

## **Regional stakeholder webinar on Blue BioTrade and BioTrade principles and criteria including CITES requirements, 22 - 23 March 2021**

### **Summary**

On 22-23 March, UNCTAD in collaboration with the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) joined forces with authorities and chief fisheries officers from OECS countries [to share information and build capacity](#) towards lifting a trade suspension of queen conch and maximize the sustainable development of this market in the region.

Inside the iconic shell of the queen conch lies its delicious meat, valuable [pearls](#) and other biological products of high value, for which the global market is \$74 million and growing every year. Due to the high value of its products and sometime unsustainable use, queen conch is listed under [Appendix II of CITES](#), the convention designed to ensure that the international trade of certain species does not threaten their survival.

Unfortunately, information is lacking on regional queen conch stocks, the flow of products along the supply chain, and how value could be maximized through accessing high value end markets. Additionally, key information and reports are necessary for the lifting of CITES trade suspension applied to Grenada since 2006.

### **Developing the sustainable blue economy**

During the regional webinar, experts and government officials discussed how they can collaborate to lift CITES trade suspensions, gather data, and enhance access to high value end markets unlocking potentially millions in sustainable trade in the years to come.

CITES officials and chief fisheries officers had frank discussions on the state of conch fisheries, reporting challenges and fishery sustainability in the OECS countries of St Lucia, Grenada and St Vincent and the Grenadines, whose conch fisheries were valued at a combined \$7.63 million in 2012.

The next steps to be taken to address CITES trade suspension restrictions were also discussed from the perspective of regional stakeholders and regulatory officials – a critical first step to bringing Grenada back into global markets while enhancing fishery sustainability.

“Research shows that 65% of employment in the CARIFORUM region is supported by MSMEs including the seafood industry. High value sustainable blue economy products present a viable option for Caribbean Job creation,” said Deodat Maharaj, head of the Caribbean Export Development Agency.

UNCTAD and the International Trade Centre presented an innovative self-assessment tool that allows business to understand, assess, and plan alignment with the [2020 BioTrade Principles and Criteria \(P&C\)](#). [The Union for Ethical BioTrade](#) also presented tools to promote and distinguish BioTrade practices and products, explaining how certification can maximize income generation and market access for all stakeholders involved.

### **The Blue BioTrade project in OECS countries**

This webinar was an important activity in the [Blue BioTrade Project](#), a unique partnership of UNCTAD, the OECS and CITES focusing on developing [BioTrade](#) through the commercialization of goods and services derived from biodiversity that adhere to a set of sustainability guidelines known as the BioTrade P&C. Funded by the European Union, this project is the result of a new form of

partnership where various multilateral, regional and national agencies contribute to the implementation of [SDG 14 \(life below water\)](#) and [12 \(sustainable production and consumption\)](#) by making use of domestic, regional and international markets to harness the sustainable harvest, processing and commercialization of goods and services derived from marine biodiversity.

Over the next 12 months, UNCTAD experts will be working with the OECS countries of Grenada, St Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines to apply the BioTrade value chain approach to queen conch. This will involve mapping key stakeholders and processes, the ecological state of queen conch, and, importantly, the opportunities to enhance sustainability and income generation by following the BioTrade P&C.

### **Pioneering Blue BioTrade**

In applying the BioTrade P&C in an oceans economy context, this project will help promote [Blue BioTrade](#) – which focuses on marine-based products and services— an exciting new tool to promote sustainability and equity. The [World Bank](#) estimated the value of the ocean economy in the Caribbean at \$407 Billion and considers it to be one of the “next frontiers of growth”.

This project thus represents a critical opportunity to prove that income can be generated from the ocean’s economy in a sustainable way and is a forerunner in the development of Blue BioTrade products that could be an example for the sustainable use of marine biodiversity and socio-economic resilience building.

### **Working towards tangible action**

This project will also work with OECS governments to develop a regional Blue BioTrade action plan, which will outline key steps for the further development of value added products from marine biodiversity, such as the [sargassum seaweed](#), which has inundated Caribbean shores with devastating effects over the past decade.

Queen conch is but one of the many iconic marine species that can be used to advance the sustainable development of small island developing states in the Caribbean, many of which are now recognized as “large ocean” states with abundant blue economy opportunities.

OECS Director General Didacus Jules said the webinar and project are a “...process of deep visioning that allows us to see the huge potential of biodiversity in the region”.

In more than one regard, this sea snail is leading the race towards more economically and ecologically viable fisheries and ocean economies.