



Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries

**Address by the Hon. Audley Shaw, CD, MP
at the Media Briefing on the Conch Fishery
MICAFA, Hope Gardens, 2nd Floor Conference Room
March 12, 2019
10:00 a.m.**

Salutations

- Acting PS Spence
- My Colleague Ministers – Hon J.C. Hutchinson and Floyd Green
- Representatives from the JDF Coast Guard
- Superintendent Swearing, Officer in Charge of the Marine Police
- Staff from the MICAFA, including the Fisheries Division, and the Veterinary Services Division
- Members of the Fisheries Management and Development Fund Board
- Members of the Conch Industry
- Ladies and gentlemen of the Media.

I thought it prudent to address the country, not only on the grave issue of the closure of our valuable queen conch fishery, but also on the menace of illegal fishing in general.

As you may all be aware, the recent scientific survey of the queen conch population conducted in November 2018 revealed that the conch stocks are in a degraded state. Based on this evidence, I decided to close the queen conch fishery for one (1) year in the first instance. The close season has already commenced and will last up until January 31, 2020.

The depletion of the conch fishery has resulted from several factors. We are certain that illegal fishing is a major cause. We are, however, uncertain about other causes, which may include mortality from natural predators (such as sharks, turtles and octopus, etc.) and other environmental factors.

The experts tell me that the state of the queen conch population portends what is in store for our other valuable resources such as spiny lobster and sea cucumber if we do not move expeditiously to

decisively and effectively stamp out this problem. And it has not escaped me, ladies and gentlemen, that we already have the glaring example of the much degraded status of our reef and reef associated fin fish resources such as snappers, groupers and, indeed, the parrotfish, especially those on the island shelf of mainland Jamaica.

As you all know, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing is a global problem that has plagued both developing and developed countries. These problems are not new; they have been with us for decades. And they are not easy to fix nor are there any 'quick fixes'. What is clear to me is that this complex problem cannot be solved at the local level alone and a comprehensive multipronged approach is needed. We must tackle this problem from local, bilateral, regional and international levels.

I take this opportunity to outline the key features of my Ministry's comprehensive strategy.

Local Initiatives

In terms of local level action—

We have already seen where, last week, our coast guard apprehended two (2) illegal vessels from the Dominican Republic

with queen conch, spiny lobster, crabs, fin fish and octopus. I pause here to congratulate the JDF Coast Guard for their vigilance and excellent work in apprehending these illegal fishers and, indeed, to have caught them early before they inflicted more damage on our fisheries resources. I understand that it is evident that the vessels had just arrived in our waters and that the catch would have been significantly more if they were here for a longer period.

I also wish to recognize the hard work by the other key State entities in processing the poachers, assessing the catch and equipment aboard the two vessels as well as preparing the case to ensure that swift and decisive justice is served.

Here, I speak of entities such as the Marine Police, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, the Ministry of Health, the Passport Immigration and Citizenship Agency (PICA), the Jamaica Customs Agency and the Veterinary Services Division and the Fisheries Division from my Ministry.

I am advised that the court case, involving the foreign poachers, will take place soon. And it is, indeed, my hope that our courts will send the strongest signal possible to all poachers, both local and

foreign, that Jamaica is very serious about protecting our fisheries resources and, by extension, the livelihood of our fishers and fish workers.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is critical that we do all we can to stamp out the scourge of illegal fishing in our waters, especially by foreign poachers.

Our records show that over the last nine (9) years, from January 2011 to March 2019, ten (10) foreign fishing vessels were caught fishing illegally in our waters. And, if anecdotal information is anything to go by, this arrest rate reflects only 14% of the foreign IUU vessels operating in our waters.

Of the ten (10) vessels arrested, four (4) were from the Dominican Republic, three (3) from Honduras; two (2) from Nicaragua; and one (1) from Venezuela.

These vessels had a total of 103,673.20 lbs. of different species of fishery resources with an estimated value of US\$807,617.60. The

species of fish include queen conch, spiny lobster, sea cucumber, sharks, crabs, octopus and fin fish.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are strategically addressing one of the major impediments for effective surveillance and enforcement of our maritime space. The impediment to which I refer is the relative vastness of our waters, which is approximately 274,000 square kilometres, about 25 times the size of mainland Jamaica.

I am happy to report that we will be using appropriate technology to assist us to more effectively conduct surveillance of our waters.

Regulations will be in place very shortly to mandate all locally licensed motor fishing vessels to have aboard a Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) device. And, very importantly, to complement this technology, we are arranging access to satellite imagery of our waters to enable us to actually see these perpetrators.

The strategy is simply to use the Vessel Monitoring System technology to have 24/7 information of who is legally out there and where they are. So, when we see a number of vessels via radar or satellite imagery we can tell who should be there and who should not be there and where they are. And further, even if our

enforcement officers don't see them for whatever reason, intelligence from our fishers who see the poachers will allow us to use the satellite imagery to narrow in on their location to increase the likelihood of apprehending them.

Rest assured that our surveillance and enforcement activities will not be confined to illegal fishing in our off-shore areas. These activities will spread far and wide to stop illegal fishing in our near-shore areas and fisheries- related illegal activities on mainland Jamaica such as the illegal storage and sale of fish and fish products.

The Fisheries Management and Development Fund Board, in response to the current situation, has allocated just over J\$20M for surveillance and enforcement activities. And plans are far advanced for the establishment of multi-agency enforcement teams, which, at a minimum, will be comprised of the police, coast guard, the Fisheries Division and the Praedial Larceny Prevention Unit. Of course, it is expected that other enforcement entities will provide support, when and where necessary. These teams will be checking fishers, fishing vessels, fish vendors, supermarkets, hotels, restaurants and cold storage facilities and any other relevant persons and/or establishments.

I take this opportunity to send a very firm, unequivocal appeal and warning to all Jamaicans. Please cooperate because this is critically important to safeguard the livelihood of thousands of Jamaicans and if you do not cooperate and abide by the law, we will spare no effort to bring you to justice and impose the heaviest possible sanctions under the law.

Bilateral Level Initiatives

At the bilateral level, we will lobby for the redoubling of efforts for collaboration and cooperation from fish and fish products importing States such as the United States, and Canada.

Unfortunately, fish and fish products originating from Jamaica, but caught illegally by Jamaicans and/or foreign poachers find their way into these markets without the proper checks and balances. Increased collaboration and cooperation with the importing States can significantly curtail the level of IUU products from Jamaica entering these markets. Indeed, this approach has borne fruit in the case of sea cucumbers, where illegal exports from Jamaica to the United States have ceased because of cooperation between our Fisheries Division and the United States

authorities. Similar types of arrangements will be established with other importing countries for all fish and fish products.

Regional Level Initiatives

At the regional level, we will employ a comprehensive strategy of advocacy and diplomacy through existing regional fisheries bodies such as the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) and the FAO West Central Atlantic Fisheries Commission (WECAFC) to strengthen regional cooperation to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing as well as existing mechanisms to curtail the trade of illegally caught fish and fish products.

The ultimate objective of the advocacy and diplomacy will be to achieve meaningful collaboration and cooperation: (a) amongst queen conch producing countries; (b) between queen conch producing countries and queen conch importing countries; and (c) between queen conch producing countries and the Flag State of foreign poachers.

Arrangements are already in place to strengthen collaboration and cooperation with other key queen conch producing countries in CARICOM. These member States are The Bahamas, Belize and the Turks and Caicos Islands. Through the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM), a meeting will be convened with

these countries to assess the status of our respective conch stocks and to agree on a harmonized and sustained strategy for our collective efforts at lobbying existing trade control mechanisms such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) to establish and/or strengthen protocols aimed at preventing the international trade of illegally caught queen conch.

At the wider CARICOM level, I intend to solicit support from my colleague Ministers at the upcoming CRFM Council of Ministers meeting to be held in St. Kitts on May 2, 2019.

I also will have ‘face to face’ discussions with the Ministers responsible for fisheries from the Dominican Republic, Honduras and Nicaragua during a scheduled meeting between CRFM Council of Ministers and ministers responsible for fisheries from the Organization of Fishing and Aquaculture in Central America (OSPESCA). This meeting is scheduled to take place on May 3, 2019 in St. Kitts.

International Level Initiatives

At the international level, we intend to engage CITES to ensure that all the relevant provisions of this multi-lateral arrangement is transparent and properly implemented. The truth is, we do have some concerns regarding how some queen conch producing

countries have been able to “satisfy” the strictures of the CITES convention.

Through NEPA, which is the local CITES Management Authority, we are already seeking clarification on these matters, but more importantly, we will lobby the support of Parties to the CITES Convention to ensure that all the provisions of the Treaty are adhered to in order to reduce the likelihood of queen conch illegally caught, especially in Jamaican waters, to be traded on the international market.

It is important to note that all CRFM countries, including the key queen conch producing countries, are Parties to the CITES convention.

Closing Statement

In closing, let me reiterate that it is absolutely important that all Jamaica understands that our cooperation is necessary if we are to address the serious problem of illegal fishing. It cannot be the responsibility of the Government alone in this matter. All hands must be on deck.

My appeal is for the greatest level of cooperation because this is critically important to safeguard the livelihood of thousands of Jamaicans and if you do not cooperate and abide by the law, we will spare no effort to bring you to justice and impose the heaviest possible sanctions under the law.