

FOCUS GROUPS WITH FISHERS IN THE BAHAMAS

Leander Lacy, The Nature Conservancy

Throughout the Caribbean, the Queen Conch (*Lobatus gigas* formerly called *Strombus gigas*) is considered a precious marine resource. Conch is a local food source and supports employment for thousands of Bahamians involved in fishing, processing, marketing, and exporting. Evidence showing a decline in conch populations motivated a collective effort by The Nature Conservancy, The Bahamas National Trust (BNT), the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) and other conservation partners to improve sustainability of the conch fishery through the Conchervation Campaign.

A major challenge to this effort is that little is known and documented about whether fishers of The Bahamas are aware of the status of the fishery, how conch and its products are used and valued, and whether they would support conch management. This is important as local government openly stated they would not implement regulations without some knowledge about fishers' attitudes about conch management. To understand local fishers' knowledge, attitude, and practices (KAP) related to conch, 3 focus groups were conducted in conjunction with a national phone survey.

Contrary to the assumption that fishers may be strong opponents to efforts to change conch management, these results suggest that fishers strongly support sustainability efforts and may be important allies for reforming conch management. Specifically, the conch management techniques that fishers recommended were consistent with those that were recommended by the Conchervation Campaign partners via an initial assessment.

By demonstrating support and documenting fisher's knowledge and attitudes, this KAP study has enabled a key Conchervation Campaign partner (BNT) to begin discussions with the Minister of Marine Resource on implementing new conch management. A general lesson from this study is how focus group meetings can help build relationships and obtain data in a data-poor environment.