

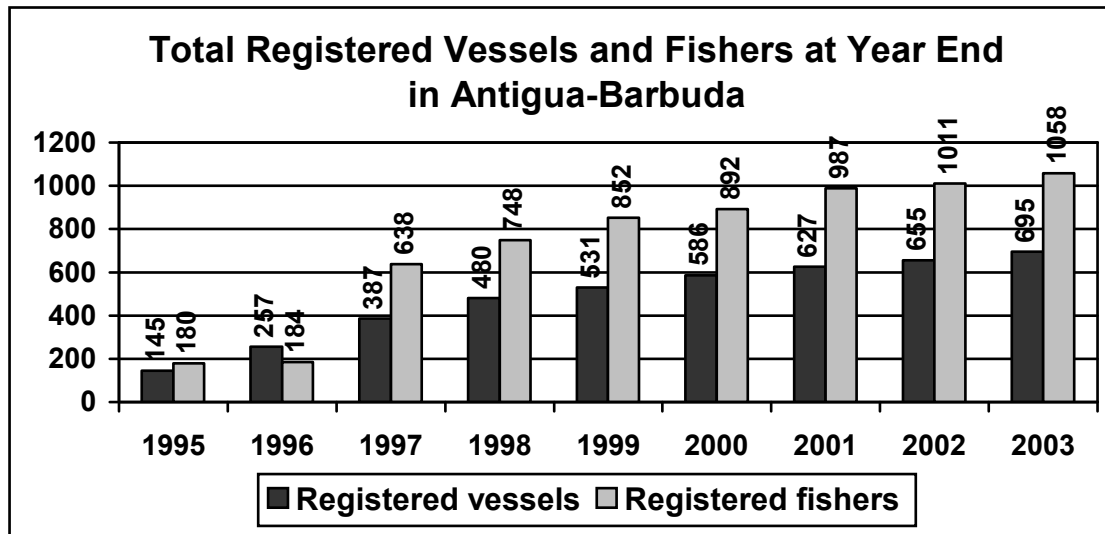
Status and Trends in the Fisheries Sector of Antigua – Barbuda

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Structure of the Fisheries Sector

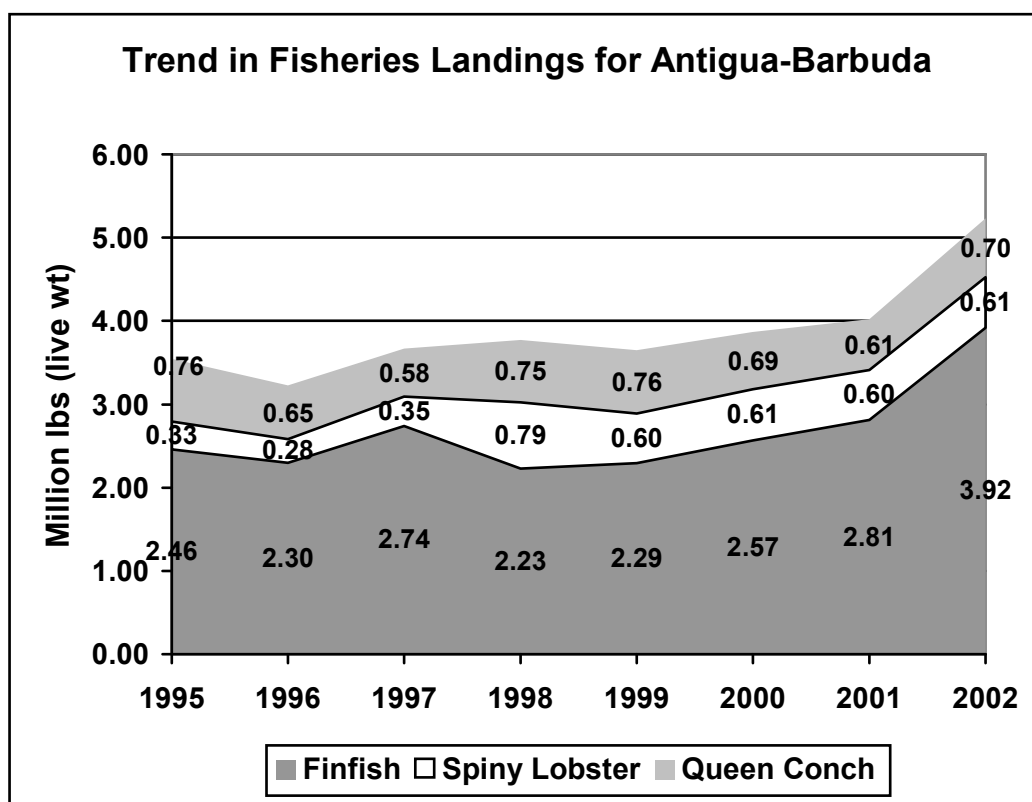
Over the past thirty years, the fishing fleet of Antigua and Barbuda has undergone significant modernisation. Most of the wooden sloops and dories that dominated the sector in the early seventies have been gradually replaced by modern fibreglass launches and pirogues with the latest fishing equipment (global positioning systems, depth sounder, trap haulers, etc). While there have been significant changes in terms of vessel construction and fishing technology, traps or “fish pot” remain the dominant gear. Trap-fishing vessels comprised 48% of the active fishing vessels in 2003, followed by “hook and line” vessels (16%). The distribution by primary fishing method for the rest of the fleet was: trolling, 15%; gillnetting, 11%; SCUBA diving, 6%; free diving, 2%; and longlining, 2%.

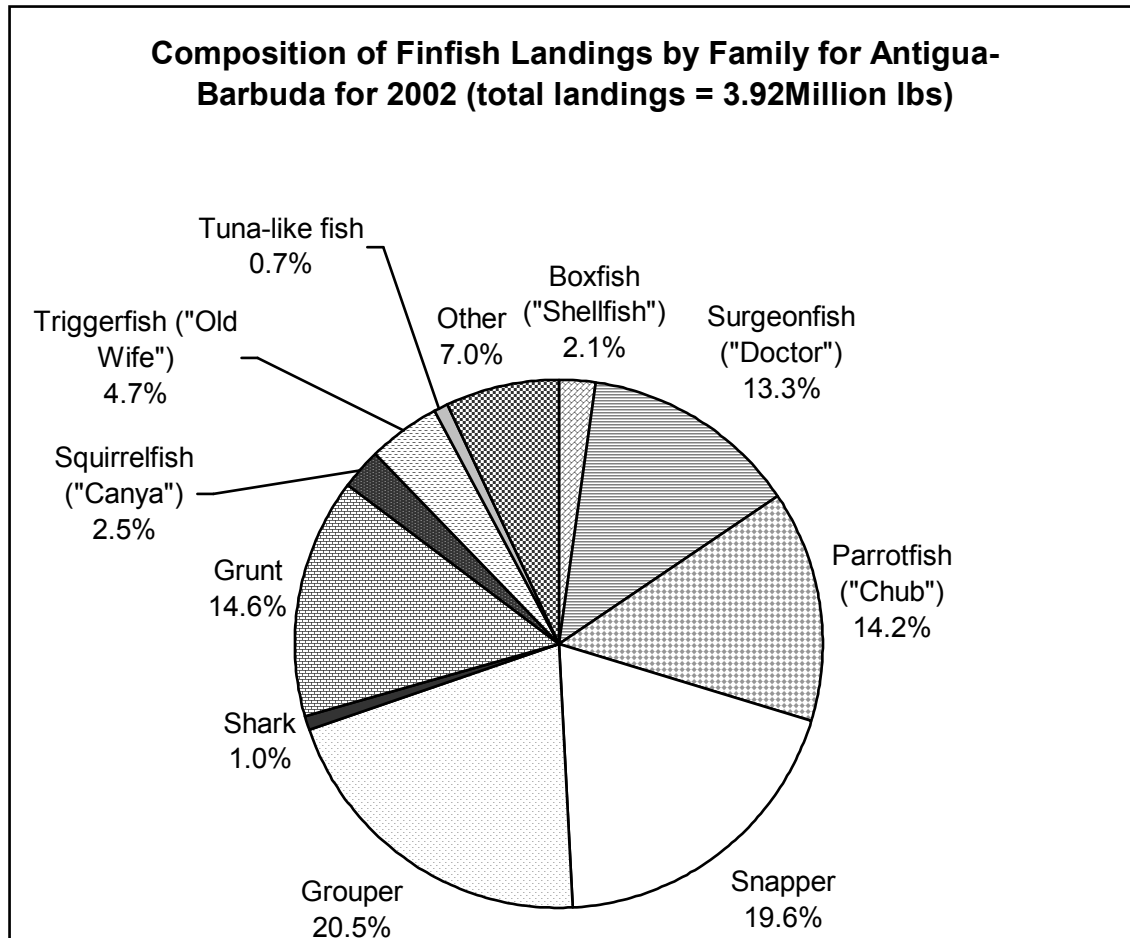
With regards to the registration of fishers and vessels, which started in 1995, there has been constant growth in this arena. However the numerous hurricanes experienced over the past decade have significantly reduced the level of fishing activity. For example, of the 695 vessels registered at the end of 2003, only 292 (42%) were actively fishing, accounting for 724 fishers or 2% of the labour force of 33,000. These values should be taken as conservative estimates since the sector continues to act as a “safety-net” for other economic activity. In other words, when there is a downturn in others sectors (e.g., tourism and construction) individuals re-enter or increase their activity in the fisheries sector.



Production

In 2002, total production of finfish, spiny lobster (*Panulirus argus*) and queen conch (*Strombus gigas*) was 5.23 Million pounds and valued at EC\$ 30.86 Million. The spiny lobster, being one of our most valuable resources contributed to 19.7% of the total value of production. With the constant growth in the number of fishing vessels over the past eight years, fisheries production continues to rise, contributing to 50% of the agricultural GDP of EC\$ 62.6 Million or 1.6% of the national GDP (in current prices) for 2002. In terms of the composition of the finfish landings, the grouper family (red hind, coney, etc.) was the most dominant group followed by the snappers, grunts and parrotfish (“chub”). Value of production for the two major fish groups was EC\$ 4.8 and EC\$ 5.4 Million, respectively. The difference in value despite larger landings for the groupers was due mainly to the higher prices offered for the snappers.





Trade

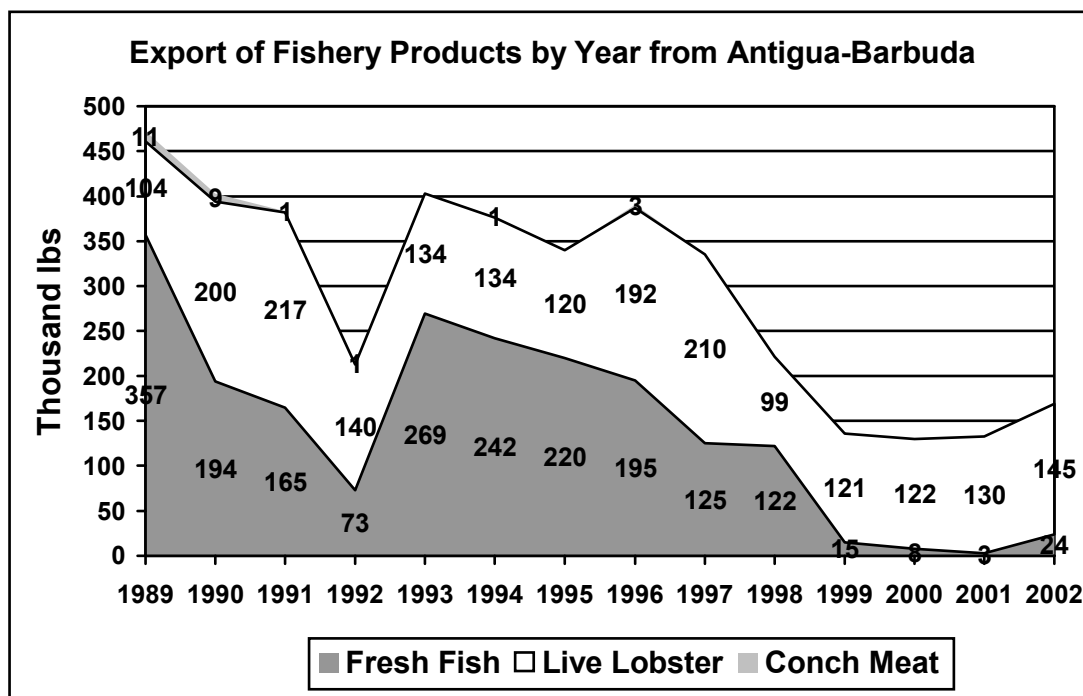
Total export of fishery products from Antigua and Barbuda in 2002 was 169,000 pounds and valued at EC\$ 1.59 Million (based on local prices). This represented an increase of 26.4%, in terms of quantity from the previous year, with Barbuda contributing 67.4%. While this represents a substantial increase, the levels of export have not recovered to the levels they were prior to the European Union harmonising their trade regulations in 1992. This harmonisation drastically affected the export sector since the European Union, specifically the French territories in the region, are our main export market. Prior to 1992, as much as 473,000 pounds of fishery products were exported mainly to the French territories of Guadeloupe, Martinique and St. Barthelemy.

In recent time, live lobster has dominated the export of fishery products due in part to Article 5 of Directive 91/493 of the European Community legislation, which forbids the placing on the market of fishery products containing ciguatera toxins – the toxins responsible for “fish poisoning”. This legislation has restricted exports to mainly live lobster since local exporters cannot guarantee that their products are free from such toxins. Fish poisoning has long been recognised as a serious health problem endemic to

the Leeward and Virgin Islands, with Antigua and Barbuda having some of the highest number of reported cases in the sub-region (295 cases in 2001 and 276 cases in 2002). With such figures, fish poisoning will continue to be detrimental to trade and a burden on our health care system.

Presently, the fisheries sector is struggling to meet the stringent trade requirements of the European Union, as well as overcome trade sanctions (in the case of conch) resulting from failure to meet our obligations under the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES). This Convention protects certain endangered species from overexploitation by means of a system of trade permits. The local conch, *Strombus gigas*, falls under the protection of CITES since Antigua-Barbuda acceded to the Convention in 1997 and is subject to the provisions of the Convention. Since 1999, trade sanctions was imposed on Antigua-Barbuda for failure to meet its obligations with respect to reporting as well as failure to enact CITES enabling legislation required to implement the Convention. In order to improve management of the conch resources and to meet our obligations to CITES, a morphological study was conducted in 1999, followed by an abundance survey. Both of which form the first steps in determining a “sustainable yield” for the stock.

In terms of vulnerability, the Barbudan economy is highly at risk due to its heavy reliance on lobster exports as a foreign exchange earner. As much as 84% of the lobsters landed are shipped to the French territories in the region. Hence, trade sanctions resulting from failure to meet international standards, can have dire implications, particularly when the lobster fishery offers the highest per capita earnings, with 26% of the population (of 1,400) financially dependent on this fishery.



Prospectus for 2004

In order for Antigua – Barbuda to meet the challenges posed by globalisation, trade liberalisation, multilateral environment agreements and international fisheries instruments, the Fisheries Division has sought assistance from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN with respect to bring the *Fisheries Act (1983)* and the *Fisheries Regulations (1990)*, in line with development in current international fisheries law and related environmental agreements. In light of this, a consultative process will take place in May this year with all relevant government authorities and stakeholders.

Issues under review (but not limited to) include:

- The guiding principles for fisheries management (e.g., sustainable development, responsible fisheries, the precautionary approach, the ecosystem approach)
- Registration, inspection and safety of fishing vessels (also the issue of vessel hygiene)
- Sport fishing (whether or not separate licensing scheme and regulations required)
- Prohibited conduct in fisheries (e.g., stealing of “fish pots”)
- Aquaculture (at present there is no legal framework)
- Record of authorisations, permits and licences (the introduction of provisions on the keeping and the use of information kept in such records)
- Seafood quality/safety and requirements for fish processing establishment (the need to implement food safety systems like Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points)
- Food security (the Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Act of 2002, requires foreign food facilities that manufacture, process or hold food for human or animal consumption in the US to register with the Food and Drug Administration)
- Artificial reefs and the use of fish aggregating devices (at present there is no legal framework)
- Conservation of turtles (possibly the introduction of maximum size regulations rather than minimum size)
- Mandatory registration of local fishers (presently registration is voluntary)
- Regulation of by-catch (such as the landing of undersize fish)
- Marine reserves and restricted areas/protection of coral reefs (legal framework for management of such areas required)
- High seas fishing (not currently regulated in fisheries legislation)

Because of the importance of this consultation, it is expected that all stakeholders will take their civic duties seriously and participate in charting the way forward for the sector.

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