

## NEWSPAPER ARTICLE ON THE BENEFIT OF MARINE RESERVES IN THE SOUFRIERE MARINE MANAGEMENT AREA

Every year, since the Soufrière Marine Management Area (SMMA) was established in 1995, scientists from the University of York in Britain have worked together with the Department of Fisheries and the SMMA to determine the status of fish stocks and the condition of coral reefs. This team has found dramatic increases in fish stocks since the Soufrière Marine Management Area was created. They now have evidence that these increases are leading to significant improvements in the reef fish catches throughout the management area. As Kai Wulf, manager of the SMMA says, *"This means that the Marine Reserves (the areas within the SMMA where no fishing is allowed) are successfully doing what they were designed to do: protecting fish in some areas to ensure the future of reef fishing in other areas and maintaining the productive coral reef system".*

*"Fish stocks have tripled in marine reserves", said Dr Callum Roberts, leader of the York team, "but what is more important to fishermen is that by now, fish stocks have also doubled in fishing areas. Marine Reserves are like money in the bank for fishermen. They protect breeding stocks and supply nearby fisheries with young fish, just like a bank account produces interest". The increase in fish numbers slowed down after Hurricane Lenny in 1999, but preliminary results from this year's survey show strong indications that increases are even greater this year. There are now more fish in the waters of the SMMA than there have been for more than six years.*

Working with the Department of Fisheries and one researcher at the University of the West Indies, the team has also found a significant increase in reef fish catches in the pot fishery of the Soufrière area. They compared fish catches in 1995 and 1996, when the SMMA was first established, with fish catches from 2000 and the first month of 2001. The study found that average catches from fish pots increased from nine to fourteen pounds. Average catches from small cane pots (the "tombé lévé") increased by ninety percent and average catches from the larger wire-mesh pots increased by forty-six percent. Dr Fiona Gell from York worked with Soufrière fishermen for five months last year. *"For every two pounds of fish caught in 1995, fishers are now catching three to four pounds", she says. The amount of fish caught per pot also increased. The number of fish species in the catches also appears to have increased and this may be another indication of how the reef fish populations of Soufrière are benefiting from the Marine Reserves.*

Marine Reserves are now being used across the world to manage fisheries in a sustainable way and to protect fish and corals, preserving species and ensuring that there will be coral reefs and reef fisheries for future generations. *"These exciting findings show that the Soufrière Marine Management Area is leading the world in the successful management of a network of Marine Reserves that are benefiting people and fish", said Sarah George of the St. Lucia Department of Fisheries. "The SMMA and the*

*Soufrière community have worked hard to protect their underwater resources and are now really beginning to see the benefits”, she added.*

As people continue to protect vital areas of reef in this way, they can expect to see further increases in fish numbers, in fish catches and in the variety of fish species. The future is looking bright for fishers and fish-lovers alike!

### **Additional Information: How Marine Reserves Work**

Protecting areas of coral reef from fishing is now viewed as one of the best ways to ensure a future for fishermen. A committee of the US National Research Council (sometimes called the “Supreme Court of Science”) has just published a report (in May 2001) that says that marine reserves have great promise for improving fishery management. This comes as a surprise to many, since reducing the area of fishing grounds might seem a quick way to smaller catches. However, if an area is left unfished, fish live longer and grow larger. Big fish produce many more offspring than small fish. For example, a twenty-pound grouper produces nearly one hundred times more young than a one-pound grouper. Large fish protected inside marine reserves produce offspring that are moved out of reserves on ocean currents to re-supply fishing grounds. Some of the big fish also move from reserves to fishing grounds, giving fishermen a nice catch.

There are many other benefits of marine reserves. They protect habitats from damage and offer a refuge for rare and unusual animals and plants. Improvements in fish stocks in Soufrière are already being appreciated by thousands of tourists who visit the SMMA each year. Their visits pay for the running of the SMMA. Marine reserves lie at the heart of this important initiative, benefiting fishers, tourists and the St. Lucian economy.