

Managing the Regional Lionfish Invasion – actions of the Project “Mitigating the Threats of Invasive Alien Species in the Insular Caribbean” (MTIASIC)



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Introduction

The MTIASIC project seeks to achieve the following general outcomes:

- **Enhance National IAS Capacity:** Increased national capacity to address potential risks posed to biodiversity of global significance from alien invasive species.
- **Regional Cooperation:** Increased regional cooperation to reduce risk posed to biodiversity of global significance from invasive alien species.

Introduction continued

- **Information Management:** Enhance access to data and established best practice for IAS, and increase public awareness of IAS.
- **Prevention of New IAS:** Increased prevention of new IAS introductions into the region that can impact globally important biodiversity
- **Management of IAS:** Increased capacity to eradicate, and improve control and management of IAS that impact on the regions endemic and globally significant biodiversity

Strategies and Plans

Specifically the project seeks to:

- **Develop a Regional Strategy:** Develop a regional lionfish strategy (beyond CARICOM) and within the context of a broader IAS strategy that includes marine ecosystem.
- **Disseminate Information:** Disseminate information on the potential impact of IAS on biodiversity including marine biodiversity.
- **Conduct Research and Development:** Through pilots in Bahamas and Jamaica determine best practise for the management of this threat to the regions commercial fishery and marine biodiversity and limit is impact on human health.

Strategies and Plans continued

- **Multi-level cooperation:** In general cooperate with International; regional and national initiatives on IAS. Specifically for Lionfish: Caribbean Regional Fishery Mechanism; National Fishery authorities etc. to coordinate efforts and share information eg via CIASNET.ORG.
- **Surveillance:** Conduct surveillance via Maria Island Reef in St. Lucia and possibly surveillance of reefs in TT.

Successes

Effectively the project started on the 23rd of September 2009 but effectively got under way in 2010.

Regionally: A website CIASNET.ORG is currently being tested and will be used as a resource to promote awareness of the issue of IAS in general including lionfish to the Caribbean and the world from schools to highest levels of the public and private sector. A regional IAS task force as well as five national level committees are considering marine IAS strategies.

Nationally: the respective Bahamian and Jamaican representatives will: to speak to the project successes at the national level.

Challenges

- Low critical mass of experts working on the issue of IAS in general and Lionfish in particular when the amount of sea space is taken into consideration and the large numbers of reefs that exists in the region.
- No effective regional coordination mechanism: thankfully this is now being addressed.
- Low level of awareness among policy makers: while in Bahamas, Jamaica and DR among others their are high levels of awareness among many small states that are vulnerable to this threat awareness is low. Economic impact assessments are needed to convince them.
- Limited baseline data to assess impact once invasion occurs.

Funding: UNEP/GEF with co-finance from International and Regional Partners

Total MTIASIC: US\$6,413.39 50% of which is co-finance.

Needs

Better coordination of :

- Messages
- Research
- Dissemination of info
- Sharing of technical expertise
- Greater collaboration to maximize available funds and to leverage additional funds

Conclusion

The Wider Caribbean region must and can work together to minimize the impact of this invasion of our marine biodiversity; economic fisheries resources and the livelihoods of our fisher folk and human health. But more importantly it must share these experiences to prevent future invasions of our fresh water, marine and terrestrial ecosystems.