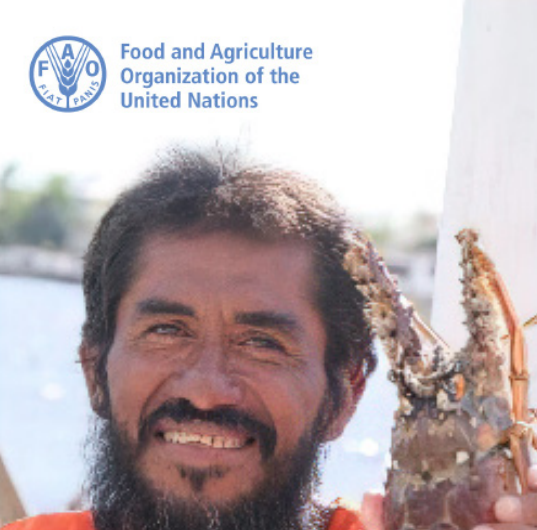




Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



LET'S FISH RESPONSIBLY!

for a more productive ocean



An illustrative handbook for Belizean fishers

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Graphic concept: Davide Signa and Ivan Mattaliano
Layout and pre-press: Color Blind Multimedia Productions, Belize City

About this handbook

This illustrated handbook is the result of a joint initiative between the Ministry of Blue Economy of the Government of Belize and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations under the framework of the project “Enhancing adaptation planning and increasing climate resilience in the coastal zone and fisheries sector of Belize”.

The handbook targets small scale fishers, especially the newly licensed ones, with the objective to provide the basic but indispensable knowledge on both current regulations and sustainable fishing and handling practices.

The revised edition by the Belize Fisheries Department was printed with the support of the Blue Bond and Finance Permanence Unit, Office of the Prime Minister, through the Government Strategic Allocation Project: “Establishing the Enabling Environment for the Development of a Marine Spatial Plan through the Strengthened Governance, Improved Management and Enhanced Monitoring of Belize’s Coastal and Marine Resources” of the Belize Fund for a Sustainable Future.

Acknowledgements

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Last but not least, the author wishes to express his deepest gratitude to all the fishermen and fisherwomen, cooperative members, fish traders and market operators, met and interviewed during the 20 days of field work that preceded the elaboration of this handbook, who had patiently shared their knowledge, experiences, aspirations and needs. This handbook would be just a sterile compilation of instructions and laws without their insights.

Important note

All readers are strongly invited to undertake the pre/post-reading test on page 31 and then repeat it after the full reading of the handbook to assess their understanding of the content.

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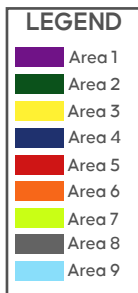
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1. Belize fisheries regulations



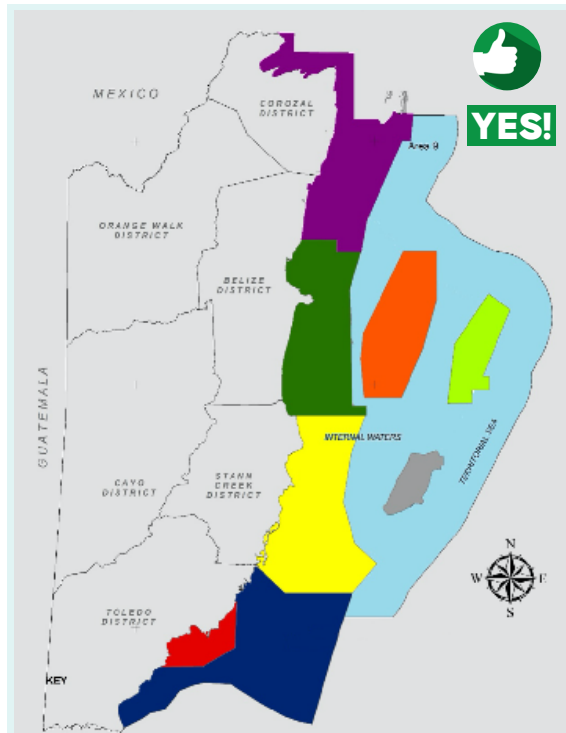
Where can I fish?

- I can get licensed to fish commercially in two areas from areas 1-8.
- Area 9 can be accessed by any licensed fisher who wishes to engage in deep slope fishing operations and must include the area on their license.



WHY CAN'T I FISH IN ALL NINE AREAS?

Because the fisheries laws of Belize adopted the Managed Access System to reduce fishing pressure and allow me to fish in my traditional areas.



Source: Maaz, J. 2011. Managed Access Program, Wildlife Conservation Society, Environmental Defense Fund and Belize Fisheries Department.

Map conforms with UN Geospatial. 2023. Map of the World. New York, United States of America. <https://www.un.org/geospatial/content/map-world-1>



Where can't I fish?

Fishing is prohibited at all times in all these RED areas of Belize's marine reserve network:

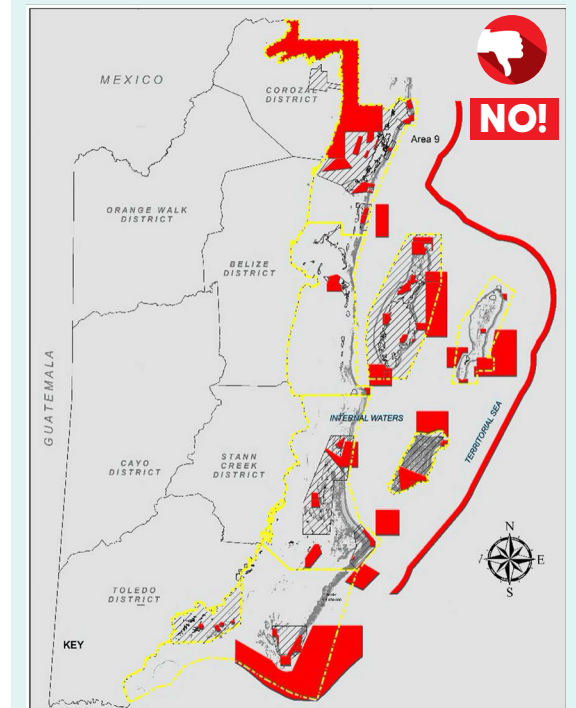
LEGEND

- no fishing zone
- fishing areas

WHY CAN'T I FISH IN THESE AREAS?

Because they host:

- important coral reefs and other habitats
- rare and protected species
- fish spawning aggregations
- critical habitats
- world heritage sites



Source: CZMAI. 2024. Belize's Marine Reserve Network, Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute, and Belize Fisheries Department.



When can I fish?

- **Spiny Lobster:** 1 July to end of February
- **Queen Conch:** 1 October until 30 June (or until national quota is reached)
- **Nassau Grouper:** 1 April to 30 November

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Lobster			X	X	X	X						
Conch							X	X	X			
Nassau Grouper	X	X	X									X

WHY DO WE NEED CLOSED SEASONS? To protect our most important species (lobster, conch and groupers) during the reproductive season, and secure future catches.



What can't I fish?

All of these are protected species:



©Adobe Stock/Bearacreative

ALL SPECIES OF TRIGGERFISH

Local Names: *Pez-ballesta*, *Hanou*, *Old Wife*



©Adobe Stock/Mirecca

ALL SPECIES OF PARROTFISH

Local Names: *Pez-loro*



©New World Publications

ALL SPECIES OF SURGEONFISH

Local Names: *Cirujano*



©Adobe Stock/Michael DeFreitas/Danita Delimont

ALL SPECIES OF ANGELFISH

Local Names: *Pez-angel*, *Pangler*

WHY CAN'T I FISH THEM? They are called the grazers of the sea and feed on the algae growth on coral and keep corals healthy.



TARPON

Local Names: *Pez-sábalo* , *Haba*

©Adobe Stock/John



PERMIT

©Dr. Addiel Perez



BONEFISH

Local Names: *Macabi* , *Masi masi*

©Dr. Addiel Perez

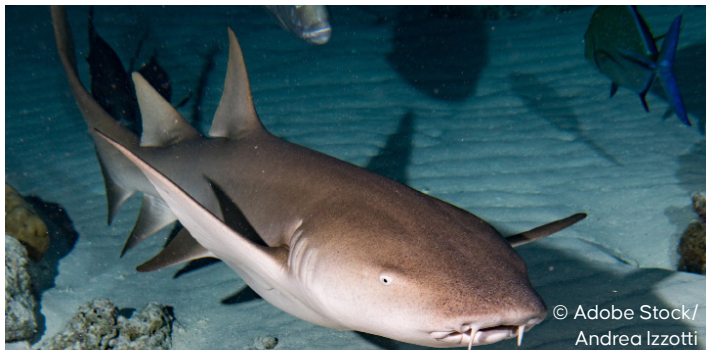


SAWFISH

Local Names: *Pez-sierra* , *Gaspardu* , *Gasiyara*

©Adobe Stock/ Andrea Izzotti

WHY CAN'T I FISH THEM? These species are protected under the Belize fisheries legislation due to its conservation status and their socio-economic importance to Belize. Permit, Tarpon and Bonefish can be fished only under a sport fishing license and its only for catch and release purpose.



© Adobe Stock/
Andrea Izzotti

NURSE SHARK

Local Names: Tiburon nodriza, Aleiru, Gata



©Adobe Stock/Ollie

WHALE SHARK

Local Names: Tiburon Ballena, Udu, Sapodillo Tom



©Adobe Stock/Sebastien Barrio



©Adobe Stock/Dordo

ALL SPECIES OF RAYS

Local Names: Rayas, Sibari



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Stock/
Kolevski. V



©Adobe Stock/Grigory Bruev

ALL SPECIES OF SEA HORSES

WHY CAN'T I FISH THEM? These species are protected under the fisheries laws of Belize due to their important ecological functions.



©Henry Brown



©Henry Brown

ALL SPECIES OF CORALS

Local Names: Corales, Rocks, Dubu baranahau



©Adobe Stock/Emmanuel

ALL SPECIES OF SEA STARS



©Adobe Stock/Aaron



©Adobe Stock/Anthanasios

ALL SPECIES OF MARINE TURTLES

Local Names: Tortugas marinas, Gawamu, Gadaru



©Adobe Stock/Andrea Izzotti



©Adobe Stock/Wildestanimal

ALL MARINE MAMMALS

WHY CAN'T I FISH THEM? These four groups are important due to their conservation status and ecological functions.

It is absolutely prohibited to catch female lobster with eggs (berried) and/or tar spot, and any soft shell (molting) lobsters



WHY CAN'T I FISH IT? You are not only killing one lobster but all the future lobsters that could grow from those eggs. You are killing your future catches and your future earnings as well!

Recommended Gears



WHAT SHALL I USE TO AVOID IT? Always use a snare or jamo to catch lobsters so that if you accidentally catch a berried lobster you can release it alive without harming it unlike when you use the hook-stick.



Is this big enough?

Caribbean Spiny Lobster



Minimum size is: 3 inches (carapace length)

WHY CANT I FISH IT? It is still too young and has not yet reproduced. If you catch it, you will not allow it to reproduce. You might earn small money now selling a small lobster but you will NOT have any more lobsters to catch in the future!

What if I don't have a caliper or gauge?

1. Make a mark on your hookstick/snare/jamo



2. Measure the lobster size in this way, from between the horns to the end of the carapace



Question: Is this lobster legal size or not?

Lobster minimum weight is: 4.0 ounces



WHY CAN'T I SELL IT? Because being undersized it can't be accepted by ANY buyer. It is illegal to fish and to have undersized lobster in possession. If you try to sell it not only will it be rejected, but you also risk being caught and prosecuted!

Queen Conch

Minimum shell length is: 7 inches



WHY CAN'T I FISH IT? Because it is still too young and not yet reproduced. If you catch it, you would not allow it to reproduce. You might earn small money now selling a small conch but you will NOT have any more conch to catch in the future.

Minimum legal conch market clean weight is: **3 ounces**



**ILLEGAL WEIGHT WHICH IS LESS THAN 3 OUNCES
FOR MARKET CLEAN, AND LESS THAN 2.75 OUNCES
FOR FILLET CONCH MEAT**



**LEGAL WEIGHT WHICH IS 3 OUNCES AND ABOVE
(MARKET CLEAN)**

WHY CAN'T I SELL IT? If it is undersized it shall not be accepted by ANY buyer. If you try to sell it not only will it be rejected but you also risk being caught and prosecuted!

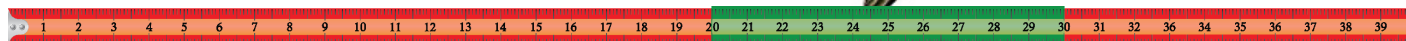
Finfish species: Nassau Grouper

Allowed catchable size: *It should not be less than 20 inches or more than 30 Inches.*

Closed Season: *December 1st to March 31st.*



© NOAA Fisheries



 NO! TOO SMALL	 YES!	 NO! TOO BIG
ILLEGAL	LEGAL	ILLEGAL

Nassau Grouper should be landed whole.



For which fishery

do I need a special license?



© FreePik/Kichigin

BLACK CORAL



©Adobe Stock/Prochym

SHARKS (Closed Season: May 1st to October 31st)

Local Names: Tiburones



©Adobe Stock/Elena Moiseeva

WHELKS

Local Names: Caracoles, Bulago, Wilks



©Belize Fisheries Department

FLORIDA STONE CRAB (Closed Season: July 1st to September 30th)

Other special licenses include:

Aquarium fish, the importation of seafood and exportation of sea food.



How can I fish?



YES!

Fishing Methods: *Spiny Lobster*



©FAO/Davide Signa

TRAP

(with a biodegradable escape panel)



©FAO/Davide Signa

SHADE



©FAO/Davide Signa

HOOKSTICK



©FAO/Davide Signa

SNARE



© Color Blind Multimedia Productions

JAMO (BULLY NET)



© Color Blind Multimedia Productions

SPEARGUN

(only outside all marine reserves)

Fishing Methods: *Conch & Finfish*



YES!

For Conch:



©FAO/Davide Signa

FREE DIVING

For Finfish:



© Color Blind Multimedia Productions



© Color Blind Multimedia Productions

HOOKS AND LINES



©FAO/Davide Signa

CAST NET FOR BAIT



©FAO/Davide Signa

LONGLINES

(only outside all marine reserves)



©FAO/Davide Signa

SPEARGUN

(only outside all marine reserves)

Illegal gear: *For commercial fishing*



©FAO/Davide Signa

SCUBA DIVING

WHY CAN'T I USE IT? It is a potential safety risk and is prohibited by law.



NO!



©U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service/Pedro Ramirez

GILLNET

WHY CAN'T I USE IT IN MARINE ENVIRONMENT? It was banned to be used in the Marine environment since 2020.

2. Good fishing practices



What shall I do to preserve marine life?



© Color Blind Multimedia Productions



YES!

RELEASE ANY SMALL FINFISH YOU CATCH

WHY? To preserve future catches. This will allow for more reproduction of fish species.



© OceanWide Explorers

KILL ANY LIONFISH YOU SEE (EVEN IF VERY SMALL!)

WHY? Lionfish is an invasive species in our sea and its causing huge problems eating most of our reef fishes. Please help us kill them all!

What shall I not do?



NO!

HOLDING ON CORALS WHEN DIVING

WHY? You can easily break the corals, and may be exposed to an allergic reaction.



CATCHING UNDERSIZED FISH

WHY? By doing so you don't allow those fishes to reproduce and that can lead to the decline of future catches.



©FAO/Davide Signa

THROW ANCHORS ON CORALS

WHY? It will damage and destroy the reef and other sensitive habitats like seagrass.



© Color Blind Multimedia Productions

DUMP ANY WASTE AT SEA

WHY? Metals and plastic materials cause pollution and can kill marine animals. Also it is illegal to dump any marine litter as per the environmental protection act.

3. Good handling hygiene and quality standard practices



How

can I keep my fish fresh on board?



NO!

©FAO/Davide Signa

DON'T LEAVE YOUR CATCH UNDER THE SUN

WHY?

- Don't leave your catch exposed, with the heat fish will spoil very fast making it of low quality for consumption.
- May be contaminated by fuel, engine oil, dirt or bacteria.
- Could be a hazard to the crew.



YES!

© Color Blind Multimedia Productions

ALWAYS USE ICE AND A COOLBOX

WHY?

- Ice is the more efficient way to keep your catch clean and fresh.
- You will then fetch a better price!

For long fishing trips



WHY? Sodium Phosphate damages the quality of your catch. It is also toxic if you put too much of it in one bucket!



WHY? This is a much better preservative and more cost effective. You need to put only a teaspoon in each bucket and it preserves the product much better.



How

can I keep my fish clean on shore?



NEVER OFFLOAD YOUR CATCH ON THE SOIL

WHY?

- The soil is full of bacteria and dirt that will contaminate your products even if you rinse them after.
- Your fish will get bruised if thrown, be gentle with your catch, that's your earning!



ALWAYS KEEP YOUR CATCHES IN A BUCKET WITH CLEAN SEA WATER

WHY?

- This is the cheapest way to keep your catch fresh for a short time.
- Salted water acts as a natural preservative for few hours if it is fresh.



© Color Blind Multimedia Productions

**AVOID USING STONES OR WOODEN SURFACES TO
HANDLE YOUR FISH**

WHY?

- Stones or wooden slabs are NOT hygienic since they absorb dirt and bacteria and contaminate your catches.
- Even after rinsing it the bacteria will already be inside your catch.



© Color Blind Multimedia Productions

**ALWAYS USE TILED OR STAINLESS-STEEL SURFACES
AND CLEAN IT WITH BLEACH AFTER**

WHY?

- Tiles or stainless-steel are sterile and durable.
- Bleach is the best and cheapest disinfectant that will kill all germs.
- A recommendation is to have a stainless steel tray on-board your vessel.

How to clean my catch?



© Color Blind Multimedia Productions

NEVER USE DIRTY WATER TO CLEAN YOUR FISH

WHY?

- Water at landing sites on shores can be polluted and dirty so it will contaminate your catch very fast.



© Color Blind Multimedia Productions

ALWAYS USE CLEAN WATER EITHER FROM TAP OR FROM OPEN SEA

WHY?

- Tap water is disinfected and ensures best hygiene of your products.
-If you don't have tap water then use clean sea water from the open sea but NOT from landing sites!

What to do with the waste?





If I want to know more

where can I learn?



Fish Right Eat Right Campaign

website: www.fishrighteatright.com



Belize Fisheries Department

website: www.fisheries.gov.bz



Belize Lobster Fisheries Improvement Project

here: www.facebook.com/BelizeLobsterFIP



Fisheries Resources Act 2020

website: www.nationalassembly.gov.bz/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Act-No.-7-of-2020-Fisheries-Resources-Act.pdf



Fisheries Resources Act [Subsidiary Laws]

website: <https://fisheries.gov.bz/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/CAP-210s-Fisheries-Resources-Act-Subsidiary-Regulations.pdf>



Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organizations

here: <https://cnfo.fish/>

For further information, please contact: **Belize Fisheries Department**



fisheries_department@fisheries.gov.bz



Fisheries Department - Belize



224-4552



Belize Fisheries Department Special-Regulations



Lobster: (*Panulirus argus*)

- Minimum carapace length of 3 inches.
- Minimum tail weight of 4 Ounces.
- No person or establishment should have in possession fillet or diced lobster tail.
- It is illegal to have in possession any soft shell (molting) lobster or females with eggs (berried).
- It is illegal to remove from any female lobster any eggs or spawn or the setae or fiber to which any eggs or spawn are or have been attached.
- **Closed season MARCH 1st to JUNE 30th.**

Conch: (*Strombus gigas*)

- Shell length should exceed 7 inches.
- Unprocessed conch means conch that has been removed from the shell with all organs attached and has a minimum weight of 7 1/2 ounces.
- Market clean weight of more than 3 ounces.
- Fillet weighs more than 2.75 ounces.
- No fisher should have in their possession diced conch meat.
- **Closed season from JULY 1st (or when the catch quota is realized) to SEPTEMBER 30th.**

Marine Turtles:

- All species of marine turtles are protected.
- No person shall interfere with any turtle nest.
- It is illegal for any person to have in possession any marine turtles.
- No person shall buy, sell or have in possession any article made of any part of the turtle or turtle egg.

Florida Stone Crab: (*Menippe mercenaria*)

- Fishing and export of Florida Stone Crab can only be done with **A SPECIAL LICENSE** issued by the Fisheries Administrator.
- No person shall fish for stone crabs using a trap without authorization from the Fisheries administrator.
- No person shall take a stone crab using a plastic trap unless it has an escape gap of at least 2 3/8 inches and a biodegradable panel.
- No person shall fish, sell, display, offer for sale, buy, or possess any stone crab during the **closed season which is from JULY 1st to SEPTEMBER 30th.**
- A licensed person can set traps from September 15th but cannot harvest any crab during that time.
- No person shall retain or handle stone crab claws with a propodus length of less than 3 inches or the carapace/body of a stone crab.
- Any person catching a stone crab must release it back into the sea immediately after removing the claw.
- No person shall use any device that can puncture, crush, or injure a stone crab's body.
- No person shall fish for stone crabs unless equipped with a ruler or caliper on-board the vessel.

Nassau groupers: (*Epinephelus striatus*)

- No person shall take, buy, sell, or have any Nassau grouper which is less than 20-inches or greater than 30-inches in total length.
- **Closed season DECEMBER 1st to MARCH 31st.**
- All Nassau groupers are to be landed as whole fish.

Sharks:

- Fishing and export of sharks can only be done with **A SPECIAL LICENSE** issued by the Fisheries Administrator.
- All exports of Shark Species require a **CITES** permit.
- All sharks need to be landed with fins attached.
- No person shall take, buy, sell, or have in possession any shark during the **closed season which is from MAY 1st to OCTOBER 31st.**

Sea-Cucumbers:

- No person shall fish, harvest, buy, sell, or have in their possession Sea-Cucumbers during the closed season which is from **FEBRUARY 1st to JULY 31st.**
- All Sea-Cucumbers fished or harvested should have a minimum size of:

- *16cm for Donkey dung Sea-Cucumber (*Holothuria mexicana*)
- *16cm for Florida Sea-Cucumber (*Holothuria floridana*)
- *23cm for the three-rowed Sea-Cucumber (*Isostichopus badiotus*) measured from the mouth to the anus when first taken out of the sea.

- Fishing and export of Sea-Cucumber can only be done with **A SPECIAL LICENSE** issued by the Fisheries Administrator.

Fish Fillets

- All fish landed as fillet shall have a skin patch of at least 2-inches by 1- inch.

Hicatee: (*Dermatemys mawii*)

- No person shall have in their possession more than 3 turtles or transport on any vehicle more than 5 turtles.
- No person shall buy or sell any such turtles.
- Fishing for female Hicatee is prohibited if the length is greater than 17.2-inches (43cm) or smaller than 15.2-inches (38cm).
- It is illegal to use or have in possession any Hicatee Net.
- **Closed season May 1st to May 31th.**

Whelks:

- Fishing and export of whelk can only be done with **A SPECIAL LICENSE** issued by the Fisheries Administrator.
- The legal-size limit is 2.44 inches (62 mm) in diameter.
- All whelks need to be landed with meat.
- **Closed season JANUARY 1st to SEPTEMBER 30th.**

Corals:

- It is illegal for any person to take, buy, sell, or have in their possession any type of Coral.
- An exception is made for the Black Coral (*Antipatharia*) which may be bought, sold, or exported with **A SPECIAL LICENSE** issued by the Fisheries Administrator.



Bonefish
(*Albula Vulpes*)
(locally known as MACABI)



Permit
(*Trachinotus falcatus*)



Tarpon
(*Megalops atlanticus*)

- No person shall take, buy or sell Bonefish, Permit, Tarpon. These species are for catch and release **ONLY**. Possession is prohibited.



E-mail: fisheries_department@fisheries.gov.bz



Telephone: 224-4552



Fisheries Department-Belize

Designed By: Fisheries Department

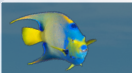
PROTECTED SPECIES REGULATIONS



The Following Species are fully Protected Under the Fisheries Resource Act No. 7 of 2020 - Section 88



Manatee
(*Trichechus manatus*)



Angelfish
(*Pomacanthidae* species)



Triggerfish
(*Balistidae*, all species)



Parrotfish
(*Scaridae*, all species)



Surgeonfish
(*Acanthuridae*, all species)



Atlantic bottlenose dolphin
(*Tursiops truncatus*)



Atlantic spotted dolphin
(*Stenella frontalis*)



Rough-toothed dolphin
(*Steno bredanensis*)



Spinner dolphin
(*Stella longirostris*)



Loggerhead turtle
(*Caretta caretta*)



Hawksbill turtle
(*Eretmochelys imbricata*)



Leatherback turtle
(*Dermochelys coriacea*)



Green turtle
(*Chelonia mydas*)



Nurse shark
(*Ginglymostoma cirratum*)



Whale Shark
(*Rhincodon typus*) and other
species of marine animals



Sawfish
(*Pristis perotteti* & *Pristis pectinata*)



Ray
(All species of the
superorder *Batoidae*)



All species of soft corals
(All species of
Scleractinia)



All species of hard and stony
corals
(All species of *Scleractinia*)



Seahorse
(*Hippocampus*, all species)



Sea star
(*Asteroidea*, all species)



What have I learned?

Quick pre/post-reading test:

Section 1: Fisheries regulations

1. When I get my licence in how many managed access fishing areas can I fish?

- a. only 1 b. 2 areas with the option to license for area 9 c. all 9 areas
-

2. Lobster closed season is from:

- a. 1 July – 1 March b. 15 July – 1 April c. 1 March – 30 June
-

3. I can sell berried lobsters as long as I removed all eggs:

- a. TRUE b. FALSE
-

4. Parrot fishes can be fished with special licence:

- a. TRUE b. FALSE
-

5. Bonefishes, Tarpons and Permits are all protected except for sport fishing (catch and release):

- a. TRUE b. FALSE
-

6. Nassau Groupers can be caught throughout the year:

- a. TRUE b. FALSE
-

7. The lobster minimum size (carapace length) is:

- a. 3.25 inches b. 4.5 inches c. 3 inches
-

8. Queen Conch can be caught of any size but only during specific periods:

a. TRUE b. FALSE

9. Scuba equipment is allowed only for Conch fisheries:

a. TRUE b. FALSE

10. Gillnets are banned only inside the Marine Reserve network:

a. TRUE b. FALSE

11. I can place lobster traps at a minimum distance from corals of:

a. 10 meters b. 50 meters c. 300 yards

12. Before opening and killing a Queen Conch I shall check that the shell size is at least:

a. 5.5 Inches b. 7 inches c. 9 Inches

Section 2: Good fishing and handling practices

13. It is a good practice to used fridges or washing machines as alternative to shades to attract lobsters:

a. TRUE b. FALSE

14. The best way to store my fish or lobster on board is:

- a. place in cool box with ice
- b. leave it on the floor of the boat under a sac/shade
- c. put it in a bucket with sea water

15. If I don't have ice on board I can keep my catch before selling it for a maximum of:

- a. 12 hours b. 24 hours c. 3 days
-

16. Fish can be thrown on the floor at landing site as long as it is rinsed after:

- a. TRUE b. FALSE
-

17. The most hygienic surface material for cleaning /filletting my catch is:

- a. stainless steel b. wood c. concrete
-

18. The best way to disinfect my tools like the knife and the surfaces where I land my fish is:

- a. rise with seawater b. use bleach c. use dish-soap
-

19. Which of the below is the best water to clean your catch?

- a. from landing site on shore b. from the tap or open sea c. both
-

20. Lobster shall be deheaded with a clean knife to reduce the amount of meat left inside the carapace:

- a. TRUE b. FALSE

Correct answers:

1 b, 2 a, 3 b, 4 b, 5 a, 6 b, 7 c, 8 b, 9 b, 10 b, 11 c, 12 b, 13 b, 14 a, 15 a, 16 b, 17 a, 18 b, 19 b, 20 a.



Ministry of Blue Economy
& Marine Conservation



DEPARTMENT
Sustainable Fisheries

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The handbook targets small scale fishers, especially the newly licensed ones, with the objective to provide the basic but indispensable knowledge on both current regulations and sustainable fishing and handling practices.

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