

Welcoming Address

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Honorable Mr. Swan, Premier of Bermuda, Host Representative Dr. Burnett-Herkes, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of the Board of Directors it is my pleasure to welcome you this morning to the 39th session of the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute. There is little need to convince this audience of the importance of Caribbean fishery resources. We know that these resources represent substantial potential for income, employment, food production, and self-sufficiency for people of the Caribbean. The fact that every year for the past thirty eight years more than a hundred individuals from over twenty countries have met at the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute is in itself indicative of the value of Caribbean fisheries.

Since its inception, GCFI's primary mission has been simply this: To exchange information on topics of current importance to the use and management of fishery resources in the wider Caribbean region.

This exchange has taken a variety of forms. We have technical papers, training workshops, informal poster sessions, and the annually published Proceedings which archive the information presented at each Institute. Equally important are the informal discussions between individuals and small groups. These discussions have often resulted in major program sessions and activities at future Institutes, and are one of the most effective mechanisms for insuring that GCFI's program remains focussed upon topics of current concern and importance.

The program for this 39th Institute reflects breadth of opportunity and concerns represented by Caribbean fisheries: We have sessions concerning aquaculture, recreational fisheries, spiny lobster, trap fisheries, management techniques, and social perspectives. Of particular note is the presence of Ministerial representatives from five Eastern Caribbean nations who will participate in discussions of foreign access to the Caribbean swordfish fishery. We extend a special welcome to the representatives of Antigua, Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent. This session will include presentations from fishery managers, academic researchers, and is sponsored by two private fishing companies. This blend of industry, government, and research includes both public and private sectors, illustrates one of GCFI's most unique and important characteristics.

The diverse and non-political structure of GCFI means that we can address highly sensitive issues and provide a neutral forum for exchange of the latest technical information and discussion of differing views. I suggest to you this morning that this sort of open exchange is the only means through which we can achieve optimum use of Caribbean fishery resources.

Last year, as many of you know, GCFI became formally incorporated as a non-profit organization. This week we will define the future direction of the Institute, and the Directors invite each of you to participate in this process. There is little doubt that we should continue to do what the Institute has done so uniquely well in the past; that is, to promote the exchange of information. But we must decide what sorts of exchange are most effective, and what information is most needed to address current concerns in Caribbean fisheries. On Thursday afternoon, we will have an open discussion of these issues, and expect to receive strong direction from GCFI's membership as to the future course of the Institute. At our annual business meeting on Friday, the membership will be asked to discuss and ultimately endorse a general mandate for expanded GCFI activity. Your counsel and participation are critical to the success of this process.

We look forward to working with you over the next five days, and invite any suggestions you may have as to how we may make your stay more enjoyable and productive. Once again, on behalf of the Institute's Directors, welcome to the 39th session of GCFI.