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Sustainable Harvesting of Commercial Species in the Belize Exclusive Economic Zone

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Abstract

The Caribbean region is widely recognised to be a hot spot for marine biodiversity. The area hosts a wide range of habitats and species of conservation and fisheries importance. The main and most economically important fisheries in the area concentrates on spiny lobster (*Panulirus argus*) and queen conch (*Strombus gigas*). These species are key to sustaining sources of protein intake, livelihoods, and economic trade for local Caribbean communities. These two species have fluctuated throughout the years and their distribution has remained in similar quantities in landings since 2005. The queen conch peaked in 2012 following high sample density and increasing shell length, whilst the spiny lobster has generally remained stable in terms of landings. However, there are limited datasets across some years, which have created gaps in the current assessments. The general concept of effort was described by the number of fishing days, which has generally increased from 1990 to 2011. The rate of change in effort from 2006 to 2011 was mirrored by that in queen conch landings, but these values were inverse when compared to the spiny lobster landings, due to limited distribution of conch resulting from over exploitation. The country's new government and new

ministries have enacted new legislation and new opportunities to continue to explore and protect queen conch and spiny lobster, whether by a remit for Marine Protected Areas (MPA) or under dedicated Nature-based Solutions (NBS) approaches. The need to acquire data and fast evidence to support these stocks under a changing climate (including ocean acidification) is of interest. A recent effort has called for an informed and participative compilation of a stakeholder-supported strategy. A solid management plan has been developed and implemented to support management and conservation in the face of climate change. This presentation showcases options to support management and conservation decisions over a robust stakeholder participation with active and transparent discussions, workshops and activities.

KEYWORDS: Caribbean, management, conservation, commercial species, participation

NOTE: *There is no accompanying paper for this item.*

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