



Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources

Government of The Bahamas

Final Draft

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National Policy for Fisheries and Aquaculture

I Introduction

This National Policy for Fisheries and Aquaculture aims to guide the development of fisheries and aquaculture in the Bahamas and the role the sector plays in the sustainability of the country. It is the result of an extensive consultation process with stakeholders in the sector that aimed to build national consensus on the Policy and establish industry-wide ownership of the Policy in support of its implementation.

Due to the importance of fisheries to the culture, development and food security of The Bahamas, and the potential opportunities provided by the expansion of aquaculture, the government of The Bahamas, recognizing also the threats to the industry, determined in 2014 to develop a National Policy on Fisheries and Aquaculture.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources approved the development of this policy that addresses the problems and opportunities in the sector. These include the continuous threats of overfishing, illegal fishing, habitat destruction, pollution and climate change, as well as the need to enhance livelihoods and employment in The Bahamas, and in particular, in the Family Islands. It also considers the advantageous situation of The Bahamas, particularly the vast resources in the nation's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) as well the potential to harness the ever expanding global role of aquaculture in a national context. In particular, the policy seeks:

- To guide the sustainable development of the sector,
- To assist fishers and fish farmers to provide healthy products to the population,
- To enable fishers and fish farmers to develop their businesses profitably,
- To increase collaboration between Government and private sector entrepreneurs,
- To increase international and state support to the industry, and
- To support national level implementation of the Caribbean Community Common Fishery Policy (CCCFP).

Noting the need for national consensus and dialogue, the Policy has been informed by a consultative process in 2014 and 2015 that engaged with and received the participation of a variety of stakeholders.

These included, but are not limited to, various relevant Government agencies, fishers and fish workers, private sector organizations, entrepreneurs, public and private foundations as well as civil society and non-governmental organizations. The development of the present policy was supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) through its Technical Cooperation Programme.

II National and Sectoral Context

The Bahamas comprises an archipelago of over 700 low-lying islands, and more than 200 cays, islets and rocks, covering approximately 100,000 mi² (260, 000 km²). This area includes the country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the Atlantic Ocean. The total land area is approximately 5,380 mi² (13, 934 km²). The islands extend 50 miles (km) east of Florida to 50 miles (km) northeast of Cuba. In addition to the United States and Cuba, neighbours include Haiti and the Turks and Caicos Islands, located to the southeast of The Bahamas.

Government policy presently reserves the commercial fishing industry for the exploitation of Bahamian nationals. Only commercial fishing vessels that are 100% Bahamian owned are considered Bahamian and allowed to fish within the country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Fishing by foreign commercial fishing vessels is prohibited.

The main factors¹ impacting the sector's overall performance include:

- Market access issues – illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) and eco-labelling;
- Lack of biological, economic and social data;
- Lack of adequate enforcement;
- Lack of adequate human and financial resources;
- Lack of adequate regulations – particularly for protection of spawning aggregations and the Queen conch
- Invasive lionfish (*Pterois volitans*)
- Lack of aquaculture policy
- Public education, consultation and outreach
- Establishment of marine reserve network

The fisheries sector in Bahamas is characterized by three main sub-sectors: (i) a well identified and reasonably well monitored commercial fisheries sub-sector, (ii) a large recreational and sports fisheries sub-sector, and a small aquaculture sub-sector in its infancy stages.

The main exploited species by commercial fisheries are the spiny lobster or crawfish, queen conch and various grouper species. Snappers and jacks are also targeted fish species, as well as various sponges species. The recreational and sport fisheries target game fish, such as marlins and sailfishes, as well as bone fish.

While the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of The Bahamas showed an upward trend in recent years, the contribution of the commercial fisheries sector has been fluctuation between 60 and 85 million USD over the period 2010 -2015. The fluctuation is largely caused by the variation in landings of spiny lobster, which were nearly 10 thousand tonnes in 2010 and 2012 and around 6500 tonnes in 2015. The

¹ Derived from the 2010 – 2014 Fisheries Sector Strategic Plan.

total production realized by commercial fisheries in 2015 was estimated at nearly 12 thousand tonnes. The commercial fisheries sector provides employment for an estimated 9300 Bahamians.

The recreational and sport fisheries subsector contributes an estimated 500+ million USD annually to the national economy through related expenditures by tourists, and provides employment for some 18 thousand Bahamians. The aquaculture subsector is small with just a few facilities and less than 20 persons involved, while employment in fish processing and vessel maintenance and repair adds another 160 jobs to the total number of jobs generated by the fisheries sector.

More than half of the commercial landings are exported. Main exported fisheries products include spiny lobster or crawfish and Queen conch. In general the annual value of fisheries exports is some five times higher than the value of fisheries products imports in the same year.

The fish supply available to the Bahamian population is an estimated 29 kg/capita per year, however actual fish consumption levels are lower as a large share of the fish landed and imported is supplied to the tourism sector. Fisheries products are important in the diet of the Bahamian people as nearly 10% of total protein intake is originating from fish and fisheries products.

The Bahamian fisheries sector has significant opportunities to increase its contribution to food security, employment and income, as well as to add to the attractiveness of The Bahamas for tourists. The sector's export earnings can be increased substantially as well, provided that the constraining factors are addressed.

III International and Regional Context

While The Bahamas has a significant national fisheries sector and the potential to expand its aquaculture sector, the particularities of the sector also entail the need for extensive regional and international collaboration and dialogue. This is due, among others, the need to conserve shared resources and the extensive and interlinked international market for fisheries and aquaculture products.

At the global and regional scale, the fisheries and aquaculture sector is governed by an extensive legal and policy framework. The Commonwealth of the Bahamas is committed to engage in these international processes. This policy is thus both informed by international standards and provides support to enhance the ability of The Bahamas to meet its international commitments and obligations.

At a global scale, the continued development of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture was important for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly those related to food security and poverty alleviation. The world has moved in 2015 from the MDGs to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) which includes Goal 14 "Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development" for the fisheries sector. The Vision set forth in this Policy will allow The Bahamas to step closer to achieving global commitments made in these SDGs and particularly reach Goal 14. On a broader scale, the Policy also sets out a general path for the fisheries and aquaculture sector to play its role in the achievement of the commitments established in the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development Rio +20 outcome document "The Future we want" and to contribute to the implementation of the Paris Agreement reached at the 21st UN Climate Change Conference held in France in November 2015 and ratified by The Bahamas in August 2016.

The implementation of this policy shall be guided by relevant international instruments and be supported by a Strategic Plan. In particular the policy seeks to implement the relevant articles of the 1995 Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and its appropriate related instruments², in particular those associated with IUU fishing, and securing sustainable small-scale fisheries. The Code is the consensus global normative instrument that establishes principles and standards for the proper conservation, management and development of fisheries.

The Bahamas has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982) and is also party to the Agreement for the implementation of the provisions of the Convention of 10 December 1982 relating to the conservation and management of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks (UN Fish Stocks Agreement). Other relevant international instruments and agreements include the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

At the regional level, The Bahamas is an active member of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC). The WECAFC provides a regional forum and technical advisory body regarding the management of shared fisheries stocks, making sure that these are sustainably managed and harvested across the Wider Caribbean Region. WECAFC provisions closely follow the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and its related instruments. Moreover, WECAFC facilitates fisheries scientific and management collaboration between The Bahamas and neighboring countries that are not member of the CARICOM. Through its active participation in the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) of CARICOM. The Bahamas has access to a mechanism for joint fisheries research projects and is able to exchange best practices across the region. Both the WECAFC and CRFM enhance regional harmonization of fisheries management, collaboration and cooperation in fisheries research, promotion of best practices, but also enhance trade and fisheries development and thus strengthen regional integration.

The Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy (CCCFP), which was approved in 2014 by the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) of the CARICOM states, provides the regional policy framework for fisheries for all CARICOM countries, including The Bahamas. Therefore this policy is contributes to the national implementation of the CCCFP in The Bahamas.

In recent years, The Bahamas has also been active in the northern parts of the Atlantic Ocean, where Bahamian flagged fish transport and transshipment vessels are active in the mandate area of the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC). The Bahamas is a cooperating non-contracting party in NEAFC.

²These include: the International Plan of Action for Reducing Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries; International Plan of Action for Conservation and Management of Sharks ;International Plan of Action for the Management of Fishing Capacity ; International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter, and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing; as well as the Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small Scale Fisheries, the Voluntary Guidelines on Flag State Performance; International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-sea Fisheries in the High Seas and the International Guidelines on the Management of Bycatch and Discards.

IV Vision

Our Vision towards fisheries and aquaculture in The Bahamas is the following:

To develop a sustainable, diverse, competitive and economically viable fisheries and aquaculture sector in The Bahamas. A sector which will deliver high quality, healthy food to consumers, and social, cultural, economic, and recreational benefits to communities, and which will operate responsibly in synergy with other sectors, in an environmentally responsible manner, locally, nationally, and internationally and throughout its value chain.

V Guiding principles

The development and management of fisheries and aquaculture in The Bahamas should adhere to the following guiding principles:

A. Sustainability. The overarching guide to the implementation of the policy shall be sustainability, marked by a balance between the use of resources and conservation of biodiversity.

B. Conflict resolution. The management measures shall be infused with mechanisms that promote conflict avoidance or resolution.

C. Food security. A secure and sustainable food supply, of high quality and safe fish and fishery products, shall take precedence over other production objectives.

D. Empowerment. People and communities shall be empowered to manage their resources through co-management arrangements and in a consultative process with government.

E. Accountability and Transparency of Government (and its procedures) and stakeholders

F. Knowledge-based. The formulation of development projects and management measures shall be based on the best available scientific/research information and traditional knowledge and local wisdom.

G. Monitoring and enforcement. Effective monitoring and enforcement shall be an integral part of the management measures.

H. Adaptive management. An adaptive management approach shall provide the flexibility to address changes in a dynamic sector, such as those related to climate change and natural disasters.

I. Education. Public education and awareness will be an integral part of the policy measures for their clear and unambiguous understanding and, preferably, support by the people.

J. Stakeholder's cooperation. Cooperation and partnership among stakeholders and between stakeholders and donor agencies shall be promoted in developing, planning and implementing fisheries management, research and development projects.

K. Consultation and participation. Active, free, effective, meaningful and informed participation of all stakeholders in management and decision making processes.

L. Subsidiarity. The Department of Marine Resources shall have a subsidiary function, performing all those tasks that cannot be legally and effectively performed at local community level.

VI Institutional Missions

The Institutional Missions of the Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources and the Department of Marine Resources are as follows:

Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources

To enhance the ability of the farming and fisheries sectors to fuel economic development, so as to improve the quality of life, by channelling human, financial and technical resources into areas where competitive advantage exists; and to provide the enabling regulatory environment for the protection and preservation of the national agricultural and marine resources for future generations.

Mission of the Department of Marine Resources

The development of the fisheries sector through sustainable use and integrated management of the fishery resources, coastal zone, and the marine environment for the wellbeing of the Bahamian Environment.

VII Definitions

The following definitions are derived from the (draft) National Fisheries Act of the Bahamas, the Fisheries Resources (Jurisdiction and Conservation) Act and the Fisheries Resources (Jurisdiction and Conservation) Regulations and their amendments unless otherwise noted:

Aquaculture³

Farming of aquatic organisms including fish, molluscs, crustaceans and aquatic plants.

Artisanal Fishing

Small boat fishing or fishing by other traditional small-scale means, and artisanal fisher shall have the corresponding meaning.

Co-management

A process of management in which government shares power with resource users, with each given specific rights and responsibilities relating to information and decision-making.⁴

Commercial Fisheries

Fishing resulting or intending, or appearing to result in selling or trading any fish, which may be taken during the fishing operations.

³ Definition of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

⁴ OECD (1996), Synthesis report for the study on the economic aspects of the management of marine living resources. AGR/FI(96)12.

Ecosystem Approach to Aquaculture⁵

An ecosystem approach to aquaculture (EAA) strives to balance diverse societal objectives, by taking account of the knowledge and uncertainties of biotic, abiotic and human components of ecosystems including their interactions, flows and processes and applying an integrated approach to the sector within ecologically and operationally meaningful boundaries.; Strategy for the integration of the activity within the wider ecosystem such that it promotes sustainable development, equity and resilience of interlinked social-ecological systems.

Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries⁶

An approach to fisheries management and development that strives to balance diverse societal objectives, by taking into account the knowledge and uncertainties about biotic, abiotic and human components of ecosystems and their interactions and applying an integrated approach to fisheries within ecologically meaningful boundaries. The purpose of EAF is to plan, develop and manage fisheries in a manner that addresses the multiple needs and desires of societies, without jeopardizing the options for future generations to benefit from the full range of goods and services provided by marine ecosystems

Fish

Includes any living aquatic organism, whether plant or animal, and whether invertebrate or vertebrate, and including finfish, shellfish, coral, reptile and marine mammal, but does not include aquatic birds;

Fishery

One or more stocks of fish or the operations based on those stocks which can be treated as a unit for purposes of conservation and management, taking into account geographical, scientific, technical, social, cultural, economic, recreational and any other relevant characteristics;

Fisheries Management Plan

Plan for the conservation, management and development of fisheries pursuant to national legislation.

Fishing

Fishing is:

- (a) the searching for, catching, taking or harvesting of fish,
- (b) the attempted searching for, catching, taking or harvesting of fish,
- (c) engaging in any other activity which can reasonably be expected to result in the locating, catching, taking or harvesting of fish,
- (d) placing, searching for or recovering a fish aggregating device or associated equipment including radio beacons,
- (e) an operation at sea in support of or in preparation for an activity within the meaning of this definition, or
- f) the use of an aircraft in relation to an activity described in this definition;

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ *ibid*

Precautionary Approach to Fisheries

The application of prudent foresight, taking account of the uncertainties in fisheries and aquaculture systems and the need to take action with incomplete knowledge.⁷

Recreational Fishing

Fishing done for leisure and without regard to earnings, gain or profit.

Sportfishing

Fishing other than for reward or profit for the purposes of sport.

VIII General approaches to address principles

The following approaches should be followed in order to address the principles established in this policy:

- A. The Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy and its related strategies, plans and procedures will adhere to and be harmonized with international and regional standards. These would include the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and its related instruments⁸.
- B. The Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy and its related strategies, plans and procedures will adhere to and be harmonized with relevant national policies.
- C. Access to relevant national fisheries and aquaculture capacity (facilities and specialized expertise) is crucial for development and management of the sector. Collaboration with regional and international organizations and countries will be sought to further increase national capacity.
- D. Fisheries and Aquaculture management measures will be effective, practical, and cost-effective and utilize readily available resources. These resources will allow the development of appropriate national and regional policies and regulatory frameworks to encourage investments and reduce the risks associated with fishing, culture, reproduction and movement of aquatic animals. The development of management measures in the sector will draw guidance from the ecosystems approach to fisheries and aquaculture management.
- E. The goals, outcomes and outputs of this Policy are formulated in the context of potential impacts from climate change and natural disasters. Mitigation and adaptation measures will be pursued in order to ensure the long term security of the sector and ensure support to vulnerable fishing communities. This Policy will be further guided by the National Policy for the Adaptation to Climate Change.
- F. The Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources (MAMR) shall take the lead and encourage fisheries and aquaculture stakeholders to apply sustainable management and production programmes and procedures. Such measures would include Better Management

⁷ FAO. 1996. Precautionary Approach to Capture Fisheries and Species Introductions. FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries, 2: 54 p.

⁸ See footnote 2 for a complete list. .

Practices (BMP), Community-Based Fisheries Management, health certification, specific pathogen free (SPF) and high health (HH) stocks, biosecurity, and vaccination protocols.

IX Strategic Goals

A commitment to sustainability requires a focus on its three pillars: environmental, economic and social sustainability. By achieving sustainability, we ensure long term benefits provided by our natural resources. An appropriate and functioning institutional framework provides the enabling environment for these pillars.

The Strategic Goals of the Policy are aligned with these pillars, thus promoting a holistic and long-term approach for the sector. The order in which they are listed below does not necessarily correspond to a prioritization of the goals.

1. Economic

To enhance the productivity, profitability and marketability of the sector so that it meets local demand and fully contributes to individual and foreign exchange savings and earnings, increases government revenues and promotes economic diversification.

2. Social

To promote an inclusive, equal and fair sector that provides secure employment, enhances national food security, nutrition and overall health, and that provides improved economic opportunities, particularly in Family Island communities.

3. Ecological

To assure sustainably managed fisheries, aquaculture, water and related resources so that aquatic biodiversity of indigenous species is protected and maintained, ecosystem services and functions are conserved, enhanced or rebuilt and invasive species are managed, controlled or eradicated.

4. Institutional

To improve sectoral governance and promote coherent policies, enabling legal frameworks and high quality human capacity building.

X Strategic Outcomes

The following outcomes for the sector are envisioned as a result of the implementation of this Policy. They are in line with the Strategic Goals presented above.

- **Economic:** A viable sector which produces profitably, providing legitimate income to producers and processors and supplying the consumer with food that meets the requirements of national and international markets.

- **Social:** A sector that produces sustainable and safe food for the population in the Bahamas, provides employment, contributes to poverty alleviation, takes in consideration the traditions and cultural values and is supported by a well-functioning system of fishers (sector) organizations.
- **Ecological/environmental:** A sector which utilizes the natural resources in a sustainable manner with care for ecosystem health, contributes to aquatic biodiversity and rehabilitation of overexploited stocks, and reduces its “ecological footprint”.
- **Institutional:** A sector which contributes to the national development objectives, and which is supported in doing so by a competent and efficiently operating Department of Marine Resources that closely collaborates and cooperates with other government agencies and is assisted by local communities, academic and research institutions, civil society organizations, NGOs and international and regional development and fisheries management partners.

XI Operational objectives

The operational objectives are aligned with the strategic goals and intended outcomes, and are thus categorized under the three pillars of sustainability, namely, social, economic and environmental. A fourth objective relates to an enabling environment, which is created by improved governance and enhanced institutional capacity. In line with the strategic goals, the operational objectives of the Policy shall be to:

Economic

1. Ensure the supply for domestic consumption through sustainable production, processing and marketing and by enhancing the value chain.
2. Increase the value and volume of fisheries and aquaculture products for export through sustainable production, value addition and market diversification and by enhancing the value chain.
3. Promote independent and socially responsible entrepreneurship in the sector.
4. Enhance revenue derived from sport fishing and other tourism activities associated with the sector.

Social

1. Increase employment through development of the aquaculture sector, and contribute to poverty alleviation through continued fisheries development, particularly in the Family Islands.
2. Strengthen the image of the sector and its products by highlighting the role of fishers, fish workers and their communities and increase consumer awareness on the nutritional and health benefits of fisheries and aquaculture products, environmental benefits of these resources and their role as responsible consumers.
3. Preserve and promote the culture and heritage of fishers, fish workers and their communities.

4. Ensure the access of fishers and anyone active in the fisheries and aquaculture sector to health, safety, social protection and national insurance programmes including improvements in occupational health and safety.
5. Create equitable access to the fisheries and aquaculture sector as a means of employment and poverty alleviation through awareness and training programs targeted to women and other groups.

Ecological

1. Improve production of fisheries by utilizing resources sustainably and responsibly informed by Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) and the Ecosystem Approach to Aquaculture (EAA), including the protection of fragile ecosystems that are significant for the sector.
2. Protect fragile habitats, conserve native aquatic biodiversity and contribute to the rehabilitation of stocks of overfished, rare and endangered aquatic species.

Institutional

1. Strengthen the national and local capacity for fisheries governance, including planning, management, regulation, monitoring and evaluation of the fisheries and aquaculture sector, and develop participatory approaches for co-management.
2. Reduce illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing through improved enforcement capacity, improved regional level collaboration and improved capacity for Monitoring Control and Surveillance (MCS)⁹.
3. Assist institutions to improve research and development (R&D), technical assistance, extension services, training and education.
4. Strengthen policy coherence and collaboration with other sectors (tourism, transport, development, etc.) to manage fisheries and aquaculture in an integrated fashion.

These objectives, which contain the basic steps needed in order to achieve the goals of the Policy are further detailed and made operational in the Strategic Plan for Fisheries and Aquaculture of the Bahamas. The Strategic Plan will be implemented for a period of five years following the approval of this Policy. The Plan will be updated according to the achievement of the initial five-year period in order to accurately reflect the priority needs of the nation.

⁹ MCS consists of monitoring (the continuous requirement for the measurement of fishing effort characteristics and resource yields), control (the regulatory conditions under which the exploitation of the resource may be conducted), and surveillance (the degree and types of observations required to maintain compliance with the regulatory controls imposed on fishing activities).