

## Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects

### Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus Half Year Report

*Note: If there is any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website, please ensure you clearly highlight this.*

**Submission Deadline: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2022**

<b>Project reference</b>	DPLUS153
<b>Project title</b>	Conserving tropical marine ecosystems in TCI through science-based fisheries management
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI)
<b>Lead partner</b>	South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute (SAERI) / TCI Department of Environment and Coastal Resources (DECR)
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Turks and Caicos Islands Government (TCIG), Department of Environment and Coastal Resources (DECR), Department of Fisheries and Marine Resources Management (FMRM), Fish Ageing Services Ltd Pty (FAS), Ocean Environmental, Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)
<b>Project leader</b>	Tara Pelembe (SAERI) and Lormeka Williams (DECR). Project Manager – Dr Edward Butler.
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	<i>HYR2</i> <i>Reporting period April 1<sup>st</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> September 2022</i>
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	Website: <a href="https://www.south-atlantic-research.org/partners/dplus-153-conserving-tropical-marine-ecosystems-in-tci-through-science-based-fisheries-management/">https://www.south-atlantic-research.org/partners/dplus-153-conserving-tropical-marine-ecosystems-in-tci-through-science-based-fisheries-management/</a>  Twitter: @SAERI_FI  Facebook: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/S4ERI/">https://www.facebook.com/S4ERI/</a>

**1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end September).**

**Output 1: Stakeholders are meaningfully engaged in understanding the requirements for robust fisheries data and in the designation of landing sites.**

Following on from initial stakeholder engagements which were held in March (Y1Q4), a nationwide fishery stakeholder consultation was held in July. This was aimed at engaging important stakeholders, identifying, and verifying important fish landing sites, harvesting historical fisher ecological knowledge and gathering perspectives from members of the fishing community regarding how best to facilitate fisheries data collection and management (**Activity 1.1, 1.2 & 1.3**).

The consultation process engaged with a total of 66 stakeholders and formally interviewed 34, across all major islands (**Indicator 1.1**). The process also identified 39 important landing sites for fisheries research and management consideration (**Activity 1.3; Indicator 1.2**). Formal provisional recommendations were made in the consultation report (available [online](#)). However, landing site recommendations have not yet been submitted to the Minister (**Activity 1.4**). It was felt that this may be premature and that additional time and experience within the fishery would promote the best-informed final recommendations. Additionally, as the recommendations would be unlikely to be actioned within the lifetime of the project, they would not impact data collection, and therefore would not affect project delivery.

More detailed information can be found in the consultation report which is available [online](#).

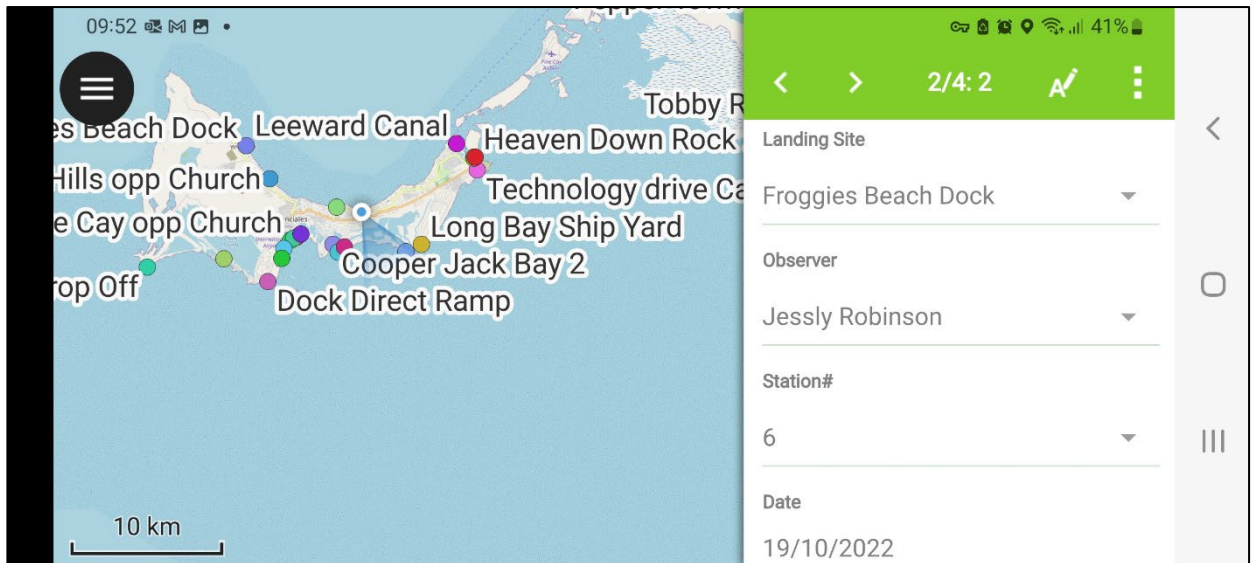
**Output 2: TCIG staff and fishers trained in data collection and fisheries data is well managed.**

Building on from the fisheries data collection workshop held in March, project staff continue to work closely with government officers to develop officer's skills and build up their experience in measuring catch and effort data, and collecting biological samples (Figure 1; **Activity 2.1, 2.3 & 2.4**).

A fisheries data collection smartphone application (app) has successfully been developed (**Activity 2.2; Indicator 2.3**). The app was initially targeted at fishers for voluntary self-reporting. However, fishers largely suggested that they would be unlikely to use such an app (Consultation Report – available [online](#)). Additionally, it was found that there is already a similar app which had been developed as part of a project driven by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS). Hence, it did not make sense to replicate a fisher app and it was decided to rather invest in creating a fisheries data collector app which could be used by government staff at landing sites to record catch, effort and biological data. The app was designed using QField freeware and is directly linked to the relational fisheries database which has been developed through the project and is housed online (Figure 2). The app also provides digital access to useful resources, such as fish ID guides and data protocols.



**Figure 1:** Project staff supervising and assisting with fisheries officer training



**Figure 2:** Screenshot of the Qfield data collection app which can be used by fisheries data collectors to record catch, effort and biological data in the field.

Landings data collection has been ongoing which will support activities towards the end of the project (**Activity 2.4**). Additionally, the relational fisheries database has been successfully developed and all landings data entry is up to date (**Indicators 2.4 & 2.5**).

**Output 3: Fisheries Science laboratory fully equipped, and staff fully trained, and age and growth studies for 4 species completed.**

Despite delays with the ordering and purchase of the laboratory equipment, all equipment has now arrived on island and has been installed (Figure 3; **Activity 3.1**), and staff have been trained in its use. A final laboratory opening ceremony is being planned, where the TCI Premier

and Minister of the Ministry of Tourism, Environment, Fisheries and Marine Affairs, Culture and Heritage will be present.

Other activities and indicators related with this outcome will be delivered in the future. Namely, age-and-growth and reproductive assessments will be completed in Y3 (**Activity 3.2 & 3.3; Indicator 3.3 & 3.4**) and the completion of a business case for the fisheries laboratory to provide regional services will be completed in Y2Q4.



**Figure 3:** Project Officer Jessly Robinson unpacking the new equipment which has arrived in TCI (left), including the new state-of-the-art otolith saw (right)

Output 4: **Stock assessments of priority species undertaken.**

There were no measurable indicators to report against for this reporting period – **4.1** is due by Y3Q1 and **4.2** by Y3Q2.

Output 5: **Project Management structure, monitoring and evaluation and communication tools established**

Most management tools were established in Y1 and are up to date. Ongoing project management has taken place and there have been regular meetings between members of the project management group (**Activity 5.2**). Minutes from all of the PMG meetings can be found [online](#).

Notably, amendments to the project MoU have been made and are being finalised with TCIG. This has been in response to the governmental restructuring which took place shortly prior to the project start. The amended MoU has sought to formally realign the project with the TCIG DFMRM, as well as the DECR.

**2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.**

**TCIG departmental split:**

The TCIG departmental split was mentioned initially in the Y1 Annual Report (Fisheries function moved from DECR to FMRM). This has had some impacts on project delivery through reduced sampling efficiency and reduced availability of government staff to assist with fisheries data collection. As a result, the reduced data over the initial project period may impact the timing of life-history (**Activity 3.2**), reproductive (**Activity 3.3**) and stock assessments (**Activity 4.2**) in Y3. Although this has had an impact on progress, there have been marked improvements through partner discussions and the drafting of the amended MoU. Additionally, data sampling at major retailers on Providenciales, sampling trips to other islands where fishing activity is

greater (South Caicos) and fishery independent sampling trips on DECR and FMRM vessels have helped to mitigate this risk so far.

**Project vehicle:**

There have been a number of challenges relating to the purchase of a vehicle (see Change Request submitted) however these are being addressed and the vehicle purchase is imminent.

**Exchange rate losses:**

The depreciation of the GBP against the USD has resulted in funds needing to be deviated to cover these fluctuations. Core project expenses and operating costs have been maintained to ensure project delivery whilst ensuring the budget is able to accommodate the exchange rate losses. The details of this can be found as outlined in our Change Request.

**Natural disasters and increased Violence on TCI**

Recently, TCI has experienced a Hurricane (Fiona) The Hurricane has had minor impacts to sampling for a short while (approximately 1 month following). This was due to a reallocation of government resources, including officers and vessels, to assist with the national recovery

Increased gun violence has resulted in injuries and some fatalities in the TCI community at large. This risk has been added to both the project issues log and field Risk Assessments and mitigation measures have included stalling field sampling on Providenciales in areas where most of the violence has taken place and shortening the stakeholder consultation process on Providenciales due to the increasing violence at the time. Landing site visits on Providenciales were also temporarily postponed in October to mitigate against any risks of encountering shootings. Both TCIG and SAERI are keeping a close eye on the situation and have adopted a precautionary approach to manage the ongoing risk.

**3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS-LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?**

Discussed with NIRAS-LTS:

Yes/No

Formal Change Request submitted:

Yes/No

Received confirmation of change acceptance

Yes/No

Change request reference if known:

**4a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?**

Yes  No  Estimated underspend: £

**4b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully.** Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

**If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a re-budget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.**

**5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?**

NO

**If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response (including the submission of your risk register), or if your Annual Report Review asked you to provide a response with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.**

**Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also** be raised with NIRAS-LTS International through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to [BCF-Reports@niras.com](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com). The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 29-001 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report**