and their associated living resources are key to the region's economies (Clegg et al. 2020). However, given the socio-cultural and geo-political complexity of the region, progress regarding ocean and living marine resources governance has been highly variable (Fanning et al. 2021, Mahon et al. 2010). Capacities for living marine resources management vary considerably at national, sub-regional and regional levels (Mahon et al. 2014). Additionally, the proximity of the countries and territories, coupled with the inherent transboundary nature of many of the key species found in the region, necessitate close collaboration among countries if the effective management and governance of fisheries is to be realized (Figure 1). Key to that collaboration is the need to optimize scarce human and financial resources through cooperation at subregional, regional and global levels.



Figure 1. Map of countries and territories of the Wider Caribbean (CLME+) Region

In 2007 the coastal countries of the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems embarked on a series of GEF funded LME projects with a focus on improving governance of living marine resources in the Wider Caribbean Region. Ultimately, there were three projects funding cycles. An 18-month PDF-B project (2007-2009) carried out Transboundary Diagnostic Analyses (TDAs) for governance and living resources and developed a Large Marine Ecosystem Governance Framework that reflected the nested multilevel nature of ocean governance in the region in a conceptual model. The CLME Project (2010-2015), updated the TDAs, carried out a variety of technical analysis and developed a Strategic Action Programme (SAP) for the region. The CLME+ Project (2015-2020) began implementation of the SAP of which development of a regional coordination mechanism is a key component.

In 2013, countries bordering and/or located within the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems adopted the 10-year Strategic Action Programme for the Sustainable Management of the Shared Living Marine Resources of the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems, the “CLME+ SAP.” (Debels et al 2017). The CLME+ SAP aimed to contribute to the achievement of the regionally adopted long-term vision for the CLME+: “healthy marine ecosystems that are adequately valued and protected through robust, integrative and inclusive governance arrangements at regional, sub-regional, national and local levels, which in turn effectively enable adaptive management that maximizes, in a sustainable manner, the provision of goods and services in support of enhanced livelihoods and human well-being” (Fanning et al. 2011, p. 371). The 5-year UNDP/GEF CLME+ Project (GEF ID 5542; 2015-2020) aimed to “Catalyse the Implementation of the SAP for the Sustainable Management of shared Living Marine Resources in the CLME+ region”.

Strategy 3 of the CLME+ SAP was “integrated ocean governance, through intersectoral policy coordination”. The aim of this was to develop a regional mechanism for integrated ocean governance for consideration by the countries, and if possible for initial implementation. This was pursued by engaging consultants to develop proposals for:

- a regional Permanent Policy Coordination Mechanism (PPCM) for shared living marine resources/ocean governance, and
- a strengthened and consolidated, multi-level, nested Regional Governance Framework (RGF) for shared living marine resources/ocean governance, with an associated Sustainable Financing Plan

The consultancy outputs (Fanning et al. 2019) were then reviewed, refined and adopted by the countries in 2020 in the form of a draft MOU. Implementation of the MOU is a component of the upcoming GEF Procaribe Project which was approved for implementation in December 2022. This will be a substantial task for the countries and organizations of the Wider Caribbean Region. Following are some reflections on the conceptual basis for what is to be undertaken and the way ahead.

2. CONCEPTUAL BASIS FOR THE MECHANISM

The development of a regional coordination mechanism for oceans in the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR) was based on analysis of the then current ocean governance situation in the region underpinned by conceptual frameworks and approaches. The analysis took the form of a governance-focused Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis which identified several gaps and weaknesses, including the lack of a mechanism for intersectoral coordination among countries and organisations at the regional level (Mahon et al. 2011). Further analysis included evaluation of the overlaps, gaps and linkages among regional organisations (Mahon et al. 2013, Cooke 2017). The geopolitical challenges involved in arriving at a workable arrangement are well documented by Mahon et al. (2014) and Fanning et al. (2021). The findings for the Wider Caribbean Region are not unique to the region; although the geopolitical complexity of the region may make it an extreme case. Therefore, there is merit in understanding the conceptual underpinnings for how researchers and practitioners are approaching regional ocean governance in the numerous oceanic regions of the world. There is much for the WCR to learn from other regions and to contribute to global knowledge of regional ocean governance.

Globally, the analysis and understanding of the structure and functioning of regional ocean governance systems, and their role in the global ocean governance architecture is relatively new and evolving. Researchers are relating what is seen on the ground to theoretical governance constructs and to what is being seen in other governance arenas such as climate change and water resources. Structure and function of the clusters of regional arrangements identified by

Mahon and Fanning (2019a) are one aspect of this analysis. These clusters have been referred to as polycentric systems by several authors from various regions (Vousden 2016, Abe et al. 2016, Mahon and Fanning 2019a, Naidoo et al. 2021). The polycentric governance concept emerged in the 1960s based largely on the work of Elinor Ostrom who offered the following definition: “Polycentric systems are characterized by multiple governing authorities at differing scales rather than a monocentric unit.” (Ostrom 2010). Initially, analysis of polycentricity was based on studies at the metropolitan and global levels and in relation to water resources management. Recently, there has been a considerable rise in interest and research on polycentricity in a wide variety of types of systems spanning local to global (Morrison et al. 2019). These authors also proposed a more encompassing definition of a polycentric system as one “which comprises multiple governing authorities at different scales which do not stand in hierarchical relationship to each other but are engaged in self-organisation and mutual adjustment”.

A competing conceptual approach for clusters of arrangements that address a common broad topic is the idea of regime complexes (Orsini, et al. 2013, Gomez-Mera et al. 2020) which refers to “...an ensemble of distinct institutional arrangements dealing with related or overlapping issues or a spatially delimited area that are not ordered in any hierarchical fashion” (Young and Kim 2021). Young and Kim (2021) refer to the polycentric cluster for the Arctic Ocean as a regime complex. The regional ocean governance situation in the WCR clearly fits the definition of polycentric systems and regime complexes. Research on these concepts has implications for the WCR.

Polycentric systems are thought to have advantages over centralized systems and to be less chaotic than they initially appear. Ostrom (2010) noted that they may provide “multiple mechanisms for mutual monitoring, learning, and adaptation of better strategies over time”. A polycentric system may also facilitate application of the subsidiarity principle, in which problems can be addressed at the most relevant and capable scale. The pros and cons of polycentric systems is an ongoing topic of discussion and could benefit from comparative analysis of regional ocean governance systems (Heikkila et al. 2018).

Mahon and Fanning (2019b) reflected on whether moving from earlier (fragmented) stages of polycentricity towards functional polycentricity would lead to more integrated governance as required by ecosystem based management (EBM) and to more effective governance. They outlined the types of architectural interventions that would move a system in this direction: attend to overall architecture and interactions among arrangements; harmonize principles, rules and mandates; analyse gaps and overlaps; establish cooperation/conflict management mechanisms; develop networks; apply the subsidiarity principle and; strengthen learning and sharing mechanisms. They observed that in the absence of efforts to improve the functioning of polycentric systems, frustration with complexity and apparent chaos and dysfunctionality may lead to withdrawal from regional efforts or even to proposals that governance arrangements be consolidated to form a centralized authority. However, as centralized authority is not feasible in the WCR where countries have already invested considerable time and effort in to existing organisations, there is no alternative to working with polycentricity and seeking ways to make the system more functional.

3. THE COORDINATION MECHANISM

The geographical scope of the coordination mechanism that has been developed for the WCR is the North Brazil Shelf and Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystems. Its objectives are:

1. To support regional collaboration towards a coordinated approach to the conservation and sustainable use of the marine and coastal ecosystems and their goods and services;
2. To support coordinated and interactive ocean governance in support of attaining ocean-based sustainable development;
3. To promote actions towards the achievement of the long-term vision [articulated in] the CLME+ SAP, and other ocean-related international and regional goals and commitments of the Signatories;
4. To promote partnerships with stakeholders from civil society and the private sector to facilitate and enhance efforts for the ecosystem based conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal resources and to support intersectoral coordination and collaboration.
5. The mechanism has core functions and complementary functions. The four core functions are:
6. Facilitate programmatic coordination of ocean governance and support the monitoring of progress with ocean sustainability instruments, goals and commitments.
7. Support the sustainable financing and coordinated resource mobilization for ocean governance.
8. Facilitate the coordination of institutional and policy frameworks for ocean governance across multiple levels.
9. Support, as requested, national ocean governance, including national level coordination for oceans.

The five complementary functions are:

1. Coordinate knowledge management and facilitate data and information sharing
2. Coordinate outreach, awareness-raising, and stakeholder engagement
3. Strengthen science-policy interfaces
4. Explore new areas for collaboration (within IGO mandates)
5. Engage in cooperation with the Gulf of Mexico LME.

The mechanism is also expected to undertake such additional activities as may be necessary to support the objectives of the Coordination Mechanism, as determined by the Signatories. It will operate through three main organs:

1. A Steering Group – composed of country representatives and the Chair of the Executive Group as a non voting Member;
2. An Executive Group – composed of IGO representatives (Chair of Steering Group may attend without decision-making capacity);
3. A Secretariat – Director, and such other staff as the Coordination Mechanism may need.

Working Groups including experts and representatives from countries, IGO, non-state actors, academia etc. will be established as necessary and appropriate.

It is anticipated that in an initial phase the function of Secretariat will be exercised by the Project Coordination Unit of the forthcoming UNDP/GEF PROCARIBE+ Project.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND THE WAY AHEAD

The functions of the coordinating mechanism reflect the diversity of actions that are critical for integrated or ecosystem-based management of the shared living marine resources of the WCR. They recognise the importance of an evidence based approach to governance, through effective science-policy interfaces (Mahon and Fanning 2021). They also recognise that while much can be done at a regional level, the national level implementation is ultimately where ‘the rubber meets the road’. Strengthening national capacity will be a key function for the new mechanism. As such, there is the need to strengthen national capacity to engage at the regional level, ideally through two-way representation from national intersectoral committees (McConney et al. 2016, Compton et al. 2020).

After nearly 20 years, the stage is set for significant progress with regional ocean governance. Successful implementation of the coordination mechanism will require significant engagement from countries over the duration of the ProCaribe project and beyond. Smaller countries have the most to gain through access to additional capacity and resources, but also have the most significant constraints in engaging. Commitment and a willingness to work together will be determining factors in how well this WCR ‘experiment’ works out. The global community is also watching closely. The WCR has been seen as a leader in ocean governance arrangements. Many regions will be keen to see if the years of preparation will bear fruit and to learn from the experiences in our region.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors acknowledge financial support from the UNDP/GEF Project: “Catalyzing Implementation of the Strategic Action Programme (SAP) for the Sustainable Management of Shared Living Marine Resources in the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems” (CLME+ Project, 2015-2020).

LITERATURE CITED

- Abe, J., B. Brown, E.A. Aja and S. Donkor. 2016. Local to regional polycentric levels of governance of the Guinea current Large Marine Ecosystem, *Environmental Development* 17: 287-295.
- Clegg, P., Mahon, R., McConney, P. and Oxenford, H.A. eds., 2020. *The Caribbean blue economy*. Routledge.
- Compton, S., P. McConney, I. Monnereau, B. Simmons and R. Mahon. 2020. Good practice guidelines for successful National Intersectoral Coordination Mechanisms (NICs): Second Edition. Report for the UNDP/GEF CLME+ Project (2015-2020). Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies, The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados. CERMES Technical Report. No. 88 2nd. 21pp.
- Cooke, A. L. 2017. Evaluating regional governance arrangements for living marine resources in the Wider Caribbean Region. PhD Thesis, University of the West Indies, Barbados, 336 pp.
- Debels P., L. Fanning, R. Mahon, P. McConney, L. Walker, T. Bahri, M. Haughton, K. McDonald, M. Perez, S. Singh-Renton, C. Toro, R. Van Anrooy, A. Vanzella Khouri and P. Whalley. 2017. The CLME+ Strategic Action Programme: An ecosystems approach for

assessing and managing the Caribbean Sea and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems. *Environmental Development*, 22: 191–205.

Fanning, L., Fenzl, N., Interwies, E., Klein, J., Mahon, R., Petersen, A., Schwörer, S. & Whalley, P. 2019. Proposals for a permanent coordination mechanism and a sustainable financing plan for ocean governance in the Wider Caribbean region. Centre for Partnerships for Development, available at http://gefcrew.org/carrcu/18IGM/10SPAWCOP/Ref-Docs/CAD_CLME+_PCM-en.pdf

Fanning, L., Mahon, R. and McConney, P., 2011. *Towards marine ecosystem-based management in the wider Caribbean*. Amsterdam University Press.

Fanning, L., Mahon, R., Compton, S., Corbin, C., Debels, P., Haughton, M., Heileman, S., Leotaud, N., McConney, P., Moreno, M.P. and Phillips, T., 2021. Challenges to implementing regional ocean governance in the wider Caribbean region. *Frontiers in Marine Science*, 8, p.286.

Heikkila, T., S. Villamayor-Tomas and D. Garrick. 2018. Bringing polycentric systems into focus for environmental governance, *Environmental Policy and Governance*, 28:207–211 doi.org/10.1002/eet.1809

Mahon, R and L. Fanning. 2019a. Regional ocean governance: Integrating and coordinating mechanisms for polycentric systems. *Marine Policy* 107. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2019.103589>

Mahon, R and L. Fanning. 2019b. Regional ocean governance: Polycentric arrangements and their role in global ocean governance. *Marine Policy* 107. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2019.103590>

Mahon, R. and L. Fanning. 2021. Scoping science-policy arenas for regional ocean governance in the Wider Caribbean Region. *Frontiers in Marine Science*, 8: 685122 doi:10.3389/fmars.2021.685122

Mahon, R., L. Fanning and P. McConney. 2011. CLME TDA Update for fisheries ecosystems: governance issues. The Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem and Adjacent Areas (CLME) Project, Cartagena, Colombia, 113 pp.

Mahon, R., Fanning, L. and McConney, P., 2014. Assessing and facilitating emerging regional ocean governance arrangements in the Wider Caribbean Region. *Ocean Yearbook Online*, 28(1), pp.631-671.

Mahon, R., Fanning, L. and McConney, P., 2017. Assessing governance performance in transboundary water systems. *Environmental Development*, 24, pp.146-155.

Mahon, R., A. Cooke, L. Fanning and P. McConney. 2013. Governance arrangements for marine ecosystems of the Wider Caribbean Region. Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados. CERMES Technical Report No 60. 99p.

Mahon, R., Fanning, L., McConney, P. and Pollnac, R., 2010. Governance characteristics of large marine ecosystems. *Marine Policy*, 34(5), pp.919-927.

McConney, P., I. Monnereau, B. Simmons and R. Mahon. 2016. Report on the Survey of National Intersectoral Coordination Mechanisms. Centre for Resource Management and

Environmental Studies, The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados. CERMES Technical Report No. 84:75pp.

Morrison, T.H., W.N. Adger, K. Brown, M.C. Lemos, D. Huitema, J. Phelps, L. Evans, P. Cohen, A.M. Song, R. Turner, and T. Quinn. 2019. The black box of power in polycentric environmental governance. *Global Environmental Change* 57: 101934. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2019.101934>

Naidoo, A., H. Hamukuaya, M. Hara, Y. Mngxe and J. Raakjær. 2021. Polycentric regional ocean governance opportunity in the Benguela Current Convention. *Frontiers in Marine Science* 8 – 2021.

Orsini, A., J.-F. Morin and O. Young. 2013. Regime complexes: a buzz, a boom, or a boost for global governance? *Global Governance* 19: 27–39.

Ostrom, E. 2010. Polycentric systems for coping with collective action and global environmental change, *Glob. Environ. Chang.* 20 (2010) 550–557.

Vousden, D. 2016. Local to regional polycentric governance approaches within the Agulhas and Somali current large marine ecosystems, *Environmental Development* 17: 277–286.

List of Figure Captions

Figure 1. Map of countries and territories of the CLME+ region.