

NOAA03-116

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NOAA FISHERIES SUPPORTS CITES QUEEN CONCH CONSERVATION MEASURES

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) announced today support of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora's (CITES) embargo on queen conch imports from three Caribbean countries; Honduras, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

In an effort to support sustainable trade in queen conch, CITES has recommended that importation of queen conch (*Strombus gigas*) be suspended from these countries. CITES will send notifications to all CITES countries recommending that they not accept shipments of queen conch as of Sept. 29, 2003.

"This is a very important decision by CITES. NOAA Fisheries is pleased to join CITES and our other partners, such as the Caribbean Fishery Management Council in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in helping to sustain queen conch populations for years to come," said Bill Hogarth, assistant administrator for NOAA Fisheries. "This action allows imports of queen conch from countries who are managing the species well, while prohibiting imports that are not sustainable."

Queen conch is found throughout the wider Caribbean Region, including Florida, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, as well as in the Atlantic Ocean near Bermuda. Products from conch include meat, pearls and shells.

Queen conch populations in Honduras, Haiti and the Dominican Republic are currently being exploited at rates that may be unsustainable. In addition, CITES has expressed concerns about the amount of illegal, under-reported and unregulated fishing of this species. The United States imports approximately 80 percent of the world's trade, usually resulting in imports of more than 1,000 metric tons of

meat a year.

In 1986, the U.S. banned all harvest of its own queen conch populations in the continental United States, and in 1992, CITES included queen conch in CITES Appendix

II. An Appendix II listing includes species that, although currently not threatened with extinction, may become threatened without trade controls. Permits indicating that trade is sustainable are required for queen conch international trade.

Although the restrictions announced mainly affect commercial importers of queen conch products, officials are warning American tourists who visit the Caribbean that they seriously consider not purchasing queen conch meat or souvenirs to bring back to the United States. Law enforcement officers may inspect and confiscate queen conch meat and shells upon return to the United States.

According to Hogarth, this action by CITES supports current efforts by the Caribbean Fishery Management Council and others in the region to promote Caribbeanwide management for all coral reef ecosystem species.

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources, and the habitat on which they depend, through scientific research, management and enforcement. Our stewardship of these resources benefits the nation by supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, while helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

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On the Internet:

NOAA - <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries - <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - <http://international.fws.gov>

CITES - www.cites.org