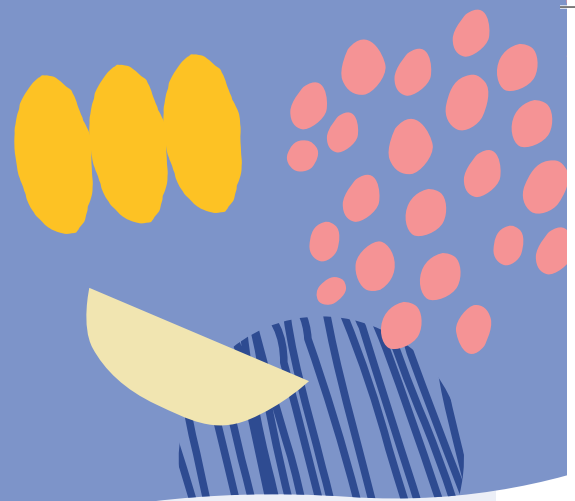




CITES & LIVELIHOODS CASE STUDY 2022

# Harvest, import and consumption of Queen Conch in St Lucia



Queen conch fishing boat in St Lucia. Photo: Alexander Girvan



ST LUCIA



QUEEN CONCH  
(*Strombus gigas*)



APPENDIX II



NOT  
ASSESSED



## SPECIES, USE AND TRADE

The queen conch (*Strombus gigas*) is a large sea mollusc, found throughout the Caribbean Sea, Gulf of Mexico and some parts of the Atlantic Ocean. Reaching up to 30 cm in shell size, queen conch is harvested and imported to Saint Lucia primarily for its meat both for domestic and tourist consumption. Saint Lucia is not currently an exporter of queen conch meat, but occasionally exports queen conch pearls.

In Saint Lucia, queen conch is known by its French name 'lambi' and is a major part of the islands culture and cuisine, largely due to the countries strong historical French influence, and close cultural relations with neighbouring Francophile islands.

Queen conch is landed across the island of Saint Lucia but the vast majority of landings occur on the north of the island in a community of Gros Islet (78% of landings). The average annual value of queen conch meat harvest in the past decade was US \$920,591.98 with a peak of US 1.18 million in 2017 and a low of US \$338,370.74 in 2020 due to fishing bans related to covid and decreased demand from the tourism industry.

Fishers use small boats and teams of three to harvest conch. Divers descend to the sea floor between 80-110 feet and fill netted collection bags with 5-10 live conch. Float bags are filled with air from the diver's tank and bring the conch to the surface where the boat crew then pulls them

into the boat. Conch meat is removed from the shell by the boat hand in the port harbour and shells are discarded overboard. In addition to this domestic capture and production, queen conch are also imported to St Lucia from other Caribbean Islands and the prepared for culinary purposes for both domestic and tourist consumption. Approximately 34% of conch consumed in Saint Lucia is imported. Cultural tourism is a significant aspect of Saint Lucia's tourism offering, with weekly "Fish fry" parties dominating the entertainment and both domestic and imported queen conch being one of the key foods on sale.

## LIVELIHOOD BENEFITS

The domestic harvest of queen conch involves approximately 40 fishers from across the island. As conch fishing (diving) is a specialised skill, most conch fishers engage only in conch fishing on a year-round basis. All conch fishers in Saint Lucia are male with the average age of fishers being 44 years old.

Due to the high level of imports as well as the domestic harvest of queen conch the post-harvest phase of the queen conch fishery is particularly important for local livelihoods as significant value is added through the variety of queen conch food preparations including curried, grilled, fried, conch soups/chowders and conch fritters. Local restaurants and street food stalls are typically owned and operated by local women and operate with two to five employees. Conch dishes sold in restaurants at least triple the value of raw conch meat and serve as a notable benefit from this trade to local communities and female lead livelihoods.



Preparing Queen conch in St Lucia. **Photo:** Alexander Girvan.



Cooking Queen conch in St Lucia. **Photo:** Alexander Girvan.

## CONSERVATION IMPACTS

Saint Lucian Fishers rotate their queen conch fishing grounds and do not harvest juvenile conch as a traditional method of conserving the resource. Furthermore, the CITES-enabled importation of queen conch to Saint Lucia from other countries with higher production capacity has helped to limit the pressure placed on local stocks. In addition, to meet CITES compliance requirements, local fisheries authorities regularly publicise and enforce size limits enshrined in local legislation.

Through the implementation of a “Blue BioTrade project”, jointly executed by the CITES, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), Saint Lucia has improved domestic data collection on catch, landings and social aspects of the conch fishery, in response to CITES recommendations. CITES data collection requirements have improved the management capacity of local authorities, but has also enhanced data collection for other fisheries nationally.

## LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The livelihood benefits of trade in CITES-listed species are often considered from the perspective of exporters. This case study demonstrates that CITES-regulated trade can also generate benefits for local people in importing countries. In this case, imported queen conch supplement that which can be domestically harvested and provide important opportunities for fish processors, chefs and restaurateurs to benefit from sales to domestic and tourism markets.

While the harvest and sale of raw materials from CITES products is important, the generation of value-added products is arguably more important for livelihood benefits, particularly when these value-added products are produced by vulnerable groups and women.

St Lucia continues to deepen regional collaboration with other producers such as Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Grenada through the BioTrade project, in areas such as stock assessments, CITES enforcement and compliance. This is because the continued benefits derived from queen conch in St Lucia are also dependent on the sustainability of its trade partners fisheries. When countries view neighbouring producers as collaborators rather than competition in the trade of CITES products, it reduces the ‘race’ to consume the biological resource, ultimately serving sustainability.

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IN COLLABORATION WITH:



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