

Managing the Saba Bank

Fisheries

Management of the Saba Bank dates back to 1994 and the declaration of the Exclusive Fishery Zone in the Dutch Caribbean and the passing of a national fishery ordinance made it illegal for foreign vessels to fish on the Bank without a license. In 1996, despite international protests, the Coastguard started to enforce the new fisheries regulations and removed all unlicensed fishing vessels. Licenses were issued preferentially to Saba and Statian fishing boats. This effectively ended all illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing on the Saba Bank. In particular conch fishing was effectively stopped altogether, lobster and finfish fisheries continued but only by local, licensed fishermen. To justify continued exclusion of foreign fishing vessels, monitoring of the fisheries then became a necessity.

Shipping and Marine Protected Area designations

In the past, substantial damage was caused to the Saba Bank by shipping traffic, particularly tankers bound for the St. Eustatius Oil Terminal (established in 1982), routinely anchoring on the Bank. Monitoring of Automatic Identification System (AIS) transponders legally required on any large ship over a five-year period starting in 2007, found that until the prohibition on anchoring in 2010, an average of 21 vessels with an average length of 210 m anchored on the Saba Bank every year, for an average of 3.5 days. The ship's anchor coupled with hundreds of meters of anchor chain is estimated to destroy an area of approximately ¾ hectare of bottom per incident as the vessel swings on its anchor. Using conservative estimates this indicates that since establishment of the Statia oil

terminal over 200 hectares of the Saba Bank have been completely destroyed by anchoring, much of the damage being concentrated on small areas of the Bank.

This threat to the Saba Bank was finally ended when it was declared a Nature Park in December 2010 and in 2012 it became the world's 13th Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA), giving it an International Maritime Organisation (IMO) designation as a no-anchoring area as well as an Area To Be Avoided (ATBA) by shipping. That same year it was designated as a National Park and recognized as an area of regional importance by the Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) Protocol and in 2013 it was recognised as an Ecologically Biologically Significant Marine Area (EBSA) by the Convention on Biological Diversity. In September 2015, thanks in major part to the efforts of Saba's Commissioner Chris Johnson, the Saba Bank became part of the Yarari Marine Mammal and Shark Sanctuary covering all waters of Saba and Bonaire.

In 2007 a Saba Bank Management Plan was developed, but it took until 2012 before the Saba Bank Management Unit (SBMU) was established by the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, in close co-operation with the Saba Conservation Foundation and the Saba Island Government. The SBMU is responsible for day-to-day management of the Saba Bank. It is staffed by two fulltime staff and its tasks consist of just surveillance and reporting shipping or fishing violations, facilitating and conducting scientific research, monitoring of fish landings and liaising with local resource users.

"The Saba Bank, the most pristine and largest coral reef area of the Dutch Caribbean."

Erik Meesters (Wageningen Marine Research)



Saba Bank Manager: Jens Odinga



Anchor damage on Saba Bank by oil tanker



SBMU research and patrol vessel

Climate change effects

The impacts of global climate change are undeniably taking their toll on the biodiversity of the Saba Bank. In 2005 for example an estimated 70% coral cover on the Bank was lost during an intensive bleaching event. Accurate data are not available but similar loss of coral cover was recorded on neighboring islands of Saba and St. Eustatius and many other islands in the northeastern Caribbean. Anecdotal data such as comparison of before and after photographs of an identical spot on the Saba Bank from 2003 and 2007 show an almost complete loss of coral cover.

What will it take to manage the Saba Bank?

The Saba Bank is a very important biological resource for Saba as well as for the surrounding islands and it supports a valuable and sustainable local fishing industry. Threats will continue to exist and law enforcement remains difficult, especially in a remote and large area like the Saba Bank.

There is also much left to explore and discover of the Saba Bank but capacities within the SBMU are limited. Support from research institutes and universities is essential to many of the scientific

research projects on the Saba Bank. To ensure a sustainable future for the Saba Bank it is important the SBMU continues its activities and its capacities are strengthened. Some wish list items for research include:

- *Identification, description and a mapping of main ecological habitats*
- *Continued monitoring of reefs, fisheries, marine mammals and sharks*
- *Habitat restoration experiments (anchor damaged areas)*
- *Methods to reduce shark bycatch, and parrotfish bycatch in fisheries*
- *Development of methods for a targeted lionfish fishery*
- *Identify and protect other spawning aggregation areas*



What have we learned from the past 5 years:

Conservation activities:

The Saba Bank Management Unit or SBMU was established by the Ministry of Economic Affairs in close cooperation with the Saba Conservation Foundation and the island government. From 2012-2014 a Shark Protection Plan was drafted for the Ministry of Economic Affairs. In 2015 the Yarari Marine Mammal and Shark Sanctuary was established. The "Save our Sharks" DCNA awareness project is being implemented from 2015-2017 (grant from National Postcode Lottery). As part of a multi-year program funded by EZ, the collaborating parties are working out the steps needed towards implementing marine mammal management and policy measures for the Yarari Sanctuary.

Wageningen University & Research
(Becking & Meesters, 2017)

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