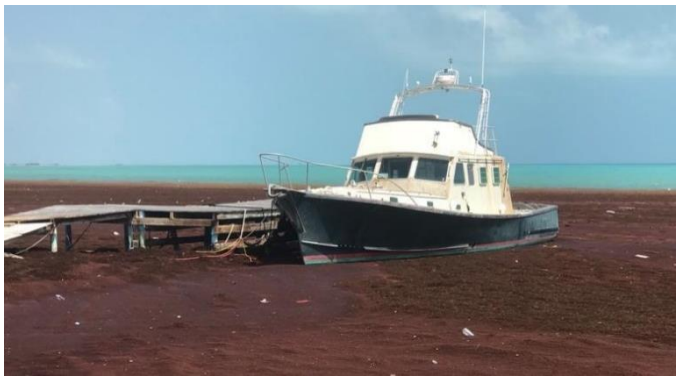
For Immediate Release

Virgin Islands fisherfolk to benefit from pilot projects to mitigate sargassum influxes and ghost fishing

Port of Spain, September 27, 2023 – Fisherfolk in the Virgin Islands will soon benefit from two pilot projects aimed at managing sargassum seaweed influxes and reducing ghost fishing. The pilot projects will run from September to December 2023 and are being funded under the Darwin Plus project, "Capacity building in fisheries evidence, networks and management in the Virgin Islands".



Sargassum inundation at Setting Point, Anegada © Chris Juredin

The first pilot project will support the local construction of a low-cost, reusable boom which can serve to deflect sargassum from Setting Point on the southern coast of the island of Anegada. The mangrove-lined southern coastline of Anegada is an area of importance to the local fishing community since it serves as a nursery area for fish. It also serves as an anchorage for fishing and non-fishing vessels. During heavy sargassum inundations, the quality of the water on the south coast of Anegada is significantly affected, resulting in fish kills and migration of turtles from the area. These impacts are thought to be caused by changes in salinity and decreased oxygen concentrations in the water brought on by the seasonal build-up of the macroalgae. Under the pilot project, local fisherfolk will work with other project stakeholders to construct, install and monitor the effectiveness of the re-useable boom with the aim of reducing impacts on biodiversity, livelihoods and health caused by sargassum influxes at Setting Point.

The second pilot project will test an electronic trap recovery system to reduce gear loss and ghost fishing in the Virgin Islands' pot and trap fisheries. In the Virgin Islands, pots and traps set to catch both reef fish and lobster are the predominant fisheries. In these fisheries, fishers are always at risk of losing their fishing gear for a variety of reasons, including changes in tides or currents, marker buoy lines being severed by the propellors of marine traffic, fishing gear getting dragged into deeper water by storms or tangled with other types of fishing gear. When lost, pots and traps become Abandoned, Lost, or otherwise Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG) and have the potential to cause 'ghost fishing', i.e., the gear continues to fish while not in the control of the owner. In a recent survey conducted by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) with a sample group of Virgin Island fishers, fisherfolk reported that traps were among the ALDFG they most frequently encountered.

Stack of fishing traps, Virgin Islands ©CANARI

Under the pilot project, 20 fishers from the pot and trap fisheries in the Virgin Islands will be engaged to trial the use of an electronic fishing trap recovery system to improve the location and retrieval of pots and traps that have lost their primary marker buoy. The trap recovery system, which is designed by RESQUNIT, consists of an integrated buoy that deploys and floats to the surface when an electronic time lock releases it. The release of the buoy also creates an opening, allowing any trapped fish or lobster to escape.

Both pilot projects will report and share results, lessons learned and recommendations on the potential for replication and upscaling.

The pilot projects are part of efforts by the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) and the Department Agriculture and Fisheries (DOAF) within the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change of the Government of the Virgin Islands to demonstrate best practices and innovations in sustainable fisheries and marine management under the ongoing Darwin Plus-funded project "Capacity building in fisheries evidence, networks and management in the Virgin Islands". The Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) in the United Kingdom (UK), which is part of the UK government's Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), is implementing the project in partnership with DOAF, CANARI and the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations (CNFO).

To find out more about Cefas' work on this project: Abandoned, Lost and otherwise Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG) to support sustainable fisheries in the Virgin Islands, please visit this blog. For more information on CANARI's work on the project please visit the CANARI webpage at https://canari.org/cefas-bvi/. To learn more about the RESQUNIT trap recovery system visit: https://www.resqunit.com/

END

About Cefas: The UK Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) are the UK Government's marine and freshwater science experts, working for healthy and productive oceans, seas and rivers and safe and sustainable seafood. We work to safeguard human and animal health, enable food security and support marine economies. We use our research and innovation expertise to work towards a sustainable blue future for the planet. For more information on Cefas and the work we do, visit www.cefas.co.uk.

About DOAF: The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DOAF) is a part of the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change of the Government of the Virgin Islands. The Department is responsible for ensuring food is safe, nutritionally sound, produced and harvested in an environmentally sustainable manner that builds resilience to internal and external shocks while contributing to the economic growth, social well-being and protection of the natural environment. For more information, see: https://bvi.gov.vg/content/ministry-education-and-culture.

About CNFO: The Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations (CNFO) is a regional network of small-scale fisherfolk and their organisations operating across the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). The network is committed to the realization of profitable and sustainable fisheries that support fisherfolk livelihoods, promote effective ecosystem-based management of fisheries resources, contribute to food security for Caribbean communities and increase resilience to risks including climate change. For more information on CNFO, see: https://cnfo.fish/.

About CANARI: The Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) is a regional technical non-profit organisation which has been working in the islands of the Caribbean for 30 years. Our mission is to promote and facilitate stakeholder participation in the stewardship of natural resources in the Caribbean. Our work focuses on Biodiversity and Ecosystems, Equity and Justice, Resilience and Participatory Governance. For more information on CANARI, see: https://www.canari.org/.

Connect with us:

For further information, please contact: Anna Cadiz-Hadeed, Programmes Director, CANARI at anna@canari.org