



# EAG TALK

## EAG participates in Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute 2014 Conference, Barbados

This year is, and continues to be, one of increased publicity for global environmental matters. Issues like adapting to climate change and sustainable use of natural resources as the human population steadily climbs past the seven billion mark, are all being highlighted by the occurrence of such landmark gatherings as this year's International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Parks Congress.

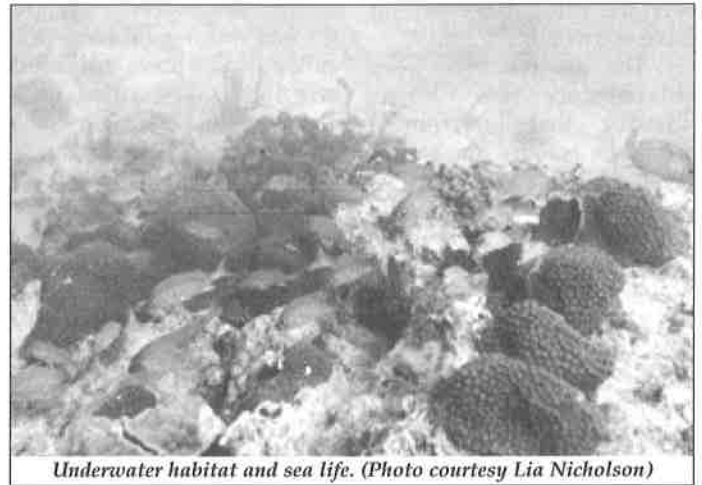
The urgency to improve effective responses to and management of environmental problems grows with each passing minute. Globally, there are many opportunities to share information, new innovations and negotiate technical and financial aid. As different as we all are as countries, cultures and in the problems we face, there is no denying we have just as many issues in common.

With this in mind, the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI) was created to promote the exchange of information, ideas and successful (and unsuccessful) case studies. In 1947, the informal association, sponsored by the University of Miami, began to bring people together from various sectors (fishers, scientists, government officials and commercial representatives) to share and discuss current information as it related to use

and management of marine resources in the Gulf and Caribbean region. GCFI, in 1985, became an independent not-for-profit corporation. Communication among all listed sectors continues to be a key component, with each sector's knowledge of and impact on the resources being tightly intertwined.

This year, at the 67th annual conference held in Barbados, the EAG was fortunate to participate. There was a week-long (November 3-17, 2014) flurry of excitement as over 200 participants networked. Post-graduate students presented their research project outcomes. Fishers and managers of marine managed areas (MMAs) exchanged ideas and success stories of reducing user conflict. Technology innovators discussed with researchers and fishers about how specific technological advances can make their work more financially and ecologically sustainable. Government representatives discussed ideas with researchers and fishers about how their work and activities feed into the decision-making process and countries' needs to meet guidelines of national policies and bi-lateral agreements.

The specific topics discussed this year are too numerous to list here, but of great concern was the general degraded state of coral reefs throughout the Caribbean and the now additional pressures of the lionfish invasion and ocean



Underwater habitat and sea life. (Photo courtesy Lia Nicholson)

acidification. Comparing Caribbean coral reef data collected in the 1970s to recent survey data, there has been a general drastic decline in coral health and fish biomass.

Long-term problems identified include land-based sources of pollution and unsustainable fishing practices. Some areas have fared better than others and it is important to look at various management tools implemented decades ago, in some countries that may have allowed marine ecosystems a better chance to recover and thrive. MMAs as a management tool are now utilised by the majority of Caribbean countries and have seen some success, particularly those that have adopted some form of co-management. Examples were heard from MMAs in Jamaica and St Lucia where fishers and tour operators are involved in research and enforcement.

All in all, it was a great opportunity for the EAG to

participate, sharing Antigua and Barbuda's experience and learning what information and technical and financial assistance are available to help our nation play its part in addressing issues of national, regional and global concern.

EAG's participation was sponsored under the regional Eastern Caribbean Marine Managed Area Network project currently being implemented by the EAG and Government of Antigua & Barbuda. The project is funded by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety, is piloted by The Nature Conservancy, and is administered by the UNEP-CEP (United Nations Environment Programme—Caribbean Environment Programme) Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife Program through its Regional Activity Center and the Caribbean Marine Protected Areas Management Network.