CONTRIBUTION 10.3

National Report on the Status of Fisheries and Aquaculture in THE BAHAMAS

1. INTRODUCTION

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas demography and economy

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas is an archipelago of roughly 3,000 small islands and cays with a land area of about 13,935 km^2. It has a total continental shelf area of approximately 116,550 km^2. The islands and cays are spread over an area of some 230,000 km^2 and are located on 16 plateaus separated from each other and from Florida, Cuba and Hispaniola by depths of 350 – 3600 meters. The archipelago comprises 700 islands and 2,400 cays, of which 29 are inhabited (referred to as Family Islands).

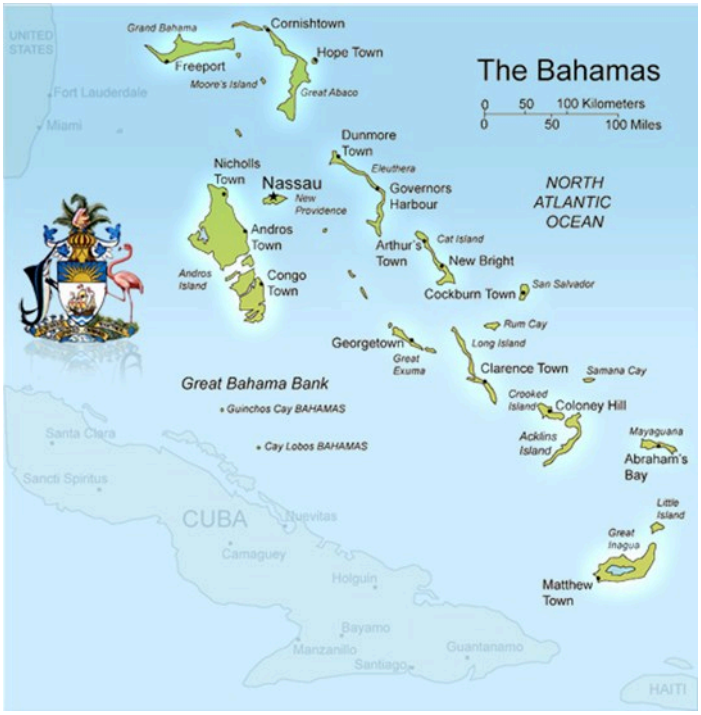

Figure 1. The Commonwealth of The Bahamas archipelago map

CITATION: Department of Marine Resources, The Bahamas, 2026. National Report on the Status of Fisheries and Aquaculture in The Bahamas. Contribution 10.3, p 23-28 *IN* CRFM, 2026. Volume II: National Reports on the Status of Fisheries and Aquaculture. Presented at the CRFM 20th Anniversary Scientific Conference, 28-31 August 2023. CRFM Special Publication No. 37, CRFM Secretariat https://www.crfm.int/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=957

The population of The Bahamas according to the preliminary count of the 2022 census conducted by The Bahamas National Statistical Institute is estimated to be 399,314 which is within the range of previous population projections that were made after the 2010 census. (BNSI, 2022)

Eighty-six percent of the population is concentrated, mainly in the urban centers, of New Providence and Grand Bahama (Bahamas National Statistical Institute, 2022). 74% of the population of which resided in New Providence, 12% in Grand Bahama and 14% in the other Family Islands.

The overall poverty rate in The Bahamas is 12.5 %. New Providence and Grand Bahama present a similar or lower poverty rates (respectively 12.4% and 9.4%) whereas Family Islands have a higher rate (17.2%). Hence, poverty rates are higher in rural communities. However, the total number of poor people in the population is higher in New Providence and Grand Bahama than in the rest of the Family Islands (BNSI, 2016a).

The economic development of The Bahamas is largely driven by its tourism and finance sectors, which contribute respectively 10 and 11 % to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). (BNSI, 2016b). The fisheries sector plays an important role with respect to foreign currency earnings, assisting the country to meet its food security needs, employment and social well-being. Its contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ranges between 1-2% annually, according to data compiled by the Department of Marine Resources. However, preliminary findings from a study conducted by BNSI estimated that the fisheries sector accounts for 20% of the country's GDP considering the entire value chain including commercial and recreational fishing, fisheries processing, exports, sports fishing and supply for the local market.

2. FISHERIES KEY FACTORS IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS

Commercial fishing takes place on the continental shelf, mainly on the Great Bahama Bank and Little Bahama Bank. These two banks constitute the majority of the 116,550 km2 of continental shelf area. The continental shelf is nearly 18% of the total Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of The Bahamas of 654, 719 km2. The fisheries sector contributes an estimated 20 % to the GDP combining commercial fishing and sports fishing sectors respectively (BNSI 2021). This percentage plays an important role in the economy in terms of foreign currency earnings, food supply and employment.

3. PRODUCTION

The fish supply available to the Bahamian population is an estimated 31 kg/capita per year, however actual fish consumption levels are lower as a large share of the fish landed and imported is supplied to the tourism sector. Fisheries products are important in the diet of the Bahamian people as nearly 10% of total protein intake originates from fish and fisheries products. The total commercial fisheries production in 2015 was estimated at nearly 12,000 tonnes. The total production has fluctuated in recent years.

Fluctuations are largely caused by the variations in landings of Caribbean spiny lobster (*Panulirus argus*), which were nearly 10,000 tonnes in whole weight in 2010 and 2012, 6,500 tonnes in 2015 and 6,994 tonnes in 2022.

Spiny lobster stocks in The Bahamas are being fully exploited, while conch, snappers and groupers are, under heavy fishing pressure and some stocks are possibly overexploited. The major threats to the marine fisheries resources are coastal zone development, boat and diver damage to the reef, over-harvesting of commercial species and disturbance to sensitive sites.

Additionally, the recreational and sport fisheries subsector of the fisheries sector is important as they contributes an estimated 500+ million USD annually to the national economy through related expenditures by tourists and provide employment for some 18,000 Bahamians. The recreational and sport fisheries target game fish, such as marlins and sailfishes, as well as bone fish. Aquaculture has been identified as a priority by the Ministry of Agriculture, Marine Resource and Family Island Affairs in the last decade, but this subsector is still in its infancy phase and is growing slowly.

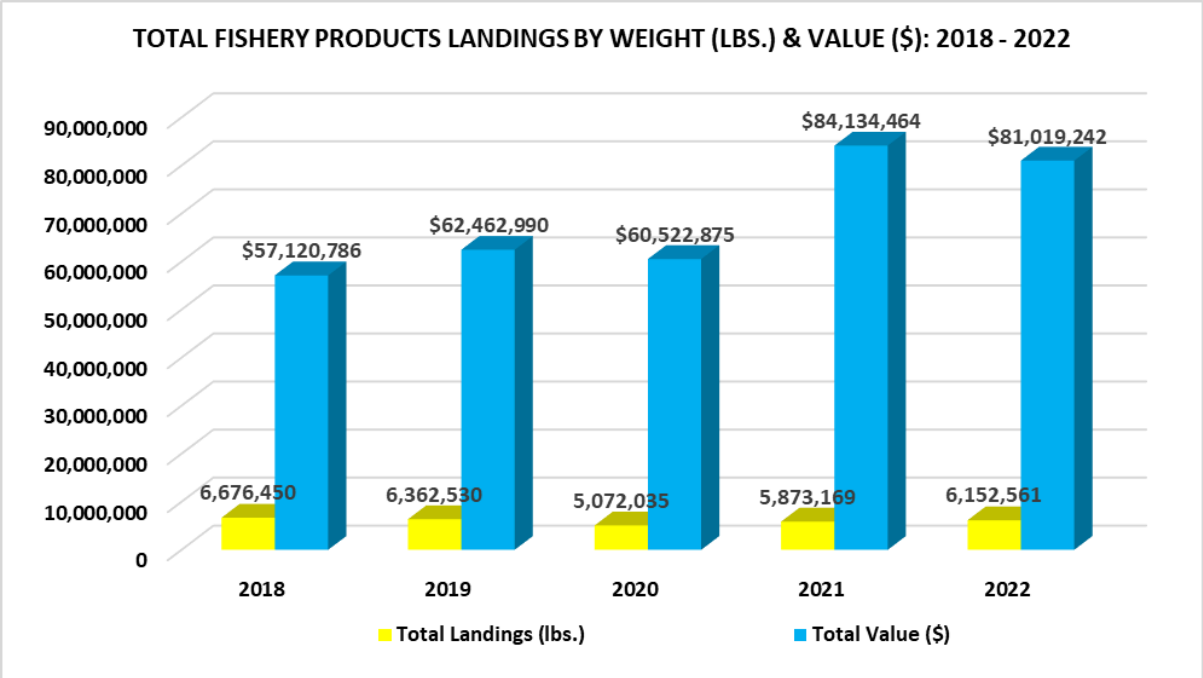

Figure 2. Graph showing the total landing from the years 2018 to 2022

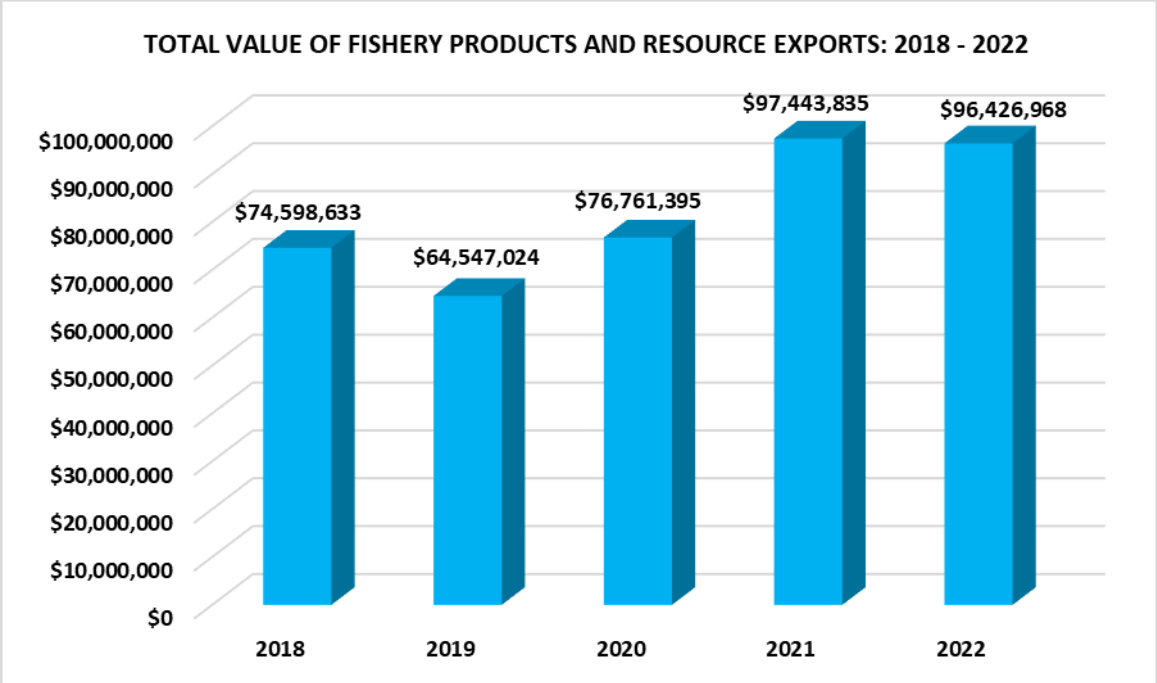

Figure 3. Graph showing the total value of fishery products and resource exports 2018 to 2022

Industry Operations

The fisheries sector generates some 80 million USD annually in export earnings and provides full-time employment to an estimated 9,300 commercial fishers and a few hundred people more in vessel maintenance, fish processing, retail and trade. The fishing fleet is characterized as small-scale and counts approximately 4,000 fishing vessels ranging in length from 3 meters to 30 meters, but generally less than 7 meter in length. (National Report 2016) The fishing is split between independent dinghies with two to three crew or motherships served by five or more dinghies. Motherships will process and freeze catch (tails) and land only frozen tails. Most lobster is landed tailed at sea with the carapaces disposed of at sea. They fish two main gears: wooden traps and lobster casitas. The wooden traps are set with twenty to twenty-five traps per string and catch a significant number of finfish in addition to the lobster. Various fishing methods are utilized throughout the fishing communities of The Bahamas such as traps, casitas, compressors, trolling, hook and line, fish pots and other fishing mechanisms. With over one hundred landing sites spread throughout the Bahamas' EEZ the major fishing communities have made livelihoods to support their families. Advancements in fishing technologies such as sonar, GPS and VMS with catch selective gear have increased the CPUE of Bahamian fishers and allow for sustainable harvest and reduced bycatch within the fisheries sector.

4. MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The Department of Marine Resources (DMR) is responsible for the administration, management, and development of fisheries in The Bahamas. Additionally, the department was created to administer, manage, and develop the fisheries sector as stipulated by the 2020 Fisheries Act. Moreover, the department is also tasked with the enforcement of Fisheries Regulations, Marine Mammal Regulations and the Seafood Processing and Inspection Regulations. Moreover, the department is the scientific authority for CITES whereas the Department of Agriculture is the managing authority as described in the wildlife protection act. The Department's mission is the development of the fisheries sector through sustainable use and integrated management of the fishery resources, coastal zone, and the marine

environment for the wellbeing of the Bahamian Environment. Enforcement procedures of closed seasons on commercially economic species, size restrictions, fishing gear guidelines and restrictions, vessel monitoring systems, vessel registrations, protected species (Marine Mammals, Marine Turtles, Sharks, Corals, and Sea horses) and pound limits (Sports fishing and Personal Baggage) allow for the management of the sector. Additionally, implementation of fisheries management software and stock assessments allow for further management of marine resources.

5. INSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The DMR is the managing authority for the commercial fishing sector. The DMR collaborated with enforcement agencies such as the Royal Bahamas Police Force (RBPF), Royal Bahamas Defense Force (RBDF), and Bahamas Customs to enforce fisheries rules and regulations within The Bahamas' EEZ. Additionally, the DMR partners with Non-Governmental Organizations such as the Bahamas National Trust (BNT), Bahamas Reef Environment Educational Foundation (BREEF), Bahamas Marine Mammal Research Organization (BMMRO), Perry Institute of Marine Science (PIMS), and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), in the capacity building of the Department through training, policy development, and research.

6. THE FISHERIES ACT 2020

In December of 2020 a new Fisheries Act was passed unanimously by the Parliament of The Bahamas, and in June of 2021 it was enacted with the exception of a few sections, which are intended to come into force with the enactment of the new subsidiary legislation in the Fisheries Resources (Jurisdiction & Conservation) Regulations. The subsidiary regulations are expected to come into force by the end of 2023.

7. RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND TRAINING

Research, public education, and capacity building training are priorities of the Department. Through partnerships with other government agencies and non-governmental organizations, projects such as a vessel monitoring system pilot, a marine action plan project, protected area management enforcement, and stony coral tissue loss disease training courses have been conducted within the department.

8. KEY DEVELOPMENT TRENDS OVER THE LAST 20 YEARS

In 2021 the DMR began a process of providing its service online. The services first began with an online app called Bahamas Outdoors for the many foreign recreational and sport fishers, who ply Bahamian waters. To date via The Bahamas Government's online MyGateway Portal, the DMR has some nineteen online services ranging from licensing and renewal of commercial fishing permits, crawfish trapping permits, stone crab trapping permits, etc. Additionally, the utilization of Open Fismis software for the issuance and storage of permits, and information management for vessel registrations, compressors, and processing plants is also available online. Over the period, the Department expanded throughout nineteen islands and cays. This is just the beginning as the department continues to build capacity to manage the fisheries sector. Further, the DMR has commissioned five inshore marine patrol

crafts in some of the Family Islands in an effort to increase enforcement patrols within the Bahamas EEZ and to assist in deterring IUU fishing.

Additionally, in an effort to combat IUU fishing (including poaching) and to counter illegal marketplaces more fully, Wild-Aid and TNC have partnered with the DMR and other local enforcement agencies i.e. RBPF, RBDF, Bahamas Customs, and The Bahamas Wildlife Enforcement Network (BAHWEN) to form a Marine Action Partnership (MAP) in 2018. The MAP is a DMR led multi-year initiative that enhances marine patrol, investigative and operational coordination among national and international law enforcement partners. Moreover, the MAP seeks to increase collaboration between law enforcement, fishing communities, protected area managers, and other agencies. As a result of the nation's leadership and elevated response to foreign and domestic poaching through ongoing MAP initiatives, including its collaboration with the United States and Canadian governments, The Bahamas was recently recognized by the International Monitoring Control and Surveillance Network (IMCS). The Bahamas Ministries of Agriculture and Marine Resources and National Security received the IMCS first place "Stop IUU Fishing Award" this month in Halifax, Canada for notable successes in combatting IUU fishing. Furthermore, The Bahamas achieved Marine Stewardship Council Certification in 2018.

9. PROJECTIONS FOR FUTURE ADVANCEMENT OF THE SECTOR TOWARDS A BLUE ECONOMY

The Department plans to conduct feasibility studies on the prospects of the development of a turtle ecotourism industry geared towards the viewing of turtles in the wild.in addition to a sea cucumber study to help to determine its commercial feasibility. These feasibility studies will gather facts and valuable information relative to the development of the "Blue Economy", which is a priority area for the Government of The Bahamas.

Based on the results of the studies the information would be used to formulate management strategies that will enable the development of both sectors.

The fisheries and aquaculture sectors in The Bahamas are small compared to tourism and finance. However, their importance should not be neglected as the sectors provide valuable income, employment and food to the population. Moreover, the exports of high values species (lobster and stone crab) generate considerable revenues. Development of an aquaculture and mari-culture sector in the Bahamas is a priority of the Bahamian government as it will allow for the rearing of commercially important species such as lobster, grouper, and conch etc. to supplement the capture fisheries. Additionally, the development of a deep sea and pelagic fisheries within the Bahamas EEZ and on the high seas will be a move towards a blue economy. Accordingly, an expansion and advancement in the commercial fishing fleet is needed to undertake this objective.

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Fisheries Act, 2020

Fisheries Resources (Jurisdiction and Conservation) Act, 1977