

**The St. Kitts/Nevis Fishery
A Summary of the Existing
Situation and Constraints and
Requirements Affecting Development**

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The newly Independent Federated State of St. Christopher and Nevis is geographically located between latitude 17°5' and 17°25' 30" North and longitude 62°31' and 62°52' West. It covers a total land area of 103 square miles, with St. Kitts 68 square miles and Nevis 35 square miles. The total population is 43,000, St. Kitts 34,000 and Nevis 9,000, of which about 900 are full time and part time fishermen.

Some 650 fishing boats of the carvel-built, sailing-dinghy type, range in sizes 12-25 feet, 90% of which are powered by outboard engines between 15-40 hp, conduct the traditional style of fishing with beach seines, pots/traps, hand lines and recently by diving with scuba gear. The twin island State lands an average estimated total of about 1880 metric tons (4.5 million pounds) of fish including such pelagic species as gars, ballahoo, tunas, kingfish, dolphin and mackerel, and such demersal species as snappers, groupers, hinds, lobsters and conch, etc.

Consumption of fish in St. Kitts/Nevis is quite high. The total requirement of fish is about 5,000 tons. Though the estimated landings are far below the total requirement of fish, lobsters in live condition and conch in chilled condition, are exported. In 1981 about 147,936 lb of conch and 12,532 lb of lobster, valued at \$315,894 EC were exported mainly to Guadeloupe and Martinique. However, the unsatisfied demand for fish and fish products contributes to the importation of large quantities of dried, salted fish mainly from Canada and the U.S.A. In 1981 533,045 lb of fish and fish products to the value of \$1,274,006 EC were imported. During the previous years quantities imported were much higher.

There are regulations specifically tailored to the protection of undersized species of fish, lobster and turtles. Egg bearing female lobsters are protected and a closed season for turtles exists. Management of the resources still remains a problem, due to inefficient enforcement and cooperation of the fishermen.

CONSTRAINTS AND REQUIREMENTS AFFECTING DEVELOPMENT

Lack of Data.--The artisanal fishery of St. Kitts/Nevis, based on traditional fishing methods described above, uses traditional fishing grounds all of which lie within our 3-mile territorial waters. With limited information as to the potential of the resources and a limited amount of data on landings, it is difficult to determine whether the apparent decline in the resources, within our territorial waters, can be attributed to

over-exploitation or to the effects of natural causes. Interviews with fishermen indicate that the once productive territorial waters of St. Kitts/Nevis are becoming less productive and the possibilities of fishing further offshore are being discussed.

Gears.--The present fishing gears and methods used in the St. Kitts/Nevis fishery today are the traditional ones used by generations of the past, and over the years, have proven adequate for effective harvesting in shallow waters. Now, the advent of an offshore fishery would mean more time and effort. More suitable boats and different types of gear are required to provide a viable and economic fishery. The one major set back to such venture is finance. Fishermen are reluctant because there are no facilities available to accommodate bigger boats in time of repairs or bad weather.

Training.--Very few fishermen, if any, in St. Kitts/Nevis are capable of navigating beyond our territorial waters properly. However, the observation of Japanese and other foreign fishing boats operating in offshore waters over the years along with the suspected depletion of inshore resources, have begun to interest local fishermen in venturing to offshore banks. But the lack of experience and training in basic requirements such as navigation, modern fishing gear and techniques, safety at sea and the small size of the present boats prohibit safe operation on offshore banks that lie a distance of about 60 miles from base.

Marketing.--The marketing of fish is in most cases a simple straightforward cash transaction between the fishermen or members of their family or hawkers and the local consumers. Commission sales do not exist as most fishermen are owners of their boats and equipment and are not controlled financially by middlemen. The present system of spending 5 to 6 hours on fishing grounds, leaving at 5 or 6 o'clock in the mornings and returning by mid-day, does not allow for any significant amount of fish to be caught and, if there are large catches that cannot be sold that day, the lack of storage and ice facilities in the rural fish landing areas contributes to a drop in price or spoilage and discarding of the catch.

Ciguatera.--From time immemorial fish poisoning has always been a phenomenal problem in the safe utilization of some tasty and valuable species of fish from Caribbean waters. With limited knowledge as to the cause and exact location of concentrations or habitat of ciguatoxic species in the area, harvesting of some important species of food-fish in some areas is inhibited for fear of losing the confidence of customers. This phenomenon is increasing in St. Kitt/Nevis. In 1981, 24 cases of fish poisoning were reported by the three hospitals in St. Kitts/Nevis, 25 cases were reported in 1982 and to date 50 cases have already been reported for 1983.

Incentives.--Presently, incentives are given to fishermen by the

Government in terms of (a) Advances to fishermen at a modest amount of \$3,500 EC to assist in repairs to fishing gears, etc.; (b) Duty free concession on all fishing equipment, and (c) Revocation of annual licensing for fishing boats. Government's aim is to improve and encourage development of fisheries in the State, but the lack of young, experienced and progressive fishermen is an inhibiting factor.

Conclusion.--For a viable offshore fishing industry to develop, bigger boats and engines, new gear and advanced methods, improved marketing and storage facilities are required. The financial and technological implications of such development are apparent. The present loan scheme advanced to fishermen by Government needs to be improved and more money invested into a program for fisheries development in St. Kitts/Nevis.