

## Report of the Evaluation Team on Conch Mariculture

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The Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute should be commended for bringing together this widespread group of people working on conch. It was very beneficial to discuss the progress that has been made in conch mariculture and the status of conch fisheries. The Evaluation Team has the following recommendations:

- (1) It is imperative that countries in the Caribbean improve their gathering of information on conch stocks and fisheries statistics, i.e., number of fishermen involved, number of landings, fishing effort and export-imports. We must have a more factual understanding of the fishery for each country.
- (2) Because hatchery-restocking programs appear quite costly, adequate fishing data should be obtained before a commitment to an extensive restocking program is made.
- (3) Considerable progress has been made in studies of the potential of restocking programs, but data are needed concerning stocking densities, age at stocking, proper habitat and timing of release. This information is essential to optimizing the benefit of any restocking program. Information on larval dispersion/recruitment is also necessary to determine the long-term impact of such programs.
- (4) From the data presented, it appears that harvested conch products may not be sufficient to pay hatchery costs in restocking programs. However, research, recreational, educational, sociological and other strictly noneconomic benefits of such programs may provide sufficient justification for the necessary subsidy of restocking efforts.
- (5) Stock rehabilitation through restocking is only *one* fisheries management option. Extensive public education programs and management through regulation must also be considered. These alone may be adequate to manage the fishery in some circumstances. Conventional fisheries management programs can be developed if sufficient information is available for local fisheries.
- (6) Considerable effort has been given to the development of experimental and pilot scale programs for rearing of conch through their larval stages, as presented at these meetings. It is time to consolidate this technology and methodology. The production testing of a simple protocol for the hatchery rearing of conch would avoid unnecessary duplication of future efforts. However, rearing programs must be tailored for application to local conditions and specific local needs.
- (7) Given the present value of the resource and predicted costs for production of market size or adult conch by any of the means discussed at these meetings, commercialization of conch aquaculture does not seem economically feasible at this time. However, changes in the price structure could change this. The present technology for conch aquaculture could be adapted to commercial scale ventures if such changes occur.
- (8) Extreme caution must be taken throughout the region to effectively manage conch resources in order to perpetuate the availability of conch for local benefits generated from employment, income and/or stable food supply.