



# BAHAMAS COMMERCIAL FISHERS ALLIANCE

Maritime Square, Bay Street, P. O. Box N 7497, Nassau, N.P. Bahamas

REFERENCE	Belize Fisher Exchange 22July20204
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**SUBJECT: Belize Fisher Exchange 17<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> June 2024**

**PREPARED BY: Adrian LaRoda**

**PARTICIPANTS: 1. Adrian LaRoda (Bahamas)**

**2. Shareash Rolle (Bahamas)**

**3. Tamika McFall (Bahamas)**

**4. Nadine Nembhard (Belize)**

**5. Sydney Fuller (Belize)**

## 1. Background:

In 2023 the Bahamas Commercial Fishers Alliance the national fisherfolk organization in the Bahamas was invited to attend the Gulf & Caribbean Fisheries Institute conference that was held at the Atlantis resort, Paradise Island Bahamas.

Following that successful conference, the BCFA was invited to present a project for GCFI's consideration which resulted in the Bahamas to Belize fisher exchange where 4 fishers from the Bahamas would travel to Belize on and information sharing and learning experience for the establishment of a fisherfolk cooperative in the Bahamas.

There are several cooperatives in Belize but two in particular, the Belize Fisherman's Cooperative Union and the Northern Fisherman's Cooperative Society both established in the 1960's have a history of consistency and administrative strength, from whom we sought to learn about administration, management and member engagement.

The initial delegation included two additional fishers and the Director of the Bahamas Department of Marine Resources, however due to visa issues they were could not travel.

This initiative follows on a Belize to Bahamas fisher exchange that took place in 2010. <sup>1</sup>In 2010 ECOMAR received a grant from the Gulf & Caribbean Fisheries Institute's (GCFI) Small Grant Fund to send six representatives from Belize to the Bahamas to learn about lionfish management. This program was very timely in implementing the Belize Lionfish Program as it allowed Belize fisherfolk to learn first-hand what the Bahamians were doing to manage lionfish so they could return to Belize and share this information with their colleagues.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ecomarbelize.org/gcfi-fisherman-exchange.html>

## *Industry In Partnership with Conservation and Sustainability*

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### **2. Objectives:**

The BCFA in supporting its core objective of improving the lives of fisherman is establishing a cooperative intended to better support the fisheries sector, this exchange served to,

- a. To meet our mission and to support our core developmental strategies, there are capacity needs that are essential for effective financial support for fishers. We want to expand on investments by providing the necessary institutional framework for assisting fishers in becoming more independent and financially strong.
- b. Building fishers capacity and access to resources that build sustainable livelihoods.
- c. To reduce operational costs for fishers by introducing more modern and sustainable fishing methods and fishing gear.
- d. Focus on education to improve life quality for and after fishing.

### **3. Discussion**

Day 1 18<sup>th</sup> June:

We attended the women in fisheries forum where I was a guest presenter on the formation of fisher organizations. This interaction was rewarding as we were able to share experiences and I was interviewed by Belize News Tv.

<sup>1</sup>Belize Women in Fisheries Forum:

Half of the workforce in the fisheries sector globally (predominantly in the processing of seafood), are women. But the reality is most are not recognized nationally for their contribution. That is primarily the reason why the Marine Conservation and Climate Adaptation Project (MCCAP) and WCS saw it vital to engage women and provide a space for them to discuss the challenges and opportunities they face. It was the birth of the first Women in Fisheries Forum (Wiff) in 2017, and now an annual event, with the 7th that took place during Fisherfolk Month in June 2024.

<sup>2</sup>After eight years of dedicated efforts, Belize has officially established a National Women in Fisheries Association on Tuesday, June 18. The association will be registered in Belize City, with virtual meetings held to accommodate its dispersed membership. The first official meeting is scheduled for August, where the focus will be on setting the association's vision, goals, and mission.

Membership in the association is open to women engaged in any aspect of the fisheries sector. This inclusivity means that one does not need to be a licensed commercial fisher to join. Women involved in various roles, such as the spouses of fishers, those in processing and marketing, lionfish jewelry makers, and seaweed farmers, are all welcome.

Currently, the association's membership represents eleven fishing communities, including Barranco, Punta

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/blog/critical-role-women-in-sustaining-belizes-fisheries/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://amandala.com.bz/news/national-women-in-fisheries-association-established/>

Negra, Placencia, Seine Bight, Riversdale, Hopkins, Dangriga, Belize City, LEMONAL, Chunox, and Sarteneja. The newly elected executive committee includes Chairwoman Paula Jacobs Williams, Vice Chairwoman Ms. Veronica Tun, Treasurer Ms. Sherene Miranda, Secretary Ms. Isela Martinez, and Councilors Ms. Olga Colon, Ms. Karen Belgrave, and Kristalee Valerio.

The formation of this association was a highlight of the 7th annual Women in Fisheries Forum (WIFF) held in Hopkins Village, Stann Creek, under the theme, "Leave No One Behind in Building an Enabling Environment for Our Small-Scale Artisanal Fisheries."

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Tamika McFall was also asked to speak to the forum on cooperative financing in the Bahamas as the financing regime in Belize is similar to that of the Bahamas as both share a similar establishment like the Development Finance Cooperation (DFC).

In Belize though, <sup>3</sup>in an effort to promote sustainable fishing and stronger stewardship of Belize's rich marine environment, the Government of Belize and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) joined forces with the Development Finance Corporation of Belize (DFC), and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) to establish a pilot program to support licensed artisanal fishers through loans tailored to their needs.

Day 2 19<sup>th</sup> June:

Courtesy call on Rigoberto Quintana, Director of the Belize Fisheries Division, we discussed matters relative to fisheries management and training. Topics ranged from Manage Access program, the updated Belize Fisheries Resources Act 2020, Belize Fisheries Regulations to be completed by 2025, Comanagement arrangements, Blue Bond agreements, Marine Protected Areas, Belize Blue Economy Policy Strategy, Marine Spatial Planning, incentive proposals for fisherfolk, intersection between fisheries and tourism sector, and ideas around cooperative formation.

Courtesy call on the CRFM. The CNFO/CRFM Small-Scale Fisheries Action Plan is the output from an initiative by the CRFM and CNFO to devise an action plan to address the challenges and seize the opportunities to make a significant contribution to the CARICOM Heads of Government commitment to reducing the Region's large food import bill by 25% by 2025.<sup>5</sup>

Courtesy call on Belize Fishermen Cooperative Society Limited and spoke with Mr. Sydney Fuller on the history of the BFCA that was founded 23 October 1970.

Day 3 20<sup>th</sup> June:

Courtesy call on National Fishermen Cooperative Society Limited and Northern Fishermen Cooperative Society Limited and tour of the fishing plant. This was an extremely rewarding meeting as we gained a better understanding of the benefits cooperatives can provide to members.

About National Fishermen Cooperative Society Limited:

The educational grant given is from High School to Sixth Form and some recipients eventually seek employment outside of the sector and find other job opportunities including lawyers, doctors, and bankers. Unfortunately, in 2020, the scholarship grant program came to an end.

The fisherfolk need to be loyal and deliver their product to the cooperative of which they are members of. This year the cooperative is paying 100% up front for all marine product. This is because of a price war

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sanpedrosun.com/government/2024/02/18/launch-of-a-credit-facility-for-artisanal-fishers-to-improvelivelihoods-and-strengthen-stewardship-for-sustainable-fisheries/> <sup>5</sup> <https://cnfo.fish/cnfo-crfm-small-scale-fisheries-action-plan-2023-2025/>

with the private sector. Before fishers were able to receive a part of their payment on delivery and the balance shortly after the close of the fishing season.

The cooperative has a traceability system. NFC's lobster and conch are known for their sweet flavor and high quality.

NFC has been in business for over 50 years and boasts over 530 member fishers. They are the second largest fishing Coop in Belize and are actively working to expand markets, while embracing technology, improving fishery performance and traceability (see NFC website).

The Caribbean Queen Conch is a prized seafood product from the restaurants of Miami to the tables of islanders throughout the region. It is popular for fritters and other island style foods such as chowders.

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Conch can be found from the coast of Florida in the US, through the Caribbean as far south as Brazil. The conch reaches lengths of up to 30 centimeters and are found in the sand flats and grassy areas of the coastal zone in waters from 1 to 30 meters and above. Conch is a managed fishery throughout the Caribbean region. The conch is harvested by free dive, using traditional fishing methods, and the meat is harvested and iced on the fishing boats. Shells are used by women to make ornaments such as earrings, necklace and other jewelry.

The Caribbean spiny lobster is prized for its meaty tail, firm texture, and sweet taste. This species of lobster flourishes in the warm coastal waters of Belize and surrounding countries. NFC's members use traditional fishing methods, free diving among the reefs and archipelagos that make up much of the Belizean coastal zone.

Spiny lobster can be found from the coast of the Carolinas in the US, through the Caribbean as far south as Brazil. The lobster has cylindrical bodies with spines along the tails and body, and are different from cold water lobsters, as they do not have the large claws on the front legs. The lobster is harvested by free dive, using traditional fishing methods, including traps and snares.

National Cooperative Society Limited website<sup>4</sup>.

About Northern Fishermen Cooperative Society Limited:

Mr. Jaime Velasquez, plant manager of Northern Fishermen Cooperative Society Ltd. explained that they have 18-20 permanent workers in the processing plant and 12-14 additional seasonal workers, all women. In June they hire the seasonal workers, and they work for about 5 to 6 months or even more. They work from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm with several breaks totaling 1 hour and a half. The rest of the year it is from 7:30 am to 5pm with total 2 hours break for the day. The peak is the first four to six weeks of both openings of the lobster or conch season; because of the high volume of production for the peak. It last about 20 to 25 days high peak and then they go back to a bit of normality.

He explains it is very intense work and the women play a very crucial role in the processing of the lobster tails and conchs. The cooperative would process 2 containers totaling 40,000 to 42,000 pounds per week. The women work every day including Saturdays and Sundays. During the conch season, they are processing 7,000 to 9,000 pounds of conchs per day.

It last about 20 to 25 days high peak and then they go back to a bit of normality.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nationalfisherscoop.com/products>

Those hired in the last 8 to 10 years are very committed in working this routine. Many keep up with the work they have. They have different roles in the cooperative. Some clean the product; some are involved in the packing, and some are involved in the verification. There is also a secretary who does the paperwork.

The permanently employed work on a full-time basis and most of them have been working at the cooperative for 10 years and they are a part of the development of the cooperative. In Belize all employer/employees pay Social Security, and they are eligible for all benefits that the Social Security provides

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Tour of two fish markets. These were landing sites where the community visit to purchase fish directly from the fishers that arrive on their boats<sup>1</sup>. usually in the afternoons.

Key observances were the similarities in the processing methods, sanitary standards, statutory regulations and seafood handling.

#### **4. Looking Ahead**

Following this visit the consensus is the exchange was extremely important and a rewarding experience as we were able to gain firsthand knowledge of a working institution. We have begun to build capacity to form a fishing cooperative to support the organization.

Steps to take:

1. Identify needs and host trainings on the **CNFO Leadership Institute**. For example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nbiiv73Fxp0>
2. Develop a business plan
3. Secure funding
4. Host meeting and form Managing Committee
5. Draft Bylaws and register

More details below:

##### 1. Group Formation

**Minimum Membership:** A fishing cooperative must have at least ten members who share a common interest in fishing and marine resources.

**Common Purpose:** Members should have a shared goal, such as improving fishing practices, increasing market access, or enhancing sustainability.

##### 2. Drafting Bylaws

**Cooperative Bylaws:** Create a set of bylaws that outline the governance structure, membership rules, decision-making processes, and operational guidelines.

**Democratic Control:** Ensure that the bylaws reflect democratic principles where each member has an equal vote.

##### 3. Registration Process

Application Submission: Submit an application for registration to the Department of Cooperatives under the Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources.

Required Documentation: Include necessary documents such as:

A copy of the proposed bylaws

List of founding members

Minutes from initial meetings

#### 4. Compliance with Regulations

Fishing Licenses: Ensure all members obtain necessary fishing licenses from the Department of Marine Resources.

Environmental Regulations: Adhere to local environmental laws regarding sustainable fishing practices and marine resource management.

#### 5. Financial Structure

Capital Contributions: Determine how much capital each member will contribute to start the cooperative.

Financial Management Plan: Establish a plan for managing finances, including budgeting, accounting, and profit distribution among members.

#### 6. Training and Capacity Building

Member Education: Provide training for members on cooperative management, sustainable fishing techniques, and marketing strategies.

Continuous Development: Encourage ongoing education to adapt to changing regulations and market conditions.

#### 7. Community Engagement

Stakeholder Involvement: Engage with local communities and stakeholders to build support for the cooperative's activities.

Partnerships: Consider forming partnerships with other cooperatives or organizations for resource sharing and capacity building.

End.