

*Management laws and policies for conch*

- *It is illegal to take from the fishery waters, sell, purchase, or at any time have in one's possession, any immature conch.*
- *It is illegal to harvest conch with a shell that does not have a flared lip.*
- *All conch are to be landed with their shells intact.*
- *It is illegal to use SCUBA for fishing unless authorised to do so by the Chief Fisheries Officer.*

**THE QUEEN CONCH 'Lambi'**

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**CITES and Conch**

**What is CITES?**

The Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) is an international convention, to which Saint Lucia is party. It works towards regulating the international trade in threatened wild plants and animals.

**Why CITES?**

- Trade in wild plants and animals requires crossing borders between countries
- Efforts towards its regulation requires international cooperation to minimize over-exploitation.
- The Convention offers varying degrees of protection to more than 30,000 species of animals and plants, whether they are traded as live specimens, fur coats or dried herbs.

**Appendix I:** Prohibits international commercial trade and regulates non-commercial trade in plant and animal species that are threatened with extinction and those that are, or may be affected by trade. E.g. include all species of marine turtles.

**Appendix II:** Uses a system of permits to ensure that international trade is sustainable for many species that are not threatened with extinction, but could become so, if international trade is not strictly regulated. E.g. queen conch (lambi) and several species of coral, including black coral.

**Appendix III:** Contains species subject to regulation within a particular country and for which the cooperation of other countries is sought to help regulate trade.

**How is Trade of Conch Regulated by CITES?**

Anyone wishing to leave Saint Lucia with conch meat (cooked or uncooked) or wishing to export conch, requires an export permit from the Department of Fisheries in Saint Lucia.



*Conch fishers landing whole animal*

Persons who purchase conch shells as souvenirs, are authorised to leave the island with no more than three adult conch shells. However, export permits are required for any number greater than three adult conch shells which can be obtained from the Department of Fisheries.



*Adult conch with flared lip and juvenile*

# What is Conch?

Queen conch, or 'lambi', as the species is more popularly known in Saint Lucia, belongs to the class of organisms known as gastropods, which include snails and slugs. However, the Queen conch can be easily differentiated from the other gastropods by the large size of its shell (up to 30 cm in length and 3 kg in weight) and its deep pink coloured lip.

Adult Queen conch are benthic (bottom dwelling) organisms that generally inhabit sandy or rubble substrate that supports the growth of sea grass and algae.



*Queen Conch on seagrass bed*

In Saint Lucia, they are targeted for their valuable meat used to create many mouth watering dishes such as conch kebabs, roti and soup. The shells are cleaned, varnished and are sold to tourists as souvenirs.

There are currently two distinct populations of conch: one in the north of the island and the other in the south. Most of the remaining stocks of conch are found in waters deeper than thirty meters. As a result, harvesting of conch occurs with the use of SCUBA.

## Conch Biology

Baby conch hatch from eggs within a few days of the female laying them on clean sand or gravel bottom. However, these baby conch are so small, that it is impossible to see them with the naked eye. Ten baby conch can fit into one drop of water!

The baby conch drift with the water currents for about three weeks, during which time, they feed on microscopic plants known as phytoplankton.



*Juvenile Queen Conch*

After three weeks, these baby conch leave the open water, sink to the ocean floor and go through metamorphosis (change in body structure). It is during this metamorphosis that the young conch begins to change into what we are familiar with: a long snout with a mouth at the end and a foot with a claw. The baby conch then disappears into the sand for about a year, during which time, it continues to feed on tiny plants.

Growth of the conch occurs in a spiral (roller) pattern. Spiral growth of the shell stops when the conch is about three years. However, this does not mean that the animal has stopped growing. Whilst the conch shell does not increase in size at this stage, it develops a flared lip which thickens with age.



*Claw attached to foot tucked outside the shell*

At the end of the year of being submerged in the sand, the young conch digs its way to the surface and settles.

Queen conch attain sexual maturity within three to four years. Like many other marine organisms, conch populations are threatened by over exploitation and habitat (e.g. seagrass and coral reef) degradation.



*Adult conch with flared lip*

## *Did You Know That..*

- *Five (5) species of conch are found in the Caribbean Region with the most economically important being the Queen conch?*
- *Conch are either male or female?*
- *Conch species are herbivorous (i.e. they only eat plants)?*
- *A mature conch is recognised not by the size of its shell but, instead, by the thickness of its lip?*
- *Old conch are easy to recognise by their worn shells and thick covering of algae?*
- *Conch use their shells as a home and as protection against predators?*
- *A male conch can be identified by a black arm over his right eye, and a female, by a groove that runs down the right side of her foot?*
- *Conch live to be about six to seven years old before they die?*
- *Persons carrying three conch shells or less out of Saint Lucia as souvenirs do not require a CITES permit?*