CONTRIBUTION 10.2

National Report on the Status of Fisheries and Aquaculture in ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

1. OVERVIEW

The state of Antigua and Barbuda lies in the Lesser Antilles Island Chain. The islands are bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the East and the Caribbean Sea to the west. The islands of Antigua and Barbuda are located between latitude 17° 00' N and 17° 44' N and longitude 61° 39` W and 61° 55' W, with Antigua to the south and Barbuda approximately 42 kilometres to the north. The uninhabited Redonda lies to the southwest at 16 55` N and 062 21` allowing for the territory being established as an Archipelagic State in 1982. With a coastline measuring 153km, the islands cover a total land area of 442 km^2 with Antigua accounting for 280 km^2, Barbuda 160 km^2 and Redonda 2 km^2. In contrast to the relatively small landmass, Antigua and Barbuda sits on an extensive insular shelf encompassing the inhabited islands with gentle bathymetric relief down to 30 metres depth. This vast shelf along with the Redonda shelf and various offshore shelves, amounting to a total shelf area of 3,568 km^2, provides adequate habitat for demersal resources targeted by artisanal fishers.

The fishing industry is responsible for half of the agricultural sector's 2% contribution to the National GDP. In 2020, during the global pandemic, the importance of the fishing industry for its role in food security and securing the livelihood of residents was realized. In 2020, the number of licenses issued to local fishers increased by over 200% over the previous year as people displaced from major industries such as tourism and construction made the transition or re-entry into fishing to maintain their livelihood. At the end of 2021 the number of registered Fishers in Antigua and Barbuda inclusive of 7 Aquaculturist, was 2497 of which 131 were females.

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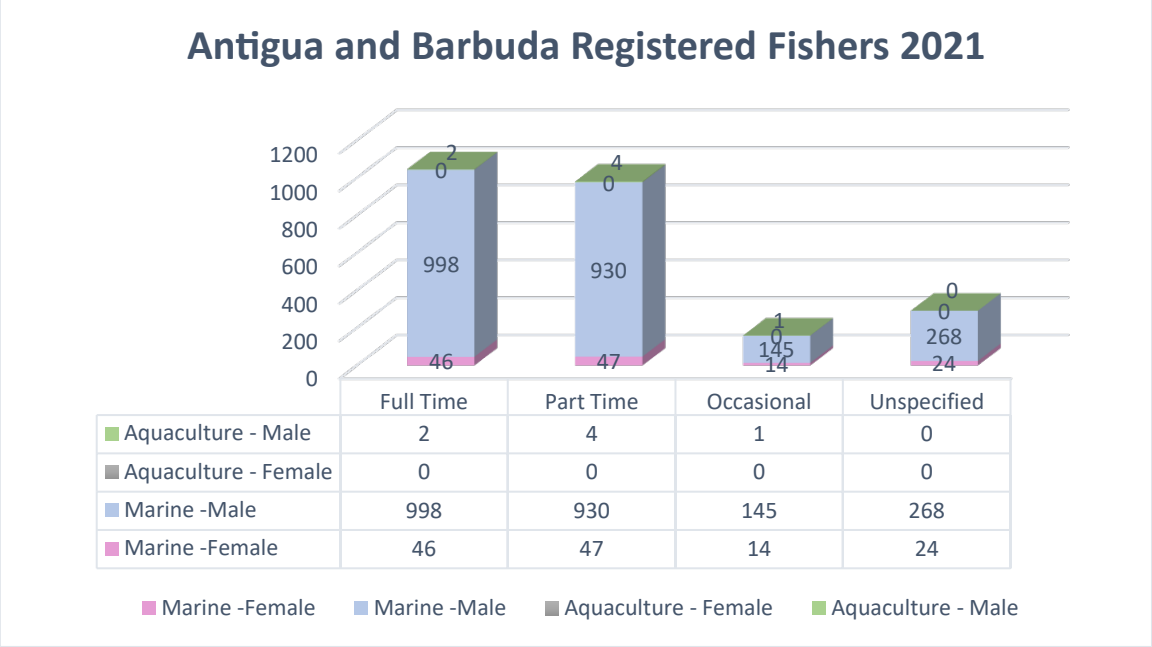


Source: H. Simon, Fisheries Division, ANU

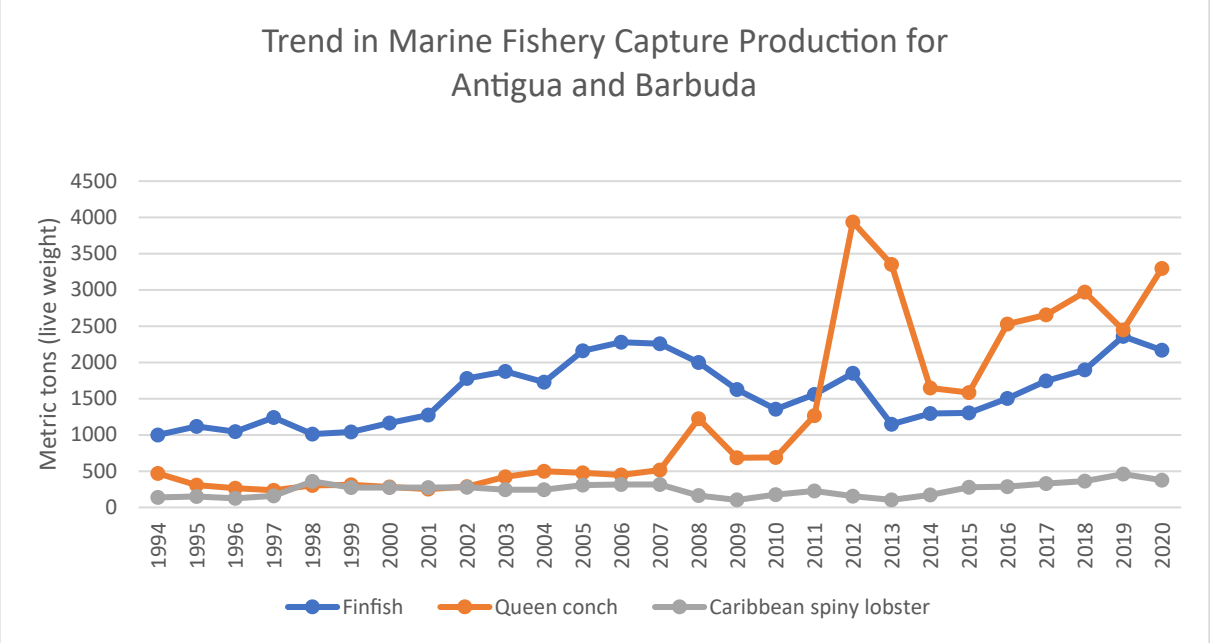
2. FISHERIES SUB-SECTORS AT A GLANCE

Marine capture fishery continues to dominate the fisheries sector in Antigua due to the extent of the insular shelf. Demersal species such as the Caribbean Spiny lobster, the Queen conch and reef fish are among the primary commercially targeted species. The Lobster fishery is most important for the fisherfolk in Barbuda where more than 80% of their total landings are exported. Local commercial fishing vessels are becoming more involved in the pelagic fishery with 8 fishing vessels utilizing FAD droplines as the primary gear in their operations with an additional 61 commercial fishing vessels trolling for pelagic fish in 2019.

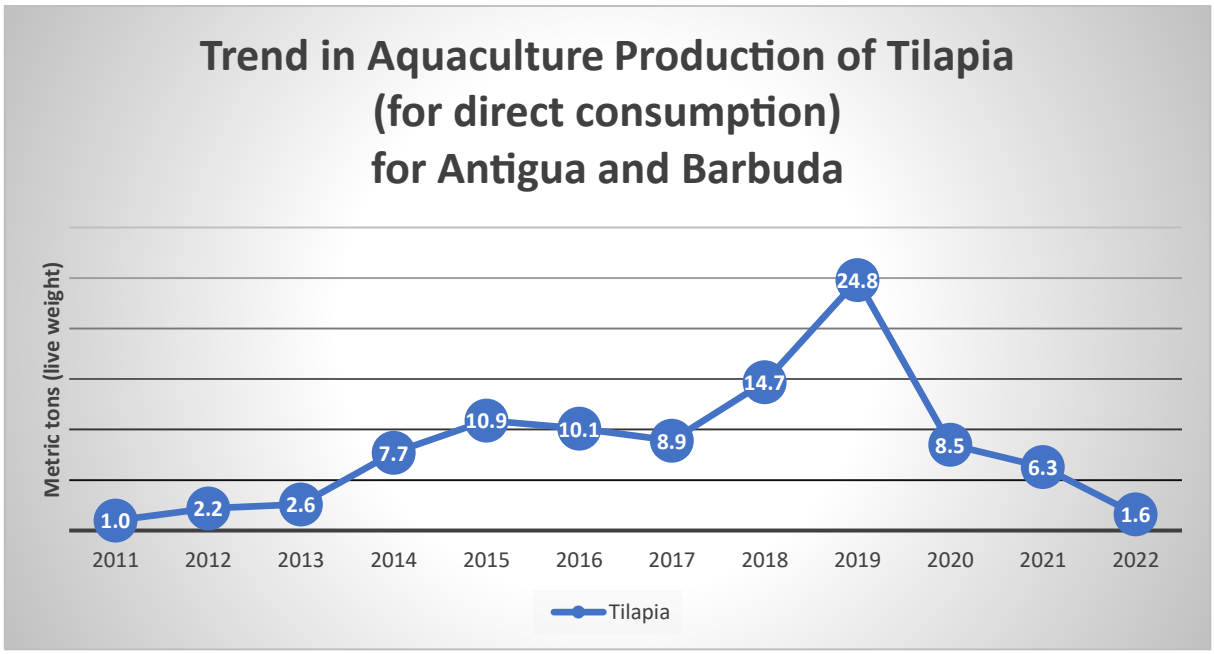
High electricity cost coupled with low annual rainfall would have resulted in hesitancy in the development of aquaculture in the past. However, within the last 15 years, with the utilization of renewable energy and other technological advancement, there have been some progress in the development in the aquaculture subsector mainly in aquaponics.

3. PRODUCTION

The fishing industry continues to show resilience in the mist of the challenges faced by the impacts of climate change and other anthropogenic features affecting fisheries on a global scale. In 2020 the landings for the Caribbean Spiny Lobster, Queen Conch and Finfish combined were estimated to be approximately 5840 metric tons (live weight) valued at 68 million Eastern Caribbean Dollars. Aquaculture production on the other hand peaked at 24.8 metric tons in 2019 but have taken a major hit due to the worldwide economic and health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, with production in 2022 falling to 1.6 metric tons.



Source: I. Horsford, Fisheries Division, ANU



Source: I. Horsford, Fisheries Division, ANU

4. INDUSTRY OPERATIONS

Local licensed Fishers operate from 28 landing sites across Antigua and 4 in Barbuda. These sites range from landing beaches with no infrastructure to tertiary sites with amenities such as ice and cold storage facilities, gear lockers, fuel depots and slipway to accommodate maintenance and repair of fishing

vessels. There are approximately 350 active fishing vessels operating in Antigua with an additional 40 based in Barbuda. A large majority of these are polyvalent fishing vessels which may employ two or more fishing methods within the same trip. In some cases, the planned secondary gear may be promoted to primary depending on its effectiveness at the time.

2021 Active Fishing Vessels – Primary Gear by Vessel Size Class						
Primary Gear	**<21 ft**	**21-30 ft**	**31-40 ft**	**41-50 ft**	**>50 ft**	**Gear Total**
Bait Nets	5	1				**6**
Beach Seine		1				**1**
Bottom longline - Palangre	2	7	2			**11**
Dropline - FAD	0	8				**8**
Free Dive	6	1				**7**
Gillnet - Bottom Set	18	16	1	1		**36**
Handline/Rod & Reel	54	28	4			**86**
SCUBA-Conch/Lobster Fish	3	12	4			**19**
Traps - Deep		1	3	2	1	**7**
Traps - Shallow	15	49	22	3	1	**90**
Trolling	13	42	17	4	2	**78**
Unspecified		1				**1**
Number of Vessels in Size Class	116	167	53	10	4	**350**

Fish Trap fishery

Trap fishing for the Caribbean Spiny Lobster and reef fish was the predominant primary fishing gear in Antigua up until the mid-2000s when handline fishing became increasingly popular due to the lower investment costs and lower susceptibility to theft compared to fish traps. Although the percentage of vessels utilizing traps decreased, the application of GPS technology to aid in the deployment and retrieval of traps without surface markers increased resulting in the reduced risk of theft. In addition to the shallow traps set to depths of less than 200 metres, Fishers also utilize traps on the deep slope to target the deep-water species such as the silk and vermillion snappers.

Queen Conch fishery

Harvesting of the Queen Conch is done by divers operating mainly from the southern section of Antigua with the use of SCUBA. The risks associated with the use of SCUBA for commercial diving have somewhat curtailed the entry into the conch fishery in some sections of the island. However, this tradition is being kept alive in the “Round South” conch fishing community with the number of younger Fishers entering the industry on the increase.

Pelagic fishery

Traditionally, the pelagic species were targeted mainly by independent sports fishers or in some cases vessels engaged in sport fishing charters. To promote diversification within the capture fishery, the Fisheries Division made attempts in the early 2000s to encourage Fishers to target the underutilized pelagic fish. These efforts got a significant boost through the Caribbean Fisheries Co-management Project

(CARIFICO), a Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) sponsored project aimed at promoting Fisheries Co-management through the construction, management, and utilization of Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) within the OECS. Through this project, local fisherfolks have been able to enjoy the economic benefits associated with the capture of these high value species and have established a FAD Fishers Association which continues to operate beyond the project period. Fish harvested by FAD fishing vessels are sold fresh (gutted and iced) to local hotels and restaurants directly by the Fishers or through a middleman.

Gillnet Fishery

The use of gillnets regained popularity in the early 2000s when a ban on the issue of permits for the use of spear guns for fishing was imposed. The ban resulted in the displacement of scores of fishers, some of whom ventured into the gillnet fishery as an alternative fishing method. In the southern section of Antigua, a small group of divers, during the closed season for conch, uses the gillnet in a method they term as “Ranching” where the divers would search for schools of fish then encircle them with gillnets.

Beach Seine

The use of beach seines has lost its popularity since in the 1980s and has become somewhat of a dying method of fishing. There is currently one beach seine operating in Antigua. The operations are somewhat sporadic with a few mature folks, villagers or family members being part of the operation at different times.

Processing and value chain

To add value to their catch, some Fishers who target the deepwater snappers would scale and gut some of the fish before placing them for sale with the processing fee accounted for. Some vendors at the St. John’s Public fish market also provide basic processing services at a cost to their customers. Local fishery products are usually consumed fresh while cheaper processed products such as dried salted fish or smoked herring are imported. However, when the markets of fresh pelagic fish recede during the offseason for tourism, some of the catch may be sliced and vacuum sealed and stored frozen until a market is available. In other instances, fishers have developed postharvest products for a niche market where cold-smoked marlin which received regional recognition is available. Dockside filleting of small pelagic such as the dolphinfish is done as a service to clients and creates entertainment for onlookers.

Establishments involved in the export of live Caribbean Spiny lobster are designed with facilities for the proper storage, sorting, inspection, and packaging of the lobsters in accordance with European Union food safety requirements. Lobsters are shipped live to the European Union via Guadeloupe or Sint Maarten and to other international markets as far as Hong Kong and mainland China.

Fishery in Barbuda

In Barbuda, the main target fishery is for the Caribbean Spiny Lobster harvested by divers and a few trap Fishers. The Queen Conch is occasionally harvested by the same divers for local consumption, while gillnets are being utilized by a handful of Fishers.

Aquaculture

There have been numerous proposals for major aquaculture facilities to be established in Antigua and Barbuda. To date, none of these proposals have become a reality. Although the scale of operations for the aquaculture facilities in Antigua remains relatively small, the level of technological advancement is on par with larger facilities with one of these local establishments serving as the FAO's sub-regional training hub specializing in aquaponics. The aquaponics systems in Antigua usually involves tilapia being raised with vegetables, mainly lettuce. One of the more advanced facilities provides additional service to boost revenue. These services include the coordinating and hosting of events such as receptions and parties, processing of the farm raised fish and even preparation of meals. The facility has further extended their operations into the ornamental fish sales.

Fishing Communities

In Antigua and Barbuda, the concept of Fishing Communities continues to evolve with the modernization of the fishing fleet, adoption of modern technology for navigation as well as regional integration allowing for easier settlement of other Caribbean nationals in the country. Traditionally, the term Fishing Community was used to describe geographical settlements where a substantial portion of the economic activities were being generated from the fisheries sector. During this period, fish markets were decentralized and possessed greater autonomy.

As time progressed, fishing vessels became mechanized, the size increased as did the range, allowing the Fishers to explore new fishing grounds. Another major change came about as result of the changing demographics; there were more "outsiders" coming into the villages and becoming engaged in fishing activities, breaking the traditional bonds that once held the physical/geographical communities together. This resulted in virtual fishing communities being formed through common interest such as gear type, fishing area, site of operation, social standings, the ability to own a fishing vessel and target markets among other factors. For example, there is a community of "Conch Divers" which is a subset of the traditional "Round South" Community. However, although most of the conch fishing vessels on Antigua operate out of Urlings (southwestern section of Antigua), with some rotating their place of landing based on proximity to the fishing area that they are utilizing, some of conch divers are now living at different parts of the island.

In Antigua and Barbuda, when the term Fishing Community is used, it differs according to the context of the discussion. The traditional fishing community which was based primarily on the geographic location of the Fisher's residence and/or operating site is almost non-existent except for Barbuda, which is still basically a single settlement. A community of Fishers or a "Virtual" Fishing Community may be recognized based on any of the following factors:

- Operating from the same landing site.
- Operating from neighbouring sites and share same fishing grounds.
- Operating similar size of vessels with bonds being formed for safety concerns – other vessels within the class will have the capability to assist in search and rescue operations including towing the other vessel back to shore. Within this grouping a vessel may be shared with another operator for use during down-time" of another vessel.

- Use of similar gear, whether on same or different fishing grounds.
- Target markets.
- Associated middleman/fish retailer.
- Engine type – ability to access parts and share mechanical know-how for minor issues.

Note – It is common for a single fisher to be part of more than one of these "Virtual" Fishing Communities.

5. MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The Fisheries Division's goal for the Fisheries Sector is to ensure its development occurs in a manner, which is "sustainable" and capable of contributing its full potential to the overall development of the national economy. Continuous improvements in the Fisheries Division's management capabilities through capacity building for staff coupled, with intersectoral collaboration is one of the primary objectives in achieving this goal. The Fisheries Division encourages the optimal exploitation of the marine resources including increasing local fish production of under-exploited species. To further highlight the role that the fishing industry plays in the building of the national economy, and providing supplementary income to Fishers, the Fisheries Division is working with stakeholders to expand the value chain through post-harvest processing and development of fishery products.

Fish is an important source of protein and essential minerals and vitamins to the diet of many persons in small islands such as Antigua and Barbuda. Therefore, fisheries play an important role in achieving national food and nutrition security. Noting the importance of this food source and to maintain sustainability of the resources, fisheries management measures are constantly progressing to retain relevance as the industry evolves. Prior to 2013, Antigua and Barbuda had an open access fishery. With the enactment of new fisheries legislation, the fishery is now limited access with additional protection for some key commercially harvested species. The Caribbean Spiny Lobster was offered additional protection with a default two-month closed season starting on May 1st and runs to June 30th of each year, protection from landing of females with intact spermatophores, as well as the requirement for vessel owners to first obtain a Special Permit to allow for its harvest. The harvesting of egg bearing, moulting and undersized lobsters is prohibited under the Fisheries Regulations, and all lobsters must be landed whole. A two-month closed season and Special permit for harvesting of the queen conch was also added to the legislated protection measures for the Queen Conch. This closed season runs from July 1st to August 31 of each year.

The Nassau Grouper (*Epinephelus striatus*), Red Hind (*Epinephelus guttatus*), Coney (*Cephalopholis fulvus*) and Parrotfish (*Scaridae*), are afforded protection from harvest during their peak spawning periods. The legislated closed season for the Parrotfish is May 1st to July 31st of each year while the Nassau Grouper, Red Hind and Coney are protected from harvesting from January 1st to March 31st of each year.

The spear gun has been known to be one of the most selective fishing gears when used by a responsible Fisher. The gear is also one of the most efficient. The high efficiency rate coupled with the low investment cost has the potential to lead to overfishing in the nearshore areas if its use is unchecked. To mitigate against unrestricted use of this gear, provisions for a Special

Permit for the use of a spear gun were included in the Fisheries Regulations 2013. The process for obtaining the permit includes submission of an application which is then reviewed by the Fisheries Division to determine eligibility of the applicant. Points considered during the review includes the applicant's compliance records as well as that for the vessel on which they operate. Permits for use of a spear gun are not issued to sport or recreational Fishers or people not engaged in fishing from a licensed commercial vessel. The holder of a special Permit for the use of spear gun is further limited to a total of six (6) fish with no more than three (3) being of the same species within a 24-hour period. The use of a spear gun is also prohibited in all areas specified as conservation areas.

Marine turtles currently have full protection from harvest with the moratorium and options in the Regulations for the areas to be declared by the Minister with responsibility for Fisheries as a turtle nesting area through notice in the gazette. The Regulations also prohibits the taking of turtle eggs or disturbing turtle nests.

The establishment of conservation areas in the marine environment assist in the protection of many species at various stages of their life cycle. Enhanced protection is required particularly at the larval and juvenile stages. In Antigua and Barbuda, Marine conservation areas range from large zoned marine management areas such as the Northeast Marine Management Area (NEMMA) which covers nearly a quarter of Antigua's coastline, to smaller localized restricted areas such as Dimond and Saltfish Tail Reef. The Barbuda (Coastal Zoning and Management) Regulations 2014, complementing the Barbuda Fisheries Regulations provide further protection for marine organisms and their habitats around the coast of Barbuda. This regulation covers all the waters including submerged lands within 3 nautical miles of the island and include areas designated as marine sanctuaries, no-net zones, shipping areas, and anchoring and mooring zones.

6. INSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The legislative framework for the management of the fisheries in Antigua and Barbuda is enshrined in the *Fisheries Act, No. 22 of 2006* and the *Fisheries Regulations, No. 2 of 2013*. Seafood safety, quality assurance and international trade are key areas to aid with further development of the sector. Therefore, for Antigua and Barbuda to meet the challenges posed by the ever-evolving requirements in the international seafood trade, the *Fisheries (Seafood) Regulations, No. 47 of 2022* and the *Seafood (live Lobster) (Technical) Regulations, No. 48 of 2022* were developed.

The Fisheries Division is the agency with the primary responsibility for fisheries management and development in Antigua and Barbuda. In the absence of a coastal zone management unit, collaboration between the Fisheries Division and NGOs and/or other government agencies is often a required. Partnering agencies such as the Department of Environment and the Development Control Authority will often time share resources and technical expertise on matters related to coastal development which has potential to impact the coastal marine environment. The authority to enforce the Fisheries Act 2006 and Fisheries Regulations 2013 are entrusted to "Authorised Officers". Under the Fisheries Act 2006, *"authorised officer"*

means a fisheries officer, a customs officer, member of the Antigua and Barbuda Defence Force or police officer and any other person or category of persons designated as an authorised officer by the minister under section 61. (Section 61 gives the minister authority to designate by notice published in the Gazette persons as authorised officers for the purpose of the Act).

Antigua and Barbuda is a member state of the CARICOM Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM). This regional organization is focused on promoting the management and conservation of fishery to support sustainable resource utilization. Antigua and Barbuda have benefited tremendously from its participation in the CRFM. Some of these benefits include capacity development opportunities provided to Fisheries Officers through training workshops and the acquisition of educational scholarships at the tertiary level. Collaboration with the CRFM was key in the development of the catch and effort and biological data collection system locally. Regional data and statistics working groups have been developed through the CRFM to assist with the management of commercially important species and species groups among its member states. With the Queen Conch being the second most commercially important species in the Antigua and Barbuda, the ongoing support of the CRFM in contesting a petition brought about by a US based NGO, aiming to have the Queen Conch listed as threatened or endangered under the US Endangered Species Act.

The islands of Antigua and Barbuda are geographically located within the FAO fishing area 31 which is a major part of the area covered by the Western Central Atlantic Fisheries Commission (WECAFC). The work of the CRFM is further supported on a wider scale by WECAFC. Additional technical and financial support is provided through WECAF to maintain the working groups established under the CRFM and OSPESCA, CRFM's Latin America counterpart.

Research, education, and training

Sound scientific evidence, coupled with local knowledge are the bases on which fisheries management policies are developed. The Fisheries Division have partnered with Fisherfolks and other local, regional, and international organisations in the execution of fisheries research and development programmes. In the spirit of Fisheries Co-management, the socio-economic aspects of the fisheries cannot be ignored when developing policies, and therefore, research in these areas were also conducted. The results of these activities have been shared though various forums including publications at the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI). GCFI publications includes *GCFI_64(2011) Horsford et al Morphology of the Queen Conch from the Antigua & Barbuda Shelf, GCFI_65(2012) Horsford & Lay Comparative Analysis of Different Approaches to Fisheries Co-management in Antigua & Barbuda, GCFI_65(2012) Horsford et al Morphology of the Queen Conch from the Island of Barbuda Implications for Fish Management, GCFI_66(2013) Horsford et al Biology Status & Current Management of the Caribbean Spiny Lobster in Antigua & Barbuda, GCFI_67(2014) Horsford Biological & Economic Aspects of Management of the Red Hind Fishery of Antigua & Barbuda, and GCFI_69 (2016) Simon et al Antigua and Barbuda Fish Aggregating Device Co-management Cost Benefit Analysis.*

Public education and outreach have been instrumental over the years in garnering the support of consumers in the enforcement of the Fisheries Act and Regulations, particularly the closed seasons. Occasionally, Fisheries Officers engage the public through local media houses. The Fisheries Division have partnered with Fisherfolks and other agencies to organise events geared towards the promotion of processed products utilizing underutilized or less desired marine species including the diamondback squid and smoking or salting of locally caught fish as an alternative to imports.

Fisheries Extension and training services have been formalized after the enactment of the Fisheries Act and Regulations in 2013. As a result, the Fisheries Professional Development Training Program was instituted based on the principles of the Basic Fisher Training Course (BFTC) pioneered by the Fisheries Division in the Commonwealth of Dominica. Between 2014 and 2017 the Fisheries Division in both countries, with support from JICA developed and published the Regional - BFTC manual.

Through the Fisheries Professional Development Training Program, Fisherfolks receive training in the areas of *Food Safety &Quality Assurance, Safety at Sea and Basic Navigation, Small Business Management for Fisherfolks, Marine Engine Preventative Maintenance, First Aid & CPR, and Dive Safety* (a specialized course for Fishers utilizing SCUBA). Apart from the formal training, Fishers continue to benefit from individual or customized training at the vessel level in the areas of *Navigation, Use of Navigation and other electronic fishing aids, as well as Fishing gear technology and gear development.*

7. KEY DEVELOPMENT TRENDS OVER THE LAST 20 YEARS

Co-management and MCS

There have been significant changes in the fishing industry in Antigua and Barbuda over the last two decades as the industry continue to evolve. It had become obvious that the top-down approach to fisheries management was becoming obsolete and that effective fisheries management and protection measures require the support of all stakeholders within the industry. The Fisheries Division, over the years have adopted the Co-management approach to the sector. Fishers and other industry stakeholders played a key role in the early 2000s in the development of the current Fisheries Act and Regulations, resulting in the relatively smooth transition once these two pieces of legislation were enacted in 2013. Over the years, local Fisherfolks have worked in unison with the Fisheries Division in fisheries research and development projects which highlighted the importance of Fisherfolks as Stewards in the industry. Fisheries Co-management in Antigua and Barbuda was brought to the forefront when the Fisheries Division along with Fishers engaged in the harvesting of the Queen Conch, in 2006, being relieved that CITES had lifted trade sanctions for the Queen Conch in Antigua and Barbuda as the country had satisfied the requirements. Support for the fisheries data collection system, allowing for easy access to biological, catch and effort data and traditional knowledge as well as amicable negotiations for introduction of a two-month closed season for the conch fishery were instrumental in the process of meeting the CITIES requirements.

To assist in Monitoring Control and Surveillance (MCS) being done by the Fisheries Division, Coast Guard and the Co-management partners, a coastal monitoring network system comprising of three AIS and RADAR systems were installed across the islands with the Fisheries Division's office being the monitoring centre.

Development in the sector

Infrastructure development at fish landing sites including the construction of three fisheries complexes in Antigua and one in Barbuda with ice production and cold storage facilities were instrumental in the enhancement of the food safety standards across the country. The availability of ice along with training, education and legislation geared towards seafood safety and quality assurance have set the local industry on a path to be competitive on the regional and international

markets. Fishing operations have also become more efficient form the perspective of operational cost, since vessel operators are able to spend longer times at sea as opposed to multiple shorter trips per week in the earlier periods where accessibility to ice was limited.

Improvement in the sanitary conditions of fishing vessels and maintaining a higher quality of seafood were key in Antigua and Barbuda's continued access to the European Union's market for live lobster. The country's success with the EU laid the foundation for the expansion into other markets as far as Hong Kong and mainland China. As accessibility to more international markets began to materialize, Fisherfolks made the necessary adjustments to their vessel's equipment to become more competitive. Currently, more than 90% of the fishing vessels engaged in the trap fishery are equipped with Global Positioning System (GPS), echo sounders and mechanical haulers for the retrieval of the traps. There has also been a shift away from wooden vessels to modern Fibreglass fishing vessels across all the size classes. For vessels equipped with outboard motors, the more fuel efficient 4-stroke engines have surpassed the traditional 2-stroke engines in the size class from 90 horsepower and upwards.

Management adjustments

The advancements within the sector would have resulted in the existing fisheries management measures becoming outdated and changes were needed maintain relevance. With the introduction of the Fisheries Act 2006 and the Fisheries Regulations 2013, fisheries management had been adjusted to adequately address the industry. The industry changed from open access to a limited entry system with the requirement for Fishers to be entered into the Record of Local Licence Fishers. Closed seasons for key species as well as special permits for the Queen Conch, Caribbean Spiny Lobster and the use of spear gun and beach seine were also implemented (see management measures). Incentives to continue in the diversification of the fishery from nearshore to target the relatively under-utilized pelagic resources were provided with the support of JICA under the CARIFICO project with the co-management of FADs.

8. PROJECTIONS FOR FUTURE ADVANCEMENT OF THE SECTOR AS WE TRANSITION TOWARDS A BLUE ECONOMY

Prior to the completion and subsequent enactment of the current fisheries legislation, Stakeholders were afforded the opportunity to give their input on the draft Regulations and fishers were able to advance negotiations for the proposed closed seasons. These negotiations resulted in the implementation of a two-month closed season for both the Queen Conch and the Caribbean Spiny Lobster in lieu of the initially proposed four months. The closed seasons have received positive response from Fisherfolks, other Stakeholders and Fisheries Managers. Building on the momentum of these initiatives in fisheries management, the intent is to continue to expand the use of closed seasons to cover other commercially important species that may include some species of snappers as warranted. The same applies to protected areas, enhancement of management plans for existing protected areas and management areas as well as the declaration of new protected areas such as in Redonda.

The Fisheries Division intends to capitalize on the success of ongoing Fisheries Co-management initiatives among the Conch Fishers and those involved in the utilization of FADs. Therefore, in fisheries governance, the Fisheries Division will continue to work towards promoting fisheries co-management or participatory management in Antigua and Barbuda using the most appropriate level of devolution of management (consultative, collaborative or delegated co-management).

With Fisherfolks being the primary stakeholders in the industry, it is important that the necessary social protection programs be implemented for their support. Therefore, in this area, registration with Social Security and Medical Benefits have become a prerequisite for registering as a local licensed fisher under the Fisheries Regulations 2013 (i.e., synergy between social protection (SP) and fisheries policies). The Fisheries Division intends to partner with SP agencies to incorporate education on social security and medical benefits in the Fisher Professionalization Programme. To further safeguard their livelihoods and offer another level of protection from the potential of them being displaced due to coastal developments in other sectors, the Fisheries Division will ensure that traditional access and user rights in the context of the blue economy are secured by formally (legally) designating traditional landing sites so that they have greater protection.

To advance climate resilience in the fisheries sector, Government intends to sign on to the CCRIF SPC COAST insurance scheme once the pilot phase is complete. In working towards this goal and ensuring sustainability in the sector, the Fisheries Division will embark on the programme for the marking of fishing gear and the inclusion of biodegradable panels in fish traps. Recent achievement in the area of IUU, as of 2023, a catch certificate is required for export of any fish or fishery product from Antigua and Barbuda regardless of the destination (i.e., exporters have to provide evidence of purchase from authorised fishers or traders). The next step in "closing the net" on illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing is adapting the catch certification programme for the other major consumer group – local hotels and restaurants.

The Fisheries Division will continue to work with local stakeholders including other government agencies and NGOs in the blue economy as well as regional and international partners to promote the sustainable use of the marine fisheries resources in the waters of Antigua and Barbuda, while protecting the interest and livelihoods of our local Fisherfolks.