CONTRIBUTION 10.12

National Report on the Status of Fisheries and Aquaculture in SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS

1. OVERVIEW

The Department of Marine Resources is directly responsible for the conservation, protection, and management of all marine resources within the federation of St. Kitts and Nevis. As of 2022, the fisheries sector of the nation contributed 0.4% to the national GDP. In order to increase our GDP share and align with the 2025 agenda of decreasing food imports by 25%, we are presently engaged in various projects, including;

- The installation of additional Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) to increase the catch of ocean pelagic fish species.
- The cultivation of sea moss to alleviate some of the strain on our coastal fish stocks and create alternative employment opportunities for our fishers.

Currently, we are seeking to transform the fisheries sector by developing the necessary infrastructure at all the landing sites throughout the federation. The goal is to encourage fishers to invest in larger vessels that will assist them to catch ocean pelagic fish and to increase length of fishing trips.

There are twelve (12) fish landing sites in St. Kitts and Nevis with most currently having little to no fisheries infrastructure.

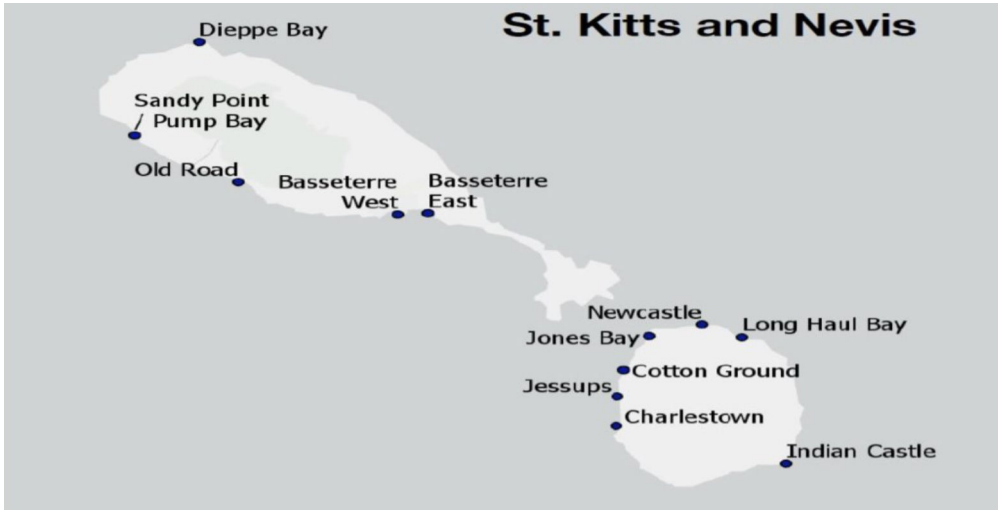

Figure 1. Fish landing sites in St. Kitts and Nevis

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The table provided below illustrates information regarding the economy and geography of St. Kitts and Nevis.

Table 1. Country Profile of St. Kitts and Nevis

Capital	Basseterre	**Population**	47,606 as of 2021
Area	261 km^2	**Ethnic divisions**	- African descent (90%) - Caucasian (2.7%) - Mixed race (2.5%)
Coastline	135 km	**Languages**	English
EEZ	9502 km^2	**Literacy**	97.8%
Territorial Sea	12 nm	**Labor force**	25,000 (2013)
Terrain	volcanic with mountainous interiors	**Shelf Area**	845 km
Environment	subject to hurricanes (June to November)	**GDP**	$860.8 M USD (2021)

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL FISHING INDUSTRY

There are five major fisheries that are managed by the Department of Marine Resources. These are Queen Conch (*Strombus gigas),* Caribbean Spiny Lobster (*Panulirus argus*), Small coastal pelagic, Large or ocean pelagic and Reef/bank/slope fisheries.

On St. Kitts there are five major sites which account for nearly 70% of the total vessels in the Federation. Some of these sites are characterized by their major or unique fishing activity. For example, most conchs are landed at East Basseterre, the location of the Basseterre fisheries

Complex. Old Road is known for their coastal Pelagics, like jacks, ballyhoo and gars, while Dieppe Bay is famous for Lobster landings and boats from Nevis that bring their catch to St. Kitts do so by using the West Basseterre landing site. The largest landing area in Nevis is adjacent to the Fishermen Marketing Supply Cooperative in Charlestown. This facility provides gear and equipment, ice and walk-in freezers, outboard motor repairs, fish processing, and stalls for marketing the fish.

2.1 Aquaculture

Over the years, numerous efforts have been made to stimulate the aquaculture industry in the federation. This has been challenging but little by little the federation has seen growth taking place with regard to the sector as more and more farmers begin to take part in this lucrative industry. There are now seven facilities producing Tilapia, while Florida Pompano production is on hiatus and there are two sea moss production farms. Aquaculture output was at a subsistence-level prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this has not altered.

3. STATISTICS, RESEARCH AND RESOURCE ASSESSMENT

The Caribbean Region Data System (CARIFIS) was used to collect fish landing data, which was then input into an excel sheet and monthly reports on estimated landings were created. The trust has been made to implement the Fisheries Manager (TFM), a new Fisheries Database which has been implemented. It is a modularized and cloud-based fisheries data management tool, which would be used to improve data and information management for evidence-based decision making. TFM can be used by data collectors to collect, store and report on fisheries data for sustainable use and management of living marine resources. The TFM serves as a comprehensive central data source where users can access third party analytical tools such as R, power B,or Excel to generate customized reports and perform statistical analysis to facilitate planning and decision making. The data based system has been designed and St Kitts and Nevis background and additional data has been entered.

3.1 Research

The Department of Marine Resources has Partnered with Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine to conduct research within our marine environment. One such research was a study on the Caribbean spiny lobster which revealed the presence of two species of egg-predator nemertean worms. These species (*Carcinonemertes conanobrieni* and an undescribed *Carcinonemertes sp.*) were found in the eggs of 87% of egg-bearing females in the study population. One species (undescribed sp.) was observed in the gills of both male and female lobsters. This genus of egg-predator has been reported in Florida and Colombia only.

A novel microsporidian parasite which infects lobster muscle was found in Saint Kitts and previously in Florida. It seems to be a rare occurrence, infecting 0.6% of the study population.

Data on the reproduction of *Panulirus argus*, namely the size at sexual maturity and the months of peak reproductive activity were also collected. The size at which 50% of females were carrying eggs and/or a spermatophore was approximately 88mm carapace length. This indicates

that females are able to spawn at least once before being removed at the legal 95mm size. Also, peak reproduction occurs from March to May.

4. POLICY AND LEGISLATION

The Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Resources Act (2016) covers the establishment of a fisheries advisory committee, fisheries access agreements, local and foreign fishing licensing, fish processing establishments, fisheries research, fisheries enforcement and the registration of fishing vessels. The Act also specifies conservation measures, for example, prohibiting the use of any explosive, poison or other noxious substance for the purpose of fishing.

Our regulations are currently under review, we have been working assiduously to get it completed and passed. Some of the proposed areas will see more stringent conservation and management measures for important ecosystems such as seagrass beds, restrictions of inland water fishing, designation of landing sites, the establishment of Marine Management Areas, the designation of FADs. Fines for those who do not adhere to the outlined guidelines of the act. Improved standards for safety equipment requirements (for example, at least one marine VHF Radio and VMS; a valid sea worthiness certificate), sanitation and vessel marking specifications. Stronger monitoring control and surveillance provides the basis for the designation of inspectors and observers.

5. DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

With a focus on Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing, the Department of Marine Resources endeavors to eliminate and deter such harmful and unsustainable fishing practices which have adverse effects on not just our Federations environment but also its economy.

The transparent trade of major fisheries such as queen conch, spiny lobster coastal and ocean pelagic is key to fisher's livelihoods and the Federations standards at the international level. Such transparency includes the vetting (regarding product heath and legal requirements) and traceability of fisheries goods by requiring import and export permits; this, in the long run, can address lacking local, regional and global awareness regarding the economic and social importance of the fisheries sector which is a vital aspect of nutritional and food security needs and the threats IUU fishing. The Federation, through the Department of Marine Resources, is therefore committed to its mandate to "provide for the conservation, management, development and sustainable use of fisheries, aquaculture and marine resources of St. Kitts and Nevis, as well as to monitor and control fishing activities in its waters."

The department is always seeking new ways to improve our operations and that of our fisher folks, we are in the process of improving our mandatory Basic Fisher Training Course which

aims to set the minimum standards for fishers within the Federation. The new and improved Basic fisher training course would not only include theoretical aspects but also a competence-based component. Some of the competence-based components would include basic fire training, basic STCW training and Life savers Training just to name a few. These additions will equip fishers with the knowledge they need and the DMR requirements to sustainably operate and harvest within the Federation waters.

6. FISHERIES MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES

The Department of Marine Resources works and has agreements with several departments/agencies/organizations nationally and internationally who assist us with our fisheries management. Some of which includes Ministry of International Trade (for import/export), Department of Maritime Affairs (for navigation and operation safety), Coast Guard, immigration, Customs, Air and Seaports Authority (for vessel entry and national safety/security), health and bureau of standards (for health standards) and legal (for policy approval/proceedings). Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) with whom we have a port state measures agreement. The Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) which aids the department with regional fisheries management and information sharing.

7. RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

7.1 Large (Ocean) Pelagic Fishery

Objective: Promote the positive aspects of the traditional nature of this fishery and encourage new entrants.

Catches of Pelagics are seasonal and often target the dolphin fish (*Coryphaena hippurus)* and tunas (Scombridae). Larger Pelagics are harvested by commercial and sport fishermen mainly by trolling. The commercial fishery is conducted by about 25 fishers using fifteen vessels, outfitted with trolling hooks and lines. Most vessels have a crew of 2-3 persons including the captain. Trolling lines are normally 80 – 100 lbs tested with a single hook. Artificial lures are sometimes used especially for the tuna and mackerel. Fishers prefer to use ballyhoo or flying fish to catch dolphin fish. Some fishers have been using Fish Aggregation Devices (FADs) in conjunction with long lines to catch yellowfin tuna.

7.2 Small (Coastal) Pelagic Fishery

Objectives: Promote the positive aspects of the traditional nature of this fishery and encourage new entrants.

Fish are mostly caught by seine nets. Seining is often carried on close to beaches. Beach seining where nets are hauled onto the beach is discouraged as large numbers of juvenile fish are often taken and discarded. Gill nets (fixed or drifting) are used sometimes for catching jacks. Cast nets are also used along the beach to catch fry. Fish are sold fresh at the landing site by fishermen or by vendors. Market demand may limit catches at certain times. In shore pelagics are also used as bait in long line, trolling and trap fisheries. Five vessels using seine nets are involved in the fishery and approximately 30 persons are employed in this fishery on a regular basis.

7.3 Reef Fishery

Objective: Promote stock recovery

The species targeted by this fishery are those demersals that live within the ecosystem of coral reefs and are taken with traps, hand lines, gill nets and spear guns and are fished at various depths throughout the extensive shelf area. The quality of the catch ranges from miscellaneous reef fish (more commonly taken in shallow areas) to snappers and groupers (more commonly taken in deeper areas). The high local demand for reef fish of any size, causes the fishery to be susceptible to overfishing.

7.4 Lobster Fishery

Objective: Promote stock recovery.

The lobster is part of the reef fishery, but has been separated by management owing to its importance to the economy and very long life cycle. Lobsters are taken in the same traps that catch reef fish and to a lesser extent by divers. Lobsters are usually caught in small numbers and stored in holding cages until they are sold. Most of the catch is exported but sales to local restaurants and hotels are increasing.

7.5 Conch Fishery

Objective: Promote stock recovery.

This fishery is carried out by SCUBA and free divers usually over seagrass beds and coral rubble, with some fishers operating without permits and others being uncertified divers. The majority of the fishing is undertaken from small wooden open fishing boats with an average length of 5 m with motors ranging from 25 to 40 HP. Each boat fishes with approximately three people. Conch populations are considered to be heavily exploited within the Federation especially on the leeward side of the islands. However, conches are beginning to reappear in near shore areas in response to the concentration of fishing effort in deeper waters and the slowdown in exports to EU markets. This is the major export marine product for St. Kitts and Nevis. There is a licensing system in place for conch fishers and exporters.

8. BLUE ECONOMY

One of the goals of the Department of Marine Resources is to catalyze our blue economy. We are currently looking at policies that will help to develop and promote our blue economy. By doing this we expect an increase of jobs in other areas of the marine sector and thus reduce pressures on our coastal fishery resources.

In 2024 we are looking to host our very first National Marine Expo for the purpose of informing the nation of the importance of the blue economy and connecting with various local, regional and international marine related businesses.

9. TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 2. Industry Characteristics of the Fisheries Sector in St. Kitts and Nevis

YEAR	FISHERIES CONTRIBUTION TO GDP %	TOTAL FISH PRODUCTION (IN TONS)
2012	0.60	346
2013	0.56	307
2014	0.48	303
2015	0.37	311
2016	0.30	229
2017	0.36	406
2018	0.04	454

* Fisheries contribution to GDP % and total fish production (in tons) statistics is not available at this time

Table 3. Number of Registered Fishers and Boats in St. Kitts and Nevis from 2003-2022

YEAR	BOATS	FISHERS
2003	-	477
2004	-	490
2005	361	501
2006	385	542
2007	396	600
2008	414	634
2009	439	679
2010	452	699
2011	460	728
2012	474	793
2013	447	756
2014	502	857
2015	515	814
2016	530	849
2017	116	948
2018	128	1,022

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2012	474	793
2013	447	756
2019	239	489
2020	220	528
2021	212	577
2022	227	626