



# TODAY'S NEWS

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Belizean lobster fisherman. Photo Courtesy of the Belize Fisheries Dept. Belize City

## Lobster is King

Capture of the **Caribbean Spiny Lobster** (*Panulirus argus*) is perhaps the single most important fishery in the Caribbean. It is crucial to the social and economic stability of the communities that depend on lobster fisheries and as a foreign exchange earner for the nations.

Our Caribbean lobster fisheries employ an estimated 250,000 people across the region, both directly and indirectly, and generate more than US\$450 million a year.

## Caribbean Nations Look to Regional Agreement on Lobster

The **Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM)** is hoping that when member countries meet in April 2015, they will agree to new rules that prohibit the possession or trade of Spiny Lobster that do not satisfy sustainable fishing guidelines.

Given the importance of lobster in the region, the CRFM Secretariat is coordinating the development of a regional management plan and declaration to improve the conservation, sustainable use, and improved management of the fisheries to ensure its long-term viability.

A region wide management strategy is expected to address concerns that a decline in catch numbers across the region since 1995, is due to overfishing and degradation of lobster habitat.

## Aims of the Declaration

The Declaration calls on Member States to do all that is required to ensure that fishing vessels, fishers and others who are legally engaged in the capture, processing and marketing of lobster provide the data and information pertinent to their operations.

The Agreement proposes that each member state:

- ◆ Collect and share the scientific, technical and statistical data on the spiny lobster;
- ◆ Ensure that all data are collected in sufficient detail and with accuracy
- ◆ Facilitate effective assessments and conservation methods and
- ◆ Adopt provisions that require vessel owners and operators to submit catch, processing and trade data to the relevant authorities.



When in place the Agreement will provide member states with the guidelines which among other things is expected to prohibit the sale of ground lobster meat, carapace-less meat and lobster from which the eggs have been artificially removed.

The Declaration is being drafted in response to concerns that the sustainability of the region's lobster fishery is threatened by illegal un-reported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, poor conservation and management efforts, climate change, pollution and habitat degradation.

The CRFM proposals call for all member nations to adopt international best practices in all lobster fishing countries of the Caribbean. This is critical, as the Caribbean Spiny Lobster (*Panulirus argus*) is one of the region's premium fish product with inter-connecting habitats. As a result, management of this important species must be a regional effort.

### WHY A DECLARATION?

The Declaration is the first step in CRFM's proposal to strengthen the sustainability, the conservation and management of the Caribbean Spiny Lobster among member nations. Once adopted, it will provide countries with a set of tools to update and strengthen their existing laws and management systems to secure long-term viability of the lobster fisheries.

The Declaration should ensure that member states and stakeholders are better equipped to protect habitats and sustainably use the Spiny Lobster fisheries. This is particularly important to the region because of the



*Lobsters with eggs like this one shown in the photo, should be thrown back. Photo courtesy of the Belize Fisheries Department, Belize City.*

importance of lobsters to the social and economic welfare of the thousands of fisher-folk who depend on the fisheries.

Small scale commercial fishing for the Caribbean Spiny Lobster is carried out by 15 of the 17 CRFM member states, but some countries still do not have the recommended guidelines for harvesting of resource in a manner that will ensure long-term sustainability.

The CRFM Secretariat is proposing that individual states enact legislation and strong harmonization, conservation and management measures that will protect the spiny lobster stocks across the region. Lobster is a trans-boundary species with inter-connecting habitats covering broad areas of the Caribbean and moving from one habitat to the next to spawn or feed, among other things. Any negative impact on the fisheries in one country, could affect that of the others.

### *The CRFM is Working...*

The CRFM is drafting the Declaration which regional governments are expected to sign when they meet in October 2014. In support of the process, the following has been completed

- ◆ A review of lobster management and data collection systems
- ◆ A review of best practices from across the region to inform the development of a policy document aimed at the management of the lobster fishery
- ◆ Negotiated an affirmation for declaration signifying an agreement among member states for the management of the species
- ◆ In 2010 the CRFM Secretariat began collecting data on the status of the Spiny Lobster stocks from member states.
- ◆ CRFM Biennial work plans between 2008 and 2012 continued efforts to improve and strengthen sustainable use, conservation and management of the lobsters.
- ◆ CRFM produces a report titled Status and Management of the Caribbean Spiny Lobster Fisheries in the CARICOM Region gives recommendations for conservation and management of the species.

### *What is important*

- ◆ The social and economic value of the Caribbean Spiny Lobster to the countries and peoples of the region;
- ◆ The mutual interest of the people's and countries in the long term sustainable use, conservation and management of the Caribbean Spiny Lobster
- ◆ Protection of trans-boundary species such as the spiny lobster with habitats that cover a broad area of the Caribbean
- ◆ The shared responsibility of regional governments for the conservation and effective management of the spiny lobster populations inhabiting their waters so that the species are preserved and populations levels remain sustainable for the long term.
- ◆ The recognition that conservation and management of spiny lobster in the Caribbean Region cannot be effective unless it is comprehensive and supported by all States that fish spiny lobster
- ◆ That concerted, coordinated action is needed immediately, to address the threats to the existing populations.
- ◆ Countries MUST agree to work together to improve the stock status of the Caribbean Spiny Lobster and their habitats.



*Rock Lobster Tails ready for the market*

### *How Can We Help?*

- ◇ Stop fishing practises that damage the marine environment and destroy juveniles
- ◇ Throw back juveniles and undersized lobsters and lobsters with eggs;
- ◇ Follow guidelines set by authorities to protect the fishery
- ◇ Register all vessels used to fish for lobster
- ◇ Keep accurate data on the amount of lobsters caught and sold
- ◇ Get involved in CRFM activities for fishers
- ◇ Report all illegal lobster fishing
- ◇ Lobby the authorities for strong legislation protect the fishery

With some of its member states still struggling to monitor their lobster fishery, the CRFM is coordinating the negotiation and drafting of a Declaration that calls on member states to agree on the implementation of legislation to prevent illegal and unsustainable fishing methods.

These must include prohibiting the catch, possession or marketing of lobsters that are carrying eggs or those lobsters carrying sperm sacs also called tar spots.

In addition, countries are also being asked to outlaw the use of scuba diving and hookah for lobster fishing within two (2) years from the signing of the agreement.

The CRFM member states have agreed in principle, that tougher rules are needed. But even where legislation exist, the management systems make it difficult for responsible authorities to collect and collate accurate data. In addition, countries are also being asked to outlaw the use of scuba diving and hookah for lobster fishing within two (2) years from the adoption of the Declaration.

The Declaration reaffirms CRFM's role as the regional body charged with establishing and promoting cooperative agreements among member states - particularly in regard to shared and migratory resources - in a manner that satisfies each member state's economic objectives.



*Freshly captured lobsters.*

The CRFM also has responsibility for efficient management and sustainable development of the Caribbean's marine and aquatic resources. As proposed, the Agreement also makes provision for the standardisation of the data collected across the region, in an effort to make habitat and stock surveys and assessments easier and more efficient.

The Declaration proposes that Member States promote and conduct periodic scientific surveys related to conservation, management and use of the spiny lobster and its habitat. In addition, the Agreement also seeks to promote the publication and dissemination of the data collected by each state.

The agreement therefore, seeks to establish the shared responsibility of each member state in protecting and managing the species. By sharing the information collected in each territory, member states are ensuring long-term survival of the species and the industry.

The articles of the Declaration speak specifically to: a minimum length of the tail; the establishment of a closed season during which time it is prohibited to capture, kill, possess or trade the spiny lobster.

Further the Declaration seeks the cooperation of fishers in the protection of habitats and conservation of the species. Fishers are asked to observe the close seasons and preserve berried females - female lobsters with eggs attached - and males with tar spots or sperm sacks by throwing them back. It also calls for the appointment of relevant competent agencies to manage the sustainable use of the resource.

The articles of the Declaration speak to a closed season of no less than four months- between February 1 and August 31 each year; the setting of size

## **Regulating Lobster Fisheries.**

Currently Spiny Lobster capture takes place under several agreements at the country level and regionally.

Regulations that are currently in place across the region include:

- a. closed season for lobster of between three (3) and six (6) months;
- b. minimum catch sizes , requirement for management programmes and periodic scientific surveys.

The shortest closed season is Jamaica's and the longest Haiti's. Five (5) member states currently have no closed season. There is no commercial lobster fishing in Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago.

Cooperation with Central American states are facilitated under a MOU between the CRFM and its equivalent agency OSPESCA, the Belize Declaration on CRFM and Fisheries office called OSPESCA Cooperation and



*Wooden lobster traps are commonly used by fishers across the region.*



*Fishers also have a role in preserving the industry . Photo Courtesy of the Belize*

### Did You Know?

- ◆ The **Caribbean Spiny Lobtser** can grow up to two feet in length?
- ◆ That some lobsters like the Maine or American lobster have claws? These are found off the East coast of the United States.
- ◆ That you can tell the species of a lobster by its tail?
- ◆ That Clawed Lobsters have more meat than Spiny Lobsters?
- ◆ North Australian Lobsters have a green shell and



restrictions on the lobsters that are landed, as well as an average weight allocation for packaging. It also proposes the imposition of an upper limit of 2,500 traps for each industrial vessel targeting Spiny Lobster.

In addition, the Declaration proposes the use of biodegradable material for the building of lobster traps and sets construction guidelines requiring that lobster traps are built with at least one escape gap of no less than 2 1/8 inch or 5.4cm to allow juveniles to escape. Other proposals include the suggestion that states ensure that all traps are removed from the sea at the end of the season and determine when legally entitled fishers can return to set their traps for the opening of the season.

### Existing Regulations

Lobster capture in the Caribbean is currently guided by several other international agreements such as UNCLOS, the FAO Code of Conduct on Responsible Fishing. Fishers and other interests are being invited to provide input in the development of the declaration and urged to lobby their governments to ensure that this agreement become one of the most significant tools in the CARICOM framework.

The Declaration seeks a commitment from CRFM Member State to ensure that best practices and the reporting of illegal international encroachments are among urgently included in the legislative frameworks. It calls on each member nation to observe and follow through on the commitments made that will determine whether or not the industry survives.



# Fishing for Lobster



*Fresh lobster tails .*



*Sorting and quality control*



*The tails are weighed and Individually wrapped*



*Packaging complete.*



*Ready for the market!*

*Photographs courtesy of the Belize Fisheries Department, Belize City.*

## **ABOUT THE CRFM**

The Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) was officially inaugurated on 27 March 2003, in Belize City, Belize, where it is headquartered.

The CRFM was established following the signing of the “Agreement Establishing the CRFM” on February 4, 2002 and is an inter-governmental organization.

The CRFM’s mission is to “To promote and facilitate the responsible utilization 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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