



Undersized Lobster Bust

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On Saturday, 30th July, the Belize Coast Guard team from Calabash Caye made a major bust of illegal fisheries. Two females were arrested and the catch was called in to the Fisheries Department - which found a few more underized and out of season products.

We got a full rundown on it today:

Jules Vasquez Reporting

These tiny lobster tails - some of them even smaller than shrimp - are what the Coast Guard recovered at an island in the Turneffe Atoll where a 25foot fiber glass Mexican Skiff "Forever Young" was docked. In total 293 lobster tails were recovered.

Hampton Gamboa, Conservation Compliance Unit

"The lobsters are all undersize that was found by the Belize Coast Guard on an island called Cockroach Caye out in Turneffe Atoll. They were only about just about a dozen that were over 2 ounces, all the rest were less than 2 ounce. We even have some of the tail weighing as low as 0.4 ounce on the scale, so they were really small and the overall average weight was like 1.2 ounces. Of 200 plus individuals when you look at 1.2` ounces as the average weight - we are dealing with some really extreme small lobster tail here."

Extremely small and extremely detrimental for the fisheries resource:

Hampton Gamboa, Conservation Compliance Unit

"The fishermen are not catching on to the bigger picture of sustainability Jules and that's the problem that we are face with, because when you look at it if you are harvesting the big ones and



you are targeting the small ones purposely as in these cases then you are looking at an industry that is very volatile and will collapse at this rate in which these guys are harvesting these juveniles."

And it's not only undersized lobster - they also found 233 out of season conch - most of which are also grossly undersized.

The fishermen also had these 99 sea cucumbers - which is a delicacy for the Chinese.

And while the cucumber extraction isn't depleting a precious resource, the lobster and conch are - and this is just a lucky catch of what may be a widespread practice:

Jules Vasquez

"Are there a lot more situations like this out there with people having ice boxes full of any size lobster - out of season conch?"

Hampton Gamboa, Conservation Compliance Unit

"We won't try to be naive about the fact. It's a reality and it's a shame but it's a reality. There is a lot of "black market" as we call it. A lot of it has to do with the fact that people like lobsters in general in Belize and they won't want to pay the actual cost of it for the tail which is \$20 plus dollars a pound, so people will be buying the smaller lobsters from those guys probably for \$10 - \$6 a pound."

But now, these lobster tails will be donated free to worthy organizations:

Hampton Gamboa, Conservation Compliance Unit

"We have been getting a number of request from feeding programs and not only in the schools now, even those after schools programs as well as the summer programs - they have swamp us with request, so for the lobsters and the conchs - we will see how we could distribute it to at least a couple of the organizations or so on."

A total of 6 persons, three fishermen and their girlfriends who were at the fishing camp are expected to be charged tomorrow in the Belize City Magistrate's Court - we'll release their names after they appear in court.

For the undersized lobster they could face penalties and fines totaling four to five thousand dollars and for the out of season conch they could face penalties and fines totaling six thousand dollars. We note that those figures are rough approximations.