

## Status of Artisanal Fisheries in Anguilla

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Anguilla, a small, flat island of 35 mi<sup>2</sup>, has a population of approximately 8,000 inhabitants. Over the years the local inhabitants have engaged in subsistence agriculture and fishing as the main areas of providing a livelihood. The island is surrounded by a large area of shallow submarine banks. The vast submarine shelf is shared by other islands of different nationalities. These islands include St. Martin (St. Maarten) and St. Barthelemy. The shelf covers 13,565 ha and Anguilla controls approximately 9,065 ha. The island is surrounded by a number of small cays such as Dog Island and Upper and Lower Prickly Pear Cays which form part of its territory. The shelf is considered to be highly productive and consequently favors the development and management of the commercial species of fish and other marine life.

Most of the local fishermen use fish traps - mainly the arrowhead shaped traps. However, some of these fish traps are baited with fishes which have value in several of the neighboring islands. The few seines on the island are operated when bonitos and jacks are seen offshore.

A number of fishermen use sprat nets for catching bait. However, the use of artificial bait is uncommon. In addition to the regular fishermen, several locals as well as expatriots occasionally engage in line fishing or spear fishing. Tourists are not permitted to spear fish in Anguilla's territorial waters.

The fishermen normally use the 1.5- or 2-in mesh wire for constructing their fishing traps. The fishing wire is ordered by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for resale to the local fishermen. However, some fishermen in spite of the conservation efforts of the Department continue to use the 1-in mesh wire. The use of anodes to prolong the life of the fish traps is on the increase. Recently, fishermen started to brace their fishing traps with steel bars. They claim that this method of bracing the fish traps has led to the reduction in the loss of pots because of drift. Due to the stiffness of the steel framed traps, the traps can be handled with greater ease, as most of the fishermen still use the traditional method of hand pulling their traps.

The fishing boats are of the whaler type, with an average length of 26 feet and a beam of 8 feet and are normally propelled by two outboard engines of approximately 25-30 hp. Most of the captains or boat owners expect these outboard engines to last for approximately 2.5 years. These open boats are managed by three or four fishermen who have an average of about 30 fish traps each, which are hauled about two to three times per week. Some fishermen travel as far as 40 miles from shore to fish mainly for lobsters.

Commercial marketing of fish, lobsters, conchs and to a lesser extent, turtle and whelks has been carried on for some number of years; however, there is a need for better organization and control of marketing fish locally and for export. The lobsters are exported to neighboring islands, namely Puerto Rico, St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. Martin. Unlike the continuous demand for lobsters throughout the year, the fish market tends to be seasonal (September to January), for pelagic and reef fishes.

Pelagic fishes, which are caught regularly around Anguilla, are: kingfish, queen fish, dolphins, barracudas, mackerels and to a lesser extent, tunas. The reef fishes caught are: grunts, groupers, parrot fish, squirrel fish and goat fish, most of which are commercially marketed in the neighboring island of St. Martin.

Problems.--The local fish marketing is not properly organized and consequently, many of the local people do not get fish on a regular basis.

Many of the major problems stem from the lack of sufficient knowledge to adopt better conservation practices. The buying and selling of berried lobsters is having a considerable adverse effect on our lobster industry. Local fishermen argue that if they "don't, others will." There isn't sufficient manpower and the proper machinery to enforce the laws to protect the lobster industry.

The under utilization of the pelagic species is apparent. Attempts to persuade or encourage fishermen to troll to and from their fish pots have not been very successful. Most fishermen consider this method to be too time consuming.

The ever increasing cost of outboard engines, ropes, buoys, boats and other fishing equipment, coupled with the high risk involved are all factors which contribute the show rate of investment in fishing projects. The fishermen are finding it more difficult to obtain loans to continue or start their fishing projects.

Efforts to get the fishermen into cooperatives or organized groups have met with limited success. Most of the fishermen tend to operate in very small groups.

Our local fishermen need to pay more attention to safety requirements. Almost every year considerable amounts of time, energy and money are spent on rescue operations which could have been avoided, or less time and money spent on search.

Foreign vessels are constantly seen fishing within Anguilla's territorial waters, and fishermen often complain that their traps have disappeared because large vessels cut their ropes and so both buoys and fish traps are lost.

Success.--Attempts to educate the fishermen and the buying agents have had limited rewards. Some fishermen sell their berried lobster to agents who in turn crate these lobsters and allow them to spawn before selling them.

The initiation of a marine resource survey is to be carried out shortly and a greater number of fishermen are becoming interested in the outcome.

Needs.--Our needs are directly related to our problems. We need assistance in continuing to educate our fishermen in conservation methods and efficient management of our limited fishing resources.

There is a need for enforcement of territorial waters, cheaper fishing equipment and a steady and reliable marketing infrastructure for local and export consumption.

In addition, fishermen need to be trained in more modern techniques of fishing and there is the need for fishermen to equip themselves with life preservers, distress signals and other safety devices.

There is a need for the fishermen to give greater support to the Fisheries Association.

Diversification of fishing is needed to alter the present trend of over-fishing the reefs.