CANARI works with partners to strengthen fisherfolk networks and governance in the BVI

**Port of Spain, May 20, 2021** – Since July 2020, the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) has been working with the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas); British Virgin Islands (BVI) Department of Agriculture and Fisheries; and the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations (CNFO) to implement the project *Capacity building in fisheries evidence, networks and management* aimed at strengthening fisherfolk capacity and governance in the BVI. CANARI’s and CNFO’s work under the project is mainly focused on strengthening the capacity of BVI fisherfolk to establish a formalised network of fisherfolk organisations that would enable them to have a collective voice and greater participation in decision-making within the BVI fisheries sector.

In late February 2021, CANARI engaged the services of an in-country consultant to provide support to implementation activities on the ground in the BVI. This approach was necessary due to the inability of CANARI staff to travel because of the COVID-19. Using a capacity needs assessment survey designed by CANARI with input from project partners, CNFO and DOAF the consultant conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups with fisherfolk and fisherfolk organisations across the four main BVI islands - Anegada, Jost Van Dyke, Tortola, and Virgin Gorda.

Additionally, CANARI and CNFO conducted virtual key informant interviews with civil society representatives and fisherfolk and fisherfolk leaders in the BVI. The key informant and needs assessment interviews and focus groups allowed for a better understanding of fisherfolk capacities, needs and interests.
The project team had to negotiate obstacles including delays brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic to achieve success with implementation of project activities. Nonetheless, the exercise was successfully completed; and the target of 5 key informant interviews and 15 to 20 needs assessment interviews and focus groups with fisherfolk was achieved. Preliminary findings from the key informant interviews and needs assessment survey suggest that fisherfolk are keen on organising themselves into formal FFOs and believe that this will allow them to have a greater voice in decision-making for the fisheries sector and improve their livelihoods.

A fisherfolk from East End, Tortola who participated in the needs assessment interviews highlighted the benefits of fisherfolk participation in the decision-making process. He noted that having a voice in decision making would mean “being a stakeholder, being able to contribute to decisions that would affect and benefit the industry and being involved in the planning”. He also expressed the view that fisherfolk leaders should not be one-sided in their approach to leadership but that there should be “community scope and partnerships with other agencies such as hotels to establish the regulatory instruments in order to maintain a healthy industry”. He was also expressed concerns about the level of support from government; and noted fisherfolk did not have access to “logistical and financial support and credit facilities” he also lamented that “fisherfolk were not treated as legitimate business entities”. In terms of capacity building needs, one fisherfolk from Road Town, Tortola identified the need for “professional leadership, and moral, financial, and material support”. He contends that while he can provide the required labour to ensure that fish is available, “improved organisational governance will provide the enabling environment for negotiating better prices for fish and ultimately improved livelihoods for fisherfolk”.

CANARI is currently wrapping-up the needs assessment report and will use the findings to develop a strategy to support creation of a formalised network of fisherfolk organisations in BVI.