

State of the Environment
1997 REPORT

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Abbreviations

BP	Before Present
Ch	Chapter
CM	Centimetre
CBO	Citizen-based Organisation
CSO	Central Statistical Office
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EMA	Environmental Management Authority
ha	hectare
MALMR	Ministry of Agriculture, Land & Marine Resources
km	Kilometre
m ³	cubic metre
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
Sq	square
TED	Turtle Exclusion Device
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Data and information used for the preparation of the Report were obtained primarily from published and unpublished reports of various sources. These were mainly the government ministries and statutory bodies engaged in the management, research and monitoring of the renewable (biological) resources under the control of the State and studies and consultancy reports on relevant subjects. Data and information were also derived from interviews and discussions with personnel of these agencies. The extraction and collation of most of this data and the interviews were done by Ms. Nicole Leotaud on behalf of the Environmental Management Authority.

The Environmental Management Authority is grateful for the input of individuals and their agencies who facilitated access to data and information for use in this report. Without their dedication and hard work over the years, the body of knowledge which now exists on the biological diversity of Trinidad and Tobago, notwithstanding its limitations, would not be available.

Special recognition must be given to Senator Dr. Julian Kenny, former Professor at the University of the West Indies who volunteered to share information and his expert knowledge on the biodiversity of Trinidad and Tobago.

Special mention must also be made of the various Divisions and Sections of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, in particular the Fisheries and Forestry Divisions which have responsibility for policy formulation and management of the country's renewable resources; the Departments of Environment and Agriculture of the Tobago House of Assembly and the Emperor Valley Zoo. The dedication and commitment of the staff of the Environmental Management Authority in the preparation and finalization of this report is highly commendable and cannot go unnoticed.

Notwithstanding the contributions of these agencies and individuals, the Environmental Management Authority remains responsible for any inaccuracies, misrepresentations or omissions in this document. The Authority advises that these would not have resulted from any deliberate action on its part.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report reviews the biodiversity resources of Trinidad and Tobago and the status of harvest and management of a few of the hundreds of species and the range of ecosystems exploited.

In compiling this Report, the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) has found considerable difficulty in accessing relevant and reliable data on resource exploitation.

The problem is partly on account of technical difficulties experienced by the main line Ministry in collection of data, partly on account of variability in the quality assurance of the sources of the data and partly because of major omissions in data collection, particularly on habitats and ecosystems. Reference to central sources of data such as the Annual Statistical Digest have not generally been helpful, largely on account of the summarised form of the Digest. Notwithstanding these constraints, the major concerns which have emerged are highlighted hereunder.

- (i) The biological diversity of Trinidad and Tobago is relatively well documented with regard to species but poorly documented with regard to habitat and ecosystems. Although there are probably in excess of 10,000 species occurring within the area under the jurisdiction of Trinidad and Tobago only a small fraction of these are directly exploited while most habitats are utilised to varying degrees.
- (ii) The average annual harvest (taken over periods during 1980 – 1996) of the living resources is principally from timber, fisheries and game and is valued at about \$94,480,000.00.
- (iii) Current knowledge does not permit monetary evaluation of the contribution of natural areas to the economy, but many areas have a major contribution to the welfare of the country through provision of services, potable water, soil conservation and recreation.
- (iv) The principal threats to biodiversity include unrestrained population growth of 1%, mismanaged planned development, unplanned development, squatting, forest fires, domestic and industrial pollution and over harvesting of commercially important species.
- (v) Management of biodiversity resources is primarily the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. The control of exploitation is by primary legislation, much of which is antiquated and ineffectually enforced.
- (vi) Legislation is being drafted to replace the Fisheries Act, the Forests Act and the Conservation of Wildlife Act, while new legislation is being drafted for a system of Parks and Protected Areas.

- (vii) Rules have been drafted by the EMA for the designation of sensitive species and sensitive areas. Other draft EMA legislation which will impact on the conservation of biodiversity are the Certificate of Environmental Clearance Rules for designated activities and the Water Pollution Rule which will require sources of water pollutants to have a Permit from the EMA.

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