



Overview of Blue BioTrade Queen Conch Country Case Study in Saint Lucia

Regional workshop and validation of the OECS Blue BioTrade
Action Plan for the queen conch value chain in the Eastern
Caribbean

May 26th -27th Kingstown, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

Presented by:

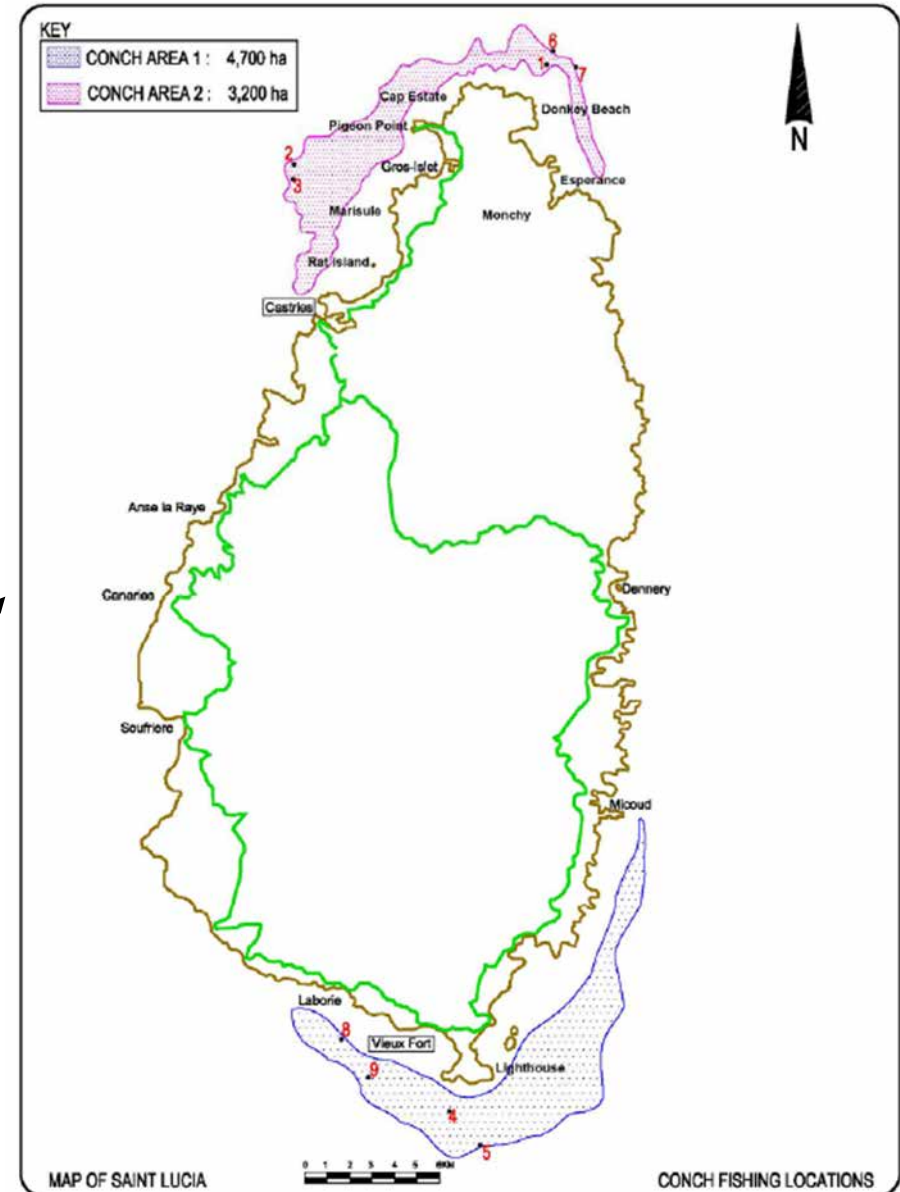
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Location of stock

- General Conch area (2008):
 - Preliminary - North (est. 4700ha) and South (est. 3200ha)
 - Suitable habitat type not considered
 - Some fishers report that conch is found island-wide at depths above 80ft (24m)



Harvest methods

- Main harvesting method: SCUBA diving
- Gill nets and freediving is also common in areas along the west and southwest coasts
- Majority of Conch meat extracted at sea on vessel, some landed whole (in shell)
 - This allows for transporting higher volumes of conch meat per fishing trip at greater speed.
- Meat extraction: cutting a small hole in the spire and severing the columnar muscle attached (*known as 'knocking'*)
- Shell typically disposed of at sea



Environmental Findings

- Morphological differences among various conch populations in Saint Lucia have implications for management measures
- Information on stocks is still scarce, especially information on density, abundance, and distribution. The scarcity of this information limits the reliability of current stock assessments.
- Data and information limitations:
 - Habitat maps for both fished and non-fished areas.
 - Sustainable catch and effort data with depth estimates
 - Depth and conch behaviour limit the ability to fine-tune conch assessments that were previously done.
- Land-based sources of pollution impact on health and availability of suitable habitat; particularly issues of siltation of seafloor and loss of seagrass.
- The topography of the seafloor within Saint Lucia's Exclusive Economic Zone is a limiting factor to conduct surveys and presents a challenge in determining the true status of the stock.



Socio-Economic Findings

- The depth at which the conch is being fished possesses threats to fishers' health and is a limiting factor on the number of dives that are being conducted.
- Decompression sickness is the main reason fishers leave the fishery.
- Conch Divers report that they would not encourage close relative to enter fishery due to high risk.
- Conch Divers do not have medical insurance coverage to support treatment for decompression sickness.
- Access to EU markets (e.g. Martinique)
- Limited capacity to monitor value chain
- All conch divers are male and more women enter the fishery closer to the end of the value chain, contributing in the cleaning and processing of the conch

TRADE

Market Potential

- Currently, Saint Lucia's Queen Conch export is minimal. Based on CITES permits issued from 2018-2019, the pearls are the most traded part of the Conch. Majority of the conch that is caught and imported is consumed locally due to high demand.
- Presently, Saint Lucia does not have any bans on the trade of Queen Conch, however, the absence of a HACCP-Certified facility as well as a national authority for seafood exports has restricted legal trade to the European Union and the United States of America.
- There is the possibility of tapping into the EU market especially due to the closeness to Martinique, however, need to create the enabling environment.



Administrative Findings

- Although biological data have been collected in the past for this species, the collection of such data has not been sustained after the termination of externally funded projects.
- Conch obtained from fishers in neighbouring islands between borders – business partnerships
- Value of fishery may be less than investments to enhance monitoring.
- Limited capacity to sustain effective monitoring and evaluation



CITES Implementation

- Saint Lucia became a member in March 1983 and has since been submitting information to the CITES Secretariat
- The Department of Fisheries and the Forestry Department are the two Scientific Authorities in Saint Lucia, with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Rural Development serving as the Management Authority
- Presently the DOF does not have an issue with permit issuance and adherence. Based on the Department's yearly CITES submissions, the main conch parts that are currently being exported are the conch meat and pearls, with the majority of the products being shipped to the United States of America, as well as the illegal trade of products to Martinique. Conch meat is being imported from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines on a regular basis.
- The main challenge that we are faced with are:
 - Many visitors who wish to travel with conch shells prefer smaller shells that are easier to store. However, this preference have encouraged the capture and sale of small shells. Due to insufficient enforcement capabilities within the DOF, many times the perpetrators are not caught and the practice continues. Also, there is difficulty in controlling distribution to the sellers because the DOF doesn't have a list of vendors on island.
- However, the aforementioned issue could be reduced with increased Awareness and Education, as well as the implementation of a monitoring and regulating system of the authorized vendors of Queen conch products

Main Needs by Stakeholders

- **Fishers**

- Many of the fishers are in support of a dive insurance scheme. Due to the nature of their work, it is difficult to get insured as a recreational diver since their work is considered commercial diving (*due to the depth they dive*).
- Fishers are in support of initiatives that would allow them to get dive gear and equipment easier and at a more affordable rate.
- Also, support in providing assistance in acquiring/ maintaining the existing compressors at the landing sites so that the filling of the tanks would be cheaper and more convenient for fishers.

- **Processors**

- Increased marketing opportunities and training in value-adding techniques that would help improve the marketability of products.



Main Needs of the Department of Fisheries

- Assistance in conducting fisheries assessment of the Queen Conch resource in Saint Lucia
- Support is needed for the revision of fisheries legislation so that additional conditions could be added to the requirements of obtaining a fishing license as a queen conch fisher
- Assistance from the project in the certifying and training of the fishers in safe SCUBA diving procedures and in the use of the emergency oxygen kits (*also the provision of emergency oxygen kits*)
- Support for the creation of an insurance plan for the fishers



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- In addition to legislative reform, there could also be support in implementing the recommendations of the Regional Queen Conch Management Plan
- Support in maintaining the compressors that are found at the different landing sites. For example, the compressor at the Gros Islet landing site is in need of repairs (*located at one of the main conch landing sites*)
- Provide technical support to the fishermen in maintaining and inspecting their dive gear, as well as assistance in acquiring/providing dive gear for the conch divers.
- Improved capacity to reduce IUU fishing by improving surveillance at ports of entry into Saint Lucia
- Support in providing gear and training to improve marketability e.g. commercial tenderizer ; food handling.
- Assistance in accessing different markets, and with that, improving the ability to sustainably extract conch in Saint Lucia
- Regulation of the value chain process to ensure compliance and enforcement to the fisheries regulations

The Future of Saint Lucia's queen conch industry

- Our Main Goal: Promoting sustainable use of our resources to ensure optimal benefits by fishers and consumers alike
 - Improving regional partnerships with other Caribbean countries. This could include increased cohesion and compliance to regional fisheries regulations
 - Establishing a national agency responsible for the trade of seafood products would also help in accessing foreign markets.
 - Exploring the option of getting local fish processing facilities HACCP certified so that local fishers could benefit from the international market.
 - Improved surveillance and monitoring so that IUU trade could be reduced

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