

Guyana and Suriname make good progress on fulfilling requirements for their MSC-certified Atlantic Seabob trawl fisheries


The CRFM Continental Shelf Fisheries Working Group (CSWG) convened a meeting during 20-22 August in Georgetown, Guyana, to review the status and management of Atlantic Seabob (a commercially important shrimp) Fisheries of Guyana and Suriname. Both fisheries are certified by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), which means that they are recognized across the globe as sustainably managed. The MSC certification is associated with certain standards of best fisheries management practices, and places the countries in a strong position to maintain and expand trade with lucrative markets. The CRFM working group meeting supported the countries to fulfill specific technical conditions set by the MSC.

According to Rob Banning, project manager at Parlevliet & Van der Plas Group, *"The meeting, under the CRFM umbrella, was unique as it brought together all relevant stakeholders (public officials, industry, NGOs and scientists) and provided a foundation for fruitful international cooperation between Guyana and Suriname."* Yolanda Babb-Echteld, of the Fisheries Department of Suriname and Chairperson of Suriname's Seabob Working Group, echoed similar sentiments, noting further that *"Suriname and Guyana share the same large marine ecosystem, and hence fisheries characteristics. Hence, the meeting allowed the two countries to learn from each other's MSC experiences."*

The CRFM working group meeting carefully considered available data, information and knowledge on seabob biology, and on the historical development of fishing operations in order to agree on the most plausible stock assessment model for determining seabob stock status. The technical experts also gave attention to different fishing effort measures that could be applied in a Harvest Control Rule for each country's fishery.

After finalizing these key elements, the meeting considered steps to strengthen the scientific base for management actions. On this, there was strong support for better scientific understanding of seabob's overall ecological role, and of fishery-ecosystem/environment interactions and impacts. In terms of broadening the information base, Hanneke Vanlavieren of World Wildlife Fund (WWF) indicated that WWF's contribution included *"Creating an on-board ETP (Endangered, Threatened and Protected) species identification guide to track ETP species by-catches, training fishermen to identify ETP species, and improvement of data collection sheets for ETP by-catch."*

A widespread call was made for continued, formal collaboration between the countries, via focused annual meetings. Randy Bumbury, of Guyana's Fisheries Department and Chairperson of Guyana's Seabob Working Group, welcomed the call for an annual meeting, saying that *"The meeting highlighted the importance of Guyana and Suriname collaborating more in the future to*

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tackle challenges and support each other in ensuring sustainability of the seabob fisheries. This is a long term process which will achieve sustainability of these fisheries in the face of wider environmental issues such as climate change.” And Tomas Willems, Fisheries expert of FAO ReBYCII-LAC project based in Suriname, also supported the idea, saying that “Both countries now have a MSC certified seabob fishery which requires close monitoring and in which mutual exchange will be beneficial to see how to tackle certification conditions and recommendations to continue improving the fishery's sustainability.”

Among the immediate next steps agreed was for CRFM to convene an electronic Scientific Meeting on Atlantic Seabob to review the final assessment and stock status findings, and the Harvest Control Rule for industry control. Paul Medley, the international fisheries assessment expert charged with the seabob assessment modelling work, said that *“This type of co-operation is laudably meeting Suriname and Guyana's responsibilities under international obligations, and sets a good example for other states in the region. The meeting would encourage further co-operation in all scientific, management and enforcement issues of mutual interest.”*

The Continental Shelf Working Group Meeting was chaired by CRFM's Deputy Executive Director, Susan Singh-Renton, who reflected on the meeting's achievements, saying *“It is pleasing for the CRFM to make its contribution towards the partnership effort between Guyana and Suriname aimed at sustainable seabob trawl fisheries management and MSC certification. The target-oriented approach of the meeting allows the CRFM to re-introduce its scientific meeting in a way that meets industry needs more immediately.”*

Photo Caption: Participants of the CRFM CSWG Meeting, assembled outside of the Fisheries Department in Guyana, included representatives from Guyana's and Suriname's fisheries departments, private seabob trawl companies, the NGO community, and independent technical experts with seabob fishery assessment and management expertise.

