

# FISHERIES AND THE EPA

## **What is the EPA?**

The European Partnership Agreement (EPA) is the framework for trade between the European Union (EU) and the CARIFORUM countries. The EPA is different from previous agreements which allowed The Bahamas to export goods to the EU duty-free while EU exports attracted customs duties at the border in The Bahamas. The EPA is reciprocal in that there will be reductions in customs duties on EU goods at The Bahamas.

## **How will the EPA impact the fisheries sector?**

The EPA has several provisions that will impact the fisheries sector:

### **(1) Market access**

The EPA will mean that fisheries products, including spiny lobster will continue to be exported to Europe dutyfree.

### **(2) Lower duties on EU imports**

As a result of the reduction in duties on EU imports to The Bahamas, some items such as fishing vessels will have lower rates of duties.

### **(3) Export taxes**

It is likely that the royalty paid on spiny lobster exports will be removed.

### **(4) Fisheries development**

The EPA contains a chapter on

agriculture and fisheries development. The objective of the chapter is to eradicate poverty through the sustainable development of the sectors. The chapter also commits the government to the sustainable use of marine ecosystems based on the precautionary principle as defined in the *FAO Code of Conduct on Responsible Fisheries*.

This is likely to mean that greater effort will be placed on fisheries management practices such as closed seasons, quotas for fisheries products and restrictions on the types of gear and equipment used.

*The Code of Conduct on Responsible Fisheries of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is a voluntary code that was adopted by 170 countries to 1995. The Code encourages countries to work together to conserve and manage fish resources and habitats. Under the terms of the Code fishing operations should be managed to ensure that practices are sustainable, that is, that there will be fish in the future. Government policies to manage fish resources should be clear and developed in cooperation with stakeholders and the best scientific information.*

During the implementation of the EPA, there will be efforts to increase

the competitiveness of production, processing and trade in traditional and non-traditional agricultural and fishery products.

**(5) Harmonization of sanitary standards**

The European Union has very high standards for imported food products. The Food Safety and Technology laboratory was established to ensure that exports conform to those standards.

**(6) Rules of Origin**

The Caribbean region also includes the Dominican Republic. This new association is known as CARIFORUM. The EPA limits the benefits of the agreement to nationals of CARIFORUM and the EU. While The Bahamas understands this position, the Rules of Origin only allow fish caught within the terrestrial waters or 12 nautical miles to be considered as fish caught in The Bahamas. Traditionally, The Bahamas has defined the fishing grounds of The Bahamas as the 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone. The EPA is also seeking to require that fishing vessels that benefit from duty-free access must be 50% owned by EU or CARIFORUM nationals.

**(7) Customs procedures**

The EPA is also likely to positively impact exporters. The EPA is likely to result in simpler customs procedures for the export of products to the EU.

**(8) Researchers**

Many fishing communities have been involved in research studies on coastal and marine ecosystems. The EPA contains provisions that would facilitate the temporary entry of EU and CARIFORUM technical and scientific researchers.

***How will the fisheries sector be kept informed on matters related to the EPA?***

There are two ways to obtain information on the EPA. The first is via the Trade Commission. This is a body that reviews and gives input to the Government on behalf of the private sector on matters related to trade. The fishing industry is represented on the Trade Commission. The second way is to contact the Ministry of Finance which has responsibility for trade.