

Fish increase recorded at Man of War Shoal

PHILIPSBURG—The first ecological assessment conducted on the Man of War Shoal Marine Park since it was established almost three years ago shows that there has been a 10-20 per cent increase in the fish population.

The research conducted by St. Maarten Nature Foundation this year was done to evaluate whether the implementation of the Marine Protected Area (MPA) had brought any changes to the environment of the coral reef area the Marine Park encompasses.

Compared to the period prior to the establishment of the Marine Park, fish abundance in 2013 increased some 10 per cent with a marked increase in grouper (20 per cent) in general and Nassau grouper (20 per cent) more specifically, which shows a reduction in fishing threats.

The data also show an increase in butterfly fish, grunts, snapper and parrotfish, which were again found to be the most abundant. This increase is important due to the fact that spill-over of fish species outside the Marine Park will increase fishing in local

waters.

The 2013 study also revealed a worrisome, low number of lobsters on certain researched reefs. Unfortunately this may be due to collecting of lobster by irresponsible divers and diving guides. However, there was an increase measured in coral shrimp.

With regard to coral, the 2013 study follow-up research showed that cover remained somewhat the same, with a five per cent increase in the coral cover overall and a two per cent decrease in nutrient indicator algae. This is due to the fact that coral cover or coverage on substrate changes are slow to occur as the organisms are slow-growing. Follow-up research will show whether the increase in coral cover has any additional effects.

Based on the research the measures that accompany the implementation of the Man of War Shoal MPA have shown an increase in mean fish abundance overall and in certain species specifically. There are still challenges with regard to poaching of especially lobsters within the MPA. The Nature Foundation

will continue to manage the area going forward and enforce the rules and regulations of the Man of War Shoal MPA accordingly.

In September 2010 the Nature Foundation conducted research into the health of St. Maarten's marine ecosystem to arrive at a baseline to determine future progress.

Results from the coral reef-monitoring aspect showed that in 2010 there were significant challenges facing St. Maarten's most important coral reef areas. There was a significant lack of important fish species, including grouper and butterfly fish, which showed that this area had been significantly overfished, the Foundation said in a press release. There was also a significant absence of lobster on the monitored site, which also indicated overfishing.

Regarding the health of the monitored coral, there was a worrying predominance of harmful nutrient indicator algae observed at the research site. These harmful algae can indicate increased incidence of nutrients from land runoff affecting the reef and can eventually smother and kill coral. There was also significant evidence of vessel damage which has severely destroyed some segments of reef.

On December 30, 2010, then Minister of Tourism and Economic Affairs Franklin Meyers took a major step towards marine environmental protection and conservation in general for the country St. Maarten when he approved the establishment of the Man of War Shoal MPA, the Caribbean's youngest MPA.

PSS, SMCU sign protocol

PHILIPSBURG—Postal Services St. Maarten (PSS) and St. Maarten Communications Union (SMCU) signed a protocol on September 4 in the presence of the Government Mediator, regulating the process and the rules of order to be followed during the Collective Labour Agreement (CLA) negotiations.

SMCU, as the sole representative of the workers at

the post office, had requested the intervention of the mediator to get the stalled negotiations resumed. After a number of sessions with both parties, it was possible to conclude and sign this protocol, which governs among other things, the duration of the negotiation process. This was stated in a press release issued by the cabinet of the Labour Ministry on Wednesday.