



© Ethan Daniels



# PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES IN BELIZE through traceability and data

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

### PROJECT SUMMARY

To promote the sustainability of fisheries in Belize, The Nature Conservancy has partnered with the National Fisher's Cooperative (NFC), the second largest cooperative in Belize leading the way in quality and sustainability standards among this country's producers. Together with Future of Fish (FoF), we are incorporating full-chain traceability technology as a critical step to reinforce the ongoing commitment to sustainability, profitability and social responsibility within the lobster and conch fisheries. By fostering data-driven fisheries, Belize will be able to conserve marine ecosystems and protect livelihoods, balancing the needs of nature and people, and providing a sustainable model for Belize and the wider region.

### BACKGROUND

The National Fisher's Cooperative (NFC) is known throughout Belize for its high standards, quality products and strict sustainability criteria. The second largest fishing cooperative in Belize, NFC has been in operation for half a century and currently has over 250 producing members. Many of NFC's members come from small fishing communities whose livelihoods have relied on lobster, conch, and finfish for generations.

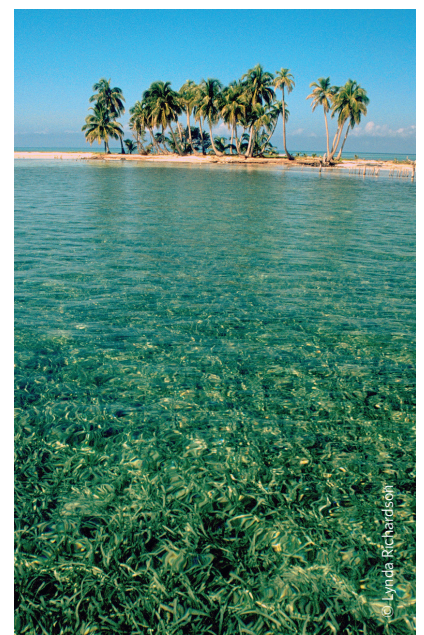
Although NFC has been leading the way in quality and sustainability among seafood producers in Belize, the panorama is changing, and their strict

standards have come at a cost. NFC is under unprecedented pressure from private competitors and changes in the regulatory environment that can offer higher prices and lead to decreasing numbers of producing members for NFC. Unfortunately, these private companies do not adhere to the same social and ecological standards.

TNC recognizes NFC's leadership and commitment to sustainability and is working with the cooperative to incentivize and train fishers to fish more sustainably. Looking to go a step further, together we have identified traceability technology as a critical element to their

## ABOUT THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

The mission of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends. Founded in 1951, TNC and its more than 1 million members have protected 120 million acres in the United States, Latin America, the Caribbean, Australia, Asia and the Pacific, and Africa. Worldwide, we have safeguarded 5,000 miles of rivers, and are engaged in more than 100 marine conservation projects.



© Lynda Richardson

ongoing efforts to build sustainability, profitability and social responsibility into the lobster and conch fisheries in Belize. We have partnered with Future of Fish (FoF) to assist with research and analysis to inform an effective strategy for designing and implementing full-chain traceability systems that will benefit NFC. By applying this technology, we seek to create an opportunity for NFC to serve as a model for Belize, fishers, and the region.

## OUR GOALS

Research and analysis began in 2016 in Belize to inform an effective strategy for both the design and implementation of traceability, as well as value chain alignment for NFC with the following goals in sight:

1. **Increase prices** by diversifying markets, optimizing product mix, and improving product standing;
2. **Retain and recruit members** through community initiatives, better communication of benefits, higher prices and an improved payment structure;
3. **Lower costs** through reducing the cost of goods sold, optimizing operational efficiencies, and restructuring debt.

## OUR STRATEGY

Through ethnographic research, a Request for Proposals for traceability technology, market assessment, and operational audits, FoF, TNC and NFC identified a suite of strategies to achieve the above mentioned overarching goals:

- **Electronic traceability implementation.** Increase efficiency in the NFC plant, provide product verification, and capture NFC's story, while collecting valuable data for sustainable fisheries management.
- **Business plan development.** Create the strategic pathway and timeline for NFC to achieve the goals above, as well as determine the additional capacity needed to optimize the plan.
- **US buyer diversification.** Maximize profit and increase stability through US diversification.
- **Pilot live lobster production.** Promote more selective fishing and access price premiums.

- **Optimize labor and operational efficiencies.** Achieve cost savings through improving efficiencies in labor and operations and reducing waste.
- **Access premium markets through brand ambassadors.** Work with key celebrity chefs and networks to promote NFC's brand and products and access price premiums.
- **Improve Seafood Watch rating.** The Belize lobster fishery currently has red status, and there is an opportunity for NFC and partners to engage with Seafood Watch to provide data and identify any improvements to move the fishery to yellow or green.
- **Improve trust and transparency and member recruitment.** "Rebrand" NFC and take steps towards greater transparency and trust-building with members and fishing communities to improve member recruitment and retention.
- **Optimize efficiency.** Investment in more efficient equipment and processes and reduction of carbon footprint and operational costs through investment in renewable energy.
- **Finance platform.** Develop a financing platform that can provide capital to qualified fishers and businesses that support conservation and fisheries management objectives.

## OUTCOMES

Through implementation of traceability, increased market recognition, and work with NGOs such as Seafood Watch, we will support NFC in achieving data rich fisheries with structure and incentives in place to support the sustainable use of the ocean's resources. Additional profits generated through increased prices and decreased costs strategies will directly benefit fishers and their communities.

The co-op structure is inherently different than its private competition, which retains dividends for owners and shareholders rather than reinvesting profits into the communities. In our scenario, all additional revenues generated through NFC will benefit fisher communities, fostering a harmonious relationship with their environment and promoting the value of conservation.

