



## Putting sustainability at the heart of Guyana's shrimp industry



Dawn Maison from the Guyana Association of Trawler Owners and Seafood Processors.

In 2017 Guyana's shrimp industry was struggling to retain important international buyers due to their concerns over potentially unsustainable fishing practices and the lack of international certification of the fishery. If the situation were to continue or worsen, it would have serious implications on the economy.

### CHOGM THEME

A more sustainable future

### PROJECT TITLE

Commonwealth Marine Economies programme

### COUNTRY

Guyana

### IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

Centre for Environment, Fisheries, & Aquaculture Science (Cefas)

Guyana's shrimp industry is the country's most significant fishing product and fourth largest export. Early in 2018 the decline in buyers had already forced one food processor to close down with a loss of 340 jobs.

In 2018 the Commonwealth Marine Economies (CME) Programme launched an initiative to help Guyana obtain Marine Stewardship Council certification status for its shrimp industry in the knowledge that this accreditation would send a message of sustainability to shrimp buyers. The industry was confirmed as certified by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) in 2019. Prior to this process, Guyana had limited capacity to monitor the health and sustainability of its fishing stocks, including shrimps or the wider impact of its fishing industry on marine habitats.

The MSC is a global non-profit organisation which works to improve the sustainability of commercial fisheries through a certification scheme. An [independent World Wildlife Fund review](#) of seafood sustainability programmes found that the MSC certification was 'clearly the best programme to drive uptake of sustainable seafood in the market and protect fisheries and their surrounding ecosystems'. In 2010, Guyana's industry association, the Guyana Association of Trawler Owners and Seafood Processors, had embarked upon the certification process, but without guidance and technical support they found it challenging and by 2015 progress had stalled.

### Road to sustainability

The CME Programme provided training and capacity building through the UK's Centre



The MSC Certification ensures continued access for US and European markets for the Guyanese shrimp industry.

for Environment, Fisheries, and Aquaculture Science (Cefas), an executive agency of the UK Government's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Representatives from Guyana's fishing industry attended bespoke training sessions at the Centre's headquarters in Lowestoft, UK. Cefas experts also visited Guyana to provide in-situ capacity building and training. "The help was tremendous," said Dawn Maison, from the Guyana Association of Trawler Owners and Seafood Processors.

**'It was really worth the while, it really helped us to get MSC'**

**Dawn Maison**

Guyana was finally confirmed as certified by the MSC in 2019.

The industry association says that there is now clear demand from international buyers. In some cases, they have also been able to raise the prices for their products. Now, according to Reuben Charles, Chair of the industry association, "We will always have a market."

In addition to the beneficial economic impact of following receipt of MSC certification, there are also clear environmental gains. Cefas has supported Guyana's fishing industry association to conduct routine comprehensive stock and habitat assessments as part of their MSC requirements. This has led to positive changes in fishing techniques. Using empirical evidence, the industry association now imposes annual enforced 'closed-seasons' to allow shrimp stocks to recover. To avoid catching juvenile shrimp, trawlers now must adhere to regulated depth

standards that determine where they can set their nets. The CME Programme also supported the establishment of rigorous enforcement through the provision of on-board monitoring systems. To ensure compliance with the new regulations, routine spot checks are conducted both by the MSC and the Guyana Ministry of Agriculture's Fisheries Department.

### Changing behaviours

An important outcome of this project is a notable shift in the attitudes and practices of those involved in Guyana's fishing industry. The Ministry's Fisheries Department take pride in noting how boat captains and fishermen are now more aware of the impact they have on fish stocks, particularly protected species, such as turtles and rays. Mikhail Amsterdam, a Fisheries Conservation specialist from the Fisheries Department said, "Captains are now demonstrating more stewardship over resources; they are [more open] about volunteering information on environmentally protected species." Reuben Charles from the industry association says that the accreditation process strengthened their relationship with the Fisheries Department and has laid the ground for more joint working practices in the future.

Both the Fisheries Department and the fishing industry association also note that the Marine Stewardship Council accreditation has helped them not only improve their technical capacity to manage fish stocks; but also to pursue new initiatives, such as expanding certification coverage to other species or further research into shrimp breeding cycles. As a result of capacity building and training provided by Cefas through the CME

**'The world is looking for sustainability [and] we definitely need to continue to up our game'**

**Denzil Roberts**

Programme, Guyana's Fisheries Department now has expanded its professional staff, and secured further specialist training in marine conservation through the United Nations University.

Going forward, Guyana's government and fishing industry aim to work together to extend certification to cover other species, such as red snapper. They will also raise awareness about environmental and sustainability issues with the artisanal fishing industry. As Denzil Roberts, who heads up the Fisheries Department within the Ministry of Agriculture said, "The world is looking for sustainability [and] we definitely need to continue to up our game."



Shrimp being processed at the factory.