

# Enhancing capacity for sustainable trade of queen conch through Blue BioTrade in the Eastern Caribbean

A summary of country study recommendations for policy makers, exporters, and investors

## 1. Background

The queen conch (*Strombus gigas*) or “*lambi*” is a large marine shellfish renowned as one of the Caribbean’s most iconic and valuable fishery resources strongly linked to the region’s culture and economy. As a result of uncontrolled harvesting and illegal landings, [queen conch](#) was listed in [Appendix II](#) of the [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora](#) (CITES) in 1992, which means that its international trade is regulated to ensure it is legal, sustainable, and traceable.

Eastern Caribbean States acknowledge that achieving sustainable trade of queen conch at the value chain level can promote environmental, social, and economic development in the region, as well as lay the foundations for best practices in other ocean economy value chains.

In 2020, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and the CITES Secretariat jointly launched Phase 1 of the pilot project, “[Seizing the trade and business potential of Blue BioTrade products for promoting sustainable livelihoods and conservation of marine biodiversity in selected Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States Countries](#)”, which aims to increase stakeholder capacity for sustainable trade of queen conch in Grenada, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Three detailed case studies were produced to map the actors of the queen conch value chain, identify challenges and opportunities for the application of the [Blue BioTrade approach](#), and generate momentum for action through inclusive consultation and validation with stakeholders, including national governments. The Blue BioTrade approach consists of applying a set of environmental, social and economic sustainability guidelines (based on UNCTAD’s BioTrade [Principles and Criteria](#)) to trade and investment in marine biodiversity-based value chains that benefit all actors fairly and equitably. As the project enters its second phase, a **regional Blue BioTrade plan of action** (“the BBT plan”) for queen conch is being designed and will be consulted with stakeholders in a [Regional Workshop in May 2022](#). It is expected that such a plan is implemented by the OECS with the support of UNCTAD, CITES, and the [Caribbean Biodiversity Fund \(CBF\)](#).

## 2. Level of queen conch sustainable management, production and export capacity in beneficiary countries

Building on the country case studies, this summary identifies key policy recommendations and serves as a primary input for the preparation of the BBT plan, which will support OECS Member States in promoting value addition and sustainable trade in the queen conch sector.

## **2.1 Grenada**

Official data reported to the United Nations by Grenada show exports of mollusc declining steadily and steeply from \$191 thousand in 2016 to \$23 thousand in 2019 and \$18 thousand in 2020, largely driven by queen conch. Despite possessing high export capacity sustained by two Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCAP) certified processing facilities (Spice Isle Fish House and Vineyard Seafoods), Grenada's exports of queen conch declined due to several factors including two CITES-trade suspensions and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Urgently addressing the CITES suspensions would greatly benefit the Grenadian queen conch sector by (i) enabling its exporters to benefit from the surge in global and regional demand, (ii) taking advantage of Grenada's high processing capacity and trade links to the southern Caribbean. With regards to the domestic market, (Grenada produced 24 tonnes of queen conch in 2017), implementing the Blue BioTrade approach would ensure the sustainability of the value chain and higher value-addition.

## **2.2 Saint Lucia**

Saint Lucia produced 99 tonnes of queen conch in 2017 and benefits from a booming market, which increased by 73 percent during the last decade. Domestic production and imports of unprocessed queen conch represented an estimated \$1.35 million market in 2019. This value increases considerably when processed conch is included, which is an important part of Saint Lucia's active culinary industry. Saint Lucia can export processed products and has strong cultural ties with queen conch destination markets in the French Caribbean. By developing HACCAP certified processing facilities and obtaining European Union recognition as a third-party sanitary authority, Saint Lucia could significantly improve its export capacity and increase its processing capacity through collaboration with neighbouring countries.




## **2.3 Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**

Due to its large and shallow territorial waters and central location, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is the largest queen conch market of the three project beneficiaries and the second largest in the OECS after Antigua and Barbuda. Queen conch represented 70 per cent of all its fisheries exports in 2019, of which half was sent to the United States. The country is CITES compliant. Exports of queen conch increased rapidly during the last decade from 18,600 kg in 2010 to 334,855 kg by 2019. To ensure the healthy status of the resource following best practices, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has been conducting a stock assessment since February 2022. Investments in a conch nursery and processing capacity would enable the country to expand production, address stock depletion, and enter niche markets providing higher value-added.




### **3. Implementing country case study recommendations through the application of Blue BioTrade in the Eastern Caribbean**




Empowering small-scale coastal producers from OECS Member States to seize and maximise the opportunities of Blue BioTrade in queen conch in domestic, regional and international markets necessitates verifiable indicators of environmental, economic and social sustainability. The Blue BioTrade approach and its Principles and Criteria, developed by UNCTAD, provides such tools, including measures to comply with CITES requirements. Close collaboration between the project countries' policymakers, regulators, businesses/exporters and partner institutions could create synergy towards those goals and enhance the efficacy of their efforts to achieve sustainable queen conch trade.

**Table 1. How can policy makers support the OECS Blue BioTrade queen conch value chain?**

Criteria	Recommendations	Sustainability action
	<p><b>Maintaining sustainable stocks of queen conch</b></p> <p><b>Incentivising private sector actors to act sustainably</b></p>	<p><b>Conducting stock assessments</b> to determine thresholds for sustainable queen conch fishing</p> <p><b>Limiting queen conch fishing</b>, focusing on strategic measures including a closed season during spawning, no-catch zones, quotas, and a monitoring programme</p> <p><b>Regulating land-based activities for environmental protection:</b> Reducing water pollution, regulating coastal developments, and promoting sustainable consumption</p> <p><b>Monitoring landings of juvenile conch:</b> Juvenile conch must not be fished to ensure stock sustainability; Although there are low reports of juvenile conch landing, deshelling of conchs at sea (to reduce costs) weakens the guarantee of no juvenile conch fishing</p> <p><b>Regulating foreign direct investment</b> to ensure sustainable investments</p> <p><b>Organising regular queen conch fisher association meetings</b> to promote associativity and coordination amongst actors</p>
	<p><b>Improving livelihoods of stakeholders</b></p>	<p><b>Investing in data collection</b> to obtain further information (employment, gender, health, etc.) on queen conch value chain actors and their needs</p> <p><b>Regulating</b> for social sustainability, including ensuring safety protocols for diving are respected.</p>
	<p><b>Accessing export markets by complying with CITES requirements:</b> E.g., Grenada needs to urgently address 2 CITES suspensions: Legal Acquisition Finding (LAF) and Non-Detriment Findings (NDF).</p> <p><b>Increasing export capacity under sustainability parameters</b></p>	<p><b>Collaborating with CITES, the OECS and UNCTAD</b> to address the trade suspensions, including by drafting and implementing new legislation</p> <p><b>Improving enforcement:</b> Enforcement of regulations and compliance capabilities are essential to reduce illegal trade but must be combined with incentives for legal trade</p> <p><b>Building export infrastructure</b> (Already well underway in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines)</p>

**Table 2. How can exporters and investors support the OECS Blue BioTrade queen conch value chain?**

Criteria	Recommendations	Sustainability action
	<p><b>Contributing to the maintenance of sustainable and healthy stocks of queen conch</b></p>	<p><b>Cooperating with government efforts</b> to conduct stock assessments, catch reporting, implement environmental regulation, and monitor landings of juvenile conch.</p> <p><b>Assessing and adopting best practices for sustainable conservation of resources</b>, using the <a href="#">UNCTAD Blue BioTrade Self-Assessment tool</a></p>
	<p><b>Improving livelihoods of divers</b>, including by reducing health risks caused by unsafe diving.</p>	<p><b>Training divers</b> on safety protocols for scuba-diving, investing in certifications of social sustainability, which can contribute to higher value-added products</p> <p>Acquiring <b>health insurance schemes</b> for divers and other vulnerable actors in the value chain</p>
	<p><b>Meeting growing demand:</b> Queen conch is a booming market worth \$74 million in 2017, of which 10-15 percent accrues to the 3 countries studied (350 tonnes annually).</p> <p><b>Achieving high investment returns:</b> A \$4.6 million project in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines yielded an additional \$8.3 million in production revenue in 2017-20 alone.</p> <p><b>Accessing high value-added markets:</b> Queen conch is sold at prices as high as \$8.5 per lb in Martinique (part of France and the European Union) by contrast to \$2.5-4 in the United States, yet countries lack certifications for exports to the European Union.</p>	<p><b>Obtaining certifications</b>, including Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCAP) in relevant processing facilities</p> <p><b>Creating an export task force</b> to define options to ensure access to the European market</p> <p><b>Supporting Biodiversity recovery and productive capability</b>, such as by establishing a conch nursery in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, owing to its strategic location could serve the three countries</p> <p><b>Reducing seafood waste and adding value:</b> Queen conch has many uses, including as a seafood delicacy, medicine, cosmetics, jewellery, and handicrafts. Within the food industry, clean and processed conch such as meat trimmings (e.g., for burgers or sausages) offer higher value. Learning conch processing techniques and diversifying conch end-uses will facilitate exporting given the high price competition on unprocessed conch from other markets.</p> <p><b>Transforming waste into value:</b> Conch shells are often discarded yet can serve as a material for coastal engineering, reef reparation, or even be displayed for tourist attractions.</p>

**Note:** The Blue BioTrade approach sustainability guidelines (symbols):  Environmental  Social  Economic