

## DPlus153 – Getting to know the TCI Fisheries

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The Darwin Plus 153 has recently gotten underway with plenty happening on the Turks and Caicos Islands. I arrived on the islands at the beginning of March to a very warm welcome from project partners at the Department of Coastal Resources and Fisheries and Marine Resources Management.

Together we have begun to gain an understanding of the TCI fisheries and have engaged a number of stakeholders across a few of the islands.

The success of small-scale fisheries management hinges directly on the procurement of reliable scientific information. For this to work, all parties need to collaborate and work together to achieve mutually beneficial goals. This week I was joined by SAERI Executive Director Dr Paul Brickle and Kyne Krusic-Golub from Fish Ageing Services Ltd. to travel around, engaging a number of stakeholder groups and talking all things fisheries research!

Our engagements began on South Caicos, the TCI fisheries capital. The vast majority of small-scale fishing in the TCI is centred here with 80% of the local population directly involved in the industry. We were fortunate enough to be hosted by the School for Field Studies TCI on Wednesday afternoon where we presented a talk to students and staff about the importance of fisheries management and research and spoke a little bit about the project. We were delighted to see the number of keen students living and learning in this incredible environment and hope that we were able to sway a few keen young minds towards a career in fisheries and marine conservation.

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Left: Various stakeholders begin to arrive at the district commissioner's office on South Caicos to hear more about the project.



Right: Dr Ed Butler and Kyne Krusic-Golub prepare to speak to students and educators at the School for Field Studies TCI.

From here, FMRM's Kathy Lockhart and Tyann Henry guided us through a visit to the docks where we were able to meet a number of fishermen and briefly introduce them to the project and its goals. The fishing community were extremely welcoming and even agreed to allow us to collect a few biological samples from the catch – mainly otoliths (ear bones used by fisheries scientists for ageing fish). It was great to see a number of larger fish, including an 81 cm cubera snapper! Incredibly, all of these fish are taken on breath-hold diving and Hawaiian sling, a remarkable skill to say the least.

This was followed by trips to the various fish plants here on South Caicos. These predominantly focus on lobster and conch trade for the export market but are important stakeholders as they monitor the boat effort daily and work closely with the fisheries department to collect both catch and effort data.

The week in South Caicos culminated in an informal talk at the district commissioner's office where we were able to formally introduce the project to stakeholders and gain some invaluable feedback regarding the fishery. All-in-all, we have learnt an exceptional amount already and must give thanks to the wonderful hosts we have crossed paths with on South Caicos.

From here, we look forward to our second week on TCI where we will be hosting a fisheries data collection and processing workshop back on Providenciales. The week will look to introduce staff from DECR and FMRM to scientifically driven fisheries management and how it is achieved. Kyne will

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also be delivering invaluable training about fish ageing and the many wonderful uses for fish otoliths!



Left: Dr Paul Brickle and Kyne Krusic-Golub engage local small-scale fishers as they process fresh catch at the South Caicos Harbour  
Right: Dr Ed Butler removes the otoliths from a freshly caught hogfish (*Lachnolaimus maximus*)