

Governance evolution in the Dominica Fish Aggregation Device Fishery



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Historically, fishing livelihoods were associated with low socio-economic status, with fishers expressing embarrassment around their fishing identity due to assumptions about a lack of education needed to fish and low fishing incomes. In the late 1980s, introduction of fish aggregation devices (FADs) to the west coast of Dominica increased incomes from the offshore pelagic fishery, with concurrent shifts in social perceptions of fishing as a desirable livelihood option. FADs are human-made structures anchored to the sea floor that are used to attract pelagic fish. Providing reduced fishing times and increased catches, they have been widely adopted across Dominica over the last two decades. The adoption of FADs, the increased efficiency of catch and the capture of much larger fish necessitated an upgrade in vessels and equipment. In 2017, approximately 900 fishers operated on 400 boats out of 21 landing sites. Fish are almost exclusively sold on the domestic markets directly from the fishers or in higher volume areas by market vendors. Most fishers participate in more than one livelihood and may be part-time farmers or construction workers. Increasingly, younger, or more entrepreneurial fishers are committing to full time fishing livelihoods through the purchase of larger or multiple vessels with for hire captain and crew.

Photo: *Dublanc Fish Landing Site, Commonwealth of Dominica. 2016 ©Joy Emily Hazell*

Location:
Dominica

Ecosystem type:
Marine

Main gear:
Hook and line, floating buoys with live bait, hand lines

Target species:
Tuna, Marlin, Mahi

Vessel type:
Keelboats and fiberglass reinforced plastic vessels > 12 meters

No. of small-scale fishers:
912

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... Small-scale fisheries have long been socially and economically important to small island, developing nations of the Caribbean, providing affordable protein sources, significant livelihood contributions, and a sense of identity...

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Justice in context

Types of justice:

- **Distributive**
- Social
- Economic
- Market
- Infrastructure/wellbeing
- **Regulatory**
- Procedural
- Environmental
- COVID-19 related

As fishing livelihoods have changed in Dominica, so have associated governance structures. Originally adopted by only a few communities, FAD construction, deployment, use and rules of use were predominately developed at a community level by formally-or informally-organized groups of fishers in self-governance. However, with new profits came new conflicts and exclusions. Fishers establishing FADs charge fees to others who fish at the FADs, opening a market for private fishery access. New investments in larger, more efficient vessels and engines led to placement of FADs farther offshore to discourage access by smaller vessels. The governmental Dominica Fisheries Division has instead encouraged open access to FADs by any fisher who buys a FAD license. The idea has gained some support among non-FAD owning fishers but has not been legally codified.

Over the last ten years, the Dominica Fisheries Division advanced a policy of co-management for the FAD fishery and began an outreach and awareness campaign about the new co-management regime. The agency has also established publicly-accessible FADs, funded by license fees. However, free-riding of non-license-buying fishers weakens both formal and informal FAD rules.

Definition of small-scale fisheries

One hundred percent of Dominica fisheries are small-scale. Vessels may be human powered canoes to keelboats with outboard engines; they may have a single captain, a captain and crew member or the crew on several vessels may work together to secure a catch. Nearshore fisheries target reefs using fish pots or schooling fish using large seine nets. Offshore fisheries target larger pelagic fish using hook and line gear around fish aggregation devices (FADs).

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Dealing with justice

In September of 2017 Hurricane Maria struck Dominica as a Category 5. Over 90% of infrastructure, including the Dominica Fisheries Division Headquarters suffered damage. Over 120 vessels and engines were damaged or lost. Ice making machines and supplies for market vendors at fishing landing sites were damaged. Fishing gear, including FADs were also damaged or lost. Although many FADs survived the initial storm, boats providing relief supplies, being unfamiliar with Dominica waters, inadvertently destroyed many FADs.

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