

## Ornamental Fisheries Collapse?

**Florida's ornamental fisheries are under pressure because of the hobby.**

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Florida provides a large number of ornamental species for the aquarium trade – 9 million animals were reported as collected in 2007 – but a new research article published in PLoS One online suggests Caribbean ornamental species are in danger of collapse.

The research article, titled “Crawling to Collapse: Ecologically Unsound Ornamental Invertebrate Fisheries” was published online December 22, 2009 in the Journal PLoS One.

The authors state: “Disturbingly, Caribbean reefs are among the most degraded worldwide [10], and collection of species on Caribbean reefs may lead to a further decline of reef health, and perhaps accelerate phase shift transitions from coral dominated to algal dominated reefs. This process has been termed ‘the slippery slope to slime’ and reversal has yet to be demonstrated on a large geographic scale [11], [12]. Shifts in ecosystem balance and overall changes in resilience are of a primary concern for managers (see [13] for review).”

The importance of the Florida fishery to the aquarium trade is unquestionable. The report says that, “The U.S. State of Florida provides an excellent example of a multi-species ornamental fishery that supports the marine aquarium and curio trade. Currently, landings of over 9 million individual animals, comprised of over 600 fish, invertebrate and plant species, are reported yearly.”

Florida has done much to try to regulate its state fisheries. The authors point out that: “The U.S. State of Florida provides an excellent example of a multi-species ornamental fishery that supports the marine aquarium and curio trade. Currently, landings of over 9 million individual animals, comprised of over 600 fish, invertebrate and plant species, are reported yearly. Laudably, Florida maintains one of the most extensive data set of any ornamental fishery worldwide, recording catch landings for the ornamental and curio markets since 1994 (Fig. 2). Florida is the largest ornamental fishery in the U.S in terms of species diversity and landing numbers [21], and on a global scale, is third only to Indonesia and the Philippines [6].”

Also, Florida's fishery is relatively well managed, “Fortunately, the FL ornamental invertebrate fishery has virtually no destructive bycatch, as most collected animals are gathered by hand to ensure quality. Cyanide is not used within this specific fishery.”

However, the authors of the paper are concerned that the state's preferred method of controlling the number of animals collected – the state issues commercial marine life licenses (called “endorsements” in Florida) to collect any marine species, with the exception of stony corals, live rock, sea fans and specific threatened fishes – doesn't sufficiently reduce the number of animals collected. If further regulation isn't instituted, the author's conclude:

“The number of grazers now exceeds, by two-fold, the number of specimens collected for curio and ornamental purposes altogether, representing a major categorical shift. In general, landings have increased 10-fold since 1994, though the number of licenses has been dramatically reduced. Thus, despite current management strategies, the FLML Fishery appears to be crawling to collapse.” (FLML stands for Florida Marine Life Fishery.)

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