

Caribbean Fisheries Management Council

I have been a full time resident of St. Croix since October 1977. I have been working daily as a dive instructor for the pass 32 years. I have made thousands of dives off the north shore of St. Croix. In 1989, I was responsible for the mooring system for dive operators and later on more moorings for recreational fishers. I am on and the board for the St. Croix Fisheries Advisory Committee, since 1989.

Diving daily, weekly monthly and yearly to the same dive sites I have noticed the decline of the fish population to the point of many species of fish totally gone from these areas. Such fish as the majority of groupers, snappers and the larger species of parrotfish.

In the early 70's scuba, diving was introduced to the USVI and since then it became the decline of the fishers. To add insult to injury the introduction of the gill and trammel net and the use of scuba has caused a near collapse of the fisheries on St. Croix.

We have limited reef area surrounding the island of St. Croix. We are a plate pushed up from the sea and are not connected underwater to other islands. With this finite shelf, the fishers that use scuba are finding their catch at much deeper depth, which is causing a high incident of decompression sickness. Conch that use to be in the shallow waters are now found only in excess of 90 feet,

With the increase, number of fishers and extremely effective methods of fishing has caused over fishing for more than 20 years. Records from Dr. Olsen, former director of Fish and Wildlife has shown that the majority of fish caught on St. Croix are too small to breed, which is another reason for the disappearing act of our reef fish. Lack of enforcement on St. Croix has and always will be a problem to protect or preserve what little we have left.

I can not speak for St. Thomas or St. John, but having an annual catch limit on St. Croix will not work. First of all the fishers will not accurately give fish reports, the gill net is still widely used and the most important reason is that we do not have enforcement here. Presently we have excellent rules and regulations for the fisheries, but they are not enforced. When there is enforcement and a fisher goes to court it would be dismissed or a small fine, which will not be a deterrent to continue breaking the law.

My recommendation to the council is a five year complete moratorium of all reef fishing on the island of St. Croix. This will be easy to enforce and allow the fish to recover. During this five year the 100 or so full time fishers can work with fish and wildlife to do studies and help restore the reefs, which the majority is covered in algae due to lack of parrotfish and sea urchins. There are many federal funds available to eradicate lionfish; this is something the fishers would be excellent at. Also more FADs need to be put in place so the fishers could continue to fish in the deep waters.

St Croix can not support reef fish fisheries. Having an annual catch limit will not help the fishery only put the last nail in the coffin.

Sincerely,



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