



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Valuable queen conch surveys completed in the Berry Islands

Nassau, Bahamas – 20 November 2009 – A new organization working in the Bahamas, Community Conch, has recently completed an extensive survey of queen conch populations in the Berry Islands. A team of volunteers from the U.S. and the Bahamas came together to gather valuable data that they hope will help the Bahamas manage the fishery sustainably.

The queen conch (*Strombus gigas*) is important to the Bahamas culturally, ecologically, and economically. The Bahamas is one of a few Caribbean nations that is fortunate enough to still have a viable commercial fishery for conch in its waters. Many regions, including the coast of Florida, have been over-fished resulting in the commercial extinction of the species. Because of diminishing stocks throughout the Caribbean, the queen conch is protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

The Berry Islands of the Bahamas are known as important commercial fishing grounds for queen conch, but it is feared that these stocks are being over-exploited. The Department of Marine Resources is moving forward with the establishment of a marine reserve in the island group that will protect queen conch nursery habitat as well as many other habitats and species within its boundaries.

Recognizing the need for scientific data that will aid the Department of Marine Resources in the management of the queen conch fishery, Ms. Martha Davis established Community Conch, a U.S. non-profit organization. The mission of Community Conch is to affect sustainable harvest of queen conch through research, education and collaboration with local communities, the Bahamian government and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Ms. Davis, a marine conservationist and a long time sailor in the Bahamas said of the current situation, "the Bahamas' large area and relatively small population has buffered it from the problems of overfishing that are common throughout the Caribbean, but it is not immune from these pressures. When juvenile conch nurseries are stripped for fish trap bait and conch salad before they are mature enough to reproduce, it is only a matter of time before the resource and a way of life are gone."

With the help of volunteers, community members and biologists Allan Stoner, PhD and Catherine Booker, MS, Community Conch completed a baseline survey of conch in the new marine reserve area and the first stock assessment of the commercial fishing grounds in the Berry Islands. Community Conch's first project was a great accomplishment for this new organization and for the Bahamas. They hope to build on their success in the future with the support of others concerned about the state of the queen conch fishery. The results of their study have been reported to the Department of Marine Resources and is available to the public at www.communityconch.org.

Contact:

Catherine Booker

Community Conch

catherinebooker@communityconch.org

242-524-5464