

# STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON THE STATUS & CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT OF CRITICALLY ENDANGERED NASSAU GROUPEL IN THE BAHAMAS

## PERSPECTIVAS DE LAS PARTES INTERESADAS SOBRE EL ESTADO Y LA GESTIÓN DE LA CONSERVACIÓN DEL MERO DE NASSAU EN PELIGRO CRÍTICO DE EXTINCIÓN EN LAS BAHAMAS

## POINTS DE VUE DES PARTIES PRENANTES SUR L'ÉTAT ET LA GESTION DE LA CONSERVATION DU MÉROU DE NASSAU, EN DANGER CRITIQUE D'EXTINCTION AUX BAHAMAS

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### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Ensuring sustainability of marine resources that provide food, economic security and other critical ecosystem services is a major challenge globally. Assessing stakeholders' knowledge and perceptions of the status of fisheries and how they should be managed can yield important insights to facilitate the development of management frameworks that are likely to assist with achieving sustainability (Hicks et al. 2016). As a socioeconomically and culturally important species, facing extinction, evaluating stakeholder perspectives on the status of the Nassau grouper fishery is critical to help inform policy (Sadovy de Mitcheson et al. 2013; Sherman et al. 2016). Knowledge and perceptions of stakeholders working in The Bahamas were assessed using voluntary participatory approaches including a workshop and questionnaires. As a precursor to developing and disseminating questionnaires, a Strength Weakness Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis was conducted with 15 individuals, revealing four common themes (centered around the environment, fisheries, legislation and enforcement and science, education, and outreach) across stakeholders. Perceptions about the status of Nassau grouper in various habitats, threats that impact the species, how the fishery should be managed, and the effectiveness of enforcement methods varied across stakeholder groups. Nationally administered questionnaires and in-person interviews conducted by the Department of Marine Resources targeted those within the fishing sector (e.g., fishers and vendors). Overall, stakeholders demonstrated support for some changes to current Bahamian fishery regulations along with the implementation of new regulations and increased capacity to better enforce and manage the fishery. Stakeholders expressed strong support (~92%) for a ban on foreign recreational fishing for Nassau grouper. The desire of stakeholders to support sustainable management for Nassau grouper was primarily based on concerns over ecosystem health, economic stability of the fishery, and the potential loss of the species.

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