

BARBADOS

1 Climate change threatens iconic national dish

DEBONED, SCALED, marinated in spices, fried and served with local cornmeal, flying fish is the staple seafood in Barbados, and an iconic dish served up to tourists who flock to the island looking for warmth and winter sun.

The small pelagic fish – long targeted by local netters and the mainstay of the inshore fleet, and featured on the national currency, the Bajan dollar – is, however, in steep decline.

A recent publication by the University of Queensland said that flying fish ‘are becoming

increasingly exposed to climate change-related stressors’ and are among the most vulnerable of marine species to a variety of environmental impacts affecting the ocean.

Catches have fallen by 50% over the last decade, sparking an international court case between Barbados and nearby Trinidad and Tobago, after Bajan fishermen entered Trinidad waters in a bid to maintain catches.

Singer Rihanna, who is from Barbados, has joined the debate, lamenting the shortage of her favourite food.

MAINE

2 Lobstermen under renewed threat

US POLITICIANS HAVE threatened to repeal legislation that provided a six-year moratorium on new gear restrictions in the iconic Maine lobster fishery, in a bid, they say, to enhance protection against entanglement in lobster gear by endangered right whales.

Lobster fishermen had celebrated the passage of the legislation, which limited the proposed reduction of gear from the 90% first suggested to 60%, and provided funds for research into the expanded use of ropeless pots.

The Maine Lobstermen’s Association has vowed to fight

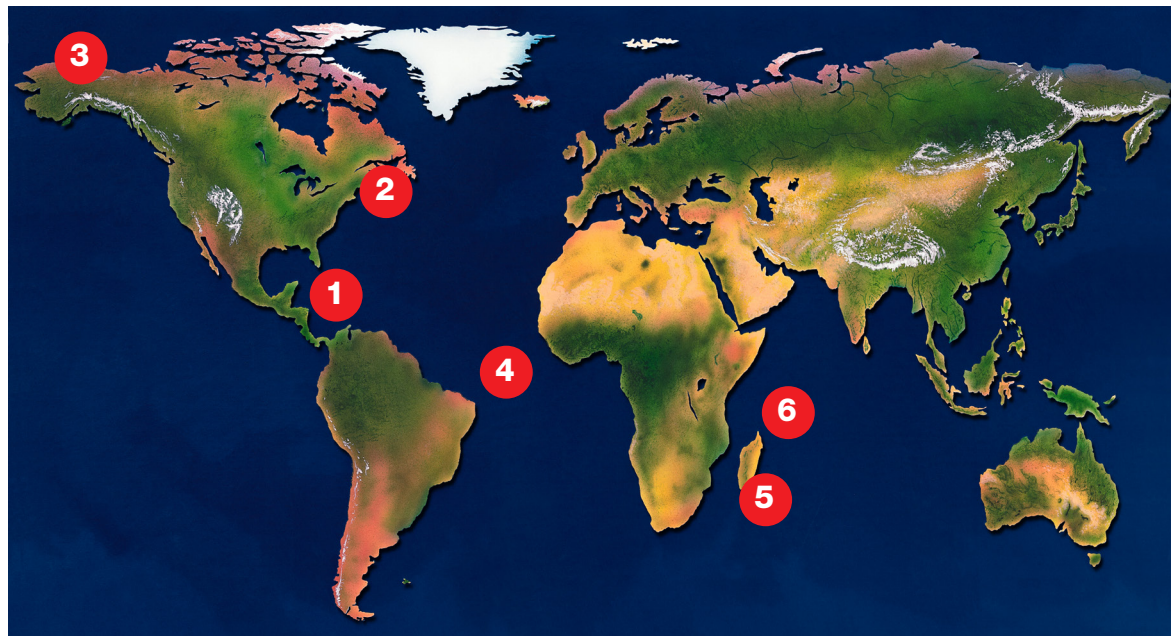
the new move, which it says will do nothing to help right whales, whilst threatening a once-thriving lobster industry. The industry is already under pressure, with warming waters seeing an increase in populations of black bass, a significant predator of juvenile lobsters.

The value of the Maine lobster fishery fell by nearly half between 2021 and 2022, to \$353m – about £300m. In contrast, Canadian stocks are booming – in 2022, Canada’s lobster exports were over 98,000t, worth over \$2bn!

ALASKA

3 Pollack ousts cod as UK favourite

THE CONTINUED SUCCESS OF



the Alaskan pollack fishery, with US quotas set at over a million tonnes, has supported its continued rise with UK consumers.

The once mighty cod, for many years the consumer favourite in the UK, has in recent years been overtaken by salmon as the most consumed fish. Increased imports of pollack, coupled with supply difficulties for Russian cod, saw pollack move into the number two spot in the UK last year, with consumers buying over 56,000t of the species.

The rise seems set to continue, said Andrew Allchurch of Safina Foods, speaking recently at the North Atlantic Seafood Forum in Norway, with salmon prices continuing to rise and ongoing pressure on cod markets.

ATLANTIC OCEAN

4 Robots to take on seaweed menace

A GROWING AREA OF THE tropical Atlantic Ocean, from Africa across to the Caribbean, is suffering from a continued boom in the growth of a floating seaweed, *Sargassum*, that is threatening fish stocks and the fishing and tourism industries across the entire region.

Climate change, increasing sewage outflows and increased river run-off from clearance in

the Amazon are all thought to be feeding the explosive growth in the seaweed. Unlike most seaweeds, the huge piles washed ashore cannot be removed for composting, as the species concentrates arsenic to levels high enough to contaminate groundwater.

Decomposing rafts of the weed have been responsible for fish deaths due to deoxygenation. Large piles rotting ashore not only prevent vessels from launching, and drive tourists away from beaches – the volumes of gas produced are themselves a health hazard.

US scientists have suggested one solution: using underwater drones to collect and compact the huge mats at sea, causing them to sink to the deepwater seabed, where they will act as a carbon sink. With an estimated 24m tonnes of the seaweed growing every year, and increasing environmental risks to fisheries and coastal communities, such a far-fetched solution may yet see the funding it needs to come to fruition.

MADAGASCAR

5 Community engagement ‘key’ to conservation

SURPRISE SURPRISE. NOT. With continuing controversy about ‘top-down’ designation of HPAs in UK waters, a timely piece of research from NGO Blue Ventures – which operates at community level in fisheries in developing countries – examines the reasons for the success or failure of various marine protected areas. One of the case studies is a successful project in a 650km² reserve in Madagascar, jointly managed by 22 communities there.

The authors of the research recommend that, rather than focusing on strict protection in order to achieve global conservation targets, countries should integrate a range of locally appropriate protection levels.

“The global push to expand ocean protection risks excluding coastal communities, the people that rely most on the ocean for survival,” said Blue Ventures marine scientist Charlie Gough, a co-author of the study. “This paper shows how community involvement in MPA design not only brings greater equity, but also better conservation outcomes.”

SEYCHELLES

6 New tuna rules ‘will affect UK supermarkets’

THE FALL-OUT FROM THE proposal to ban the use of floating Fish Aggregation Devices (FADs) in the Indian Ocean continues. The devices are widely criticised by many longliners and smaller vessel operators, as they encourage successful fisheries on large volumes of juvenile yellowfin tuna that have yet to reach maturity.

Whilst acknowledging that a ban was ‘the right thing for stocks, and will see healthier fisheries in the long term’, one processor in the Seychelles claimed that in the short term, a ban on the use of FADs may lead to shortages of tinned tuna on UK supermarket shelves.

Canneries in Mauritius and the Seychelles are key suppliers of the UK tinned tuna market. John West and Thai Union, the two largest operators, process 180,000t of tuna a year in the two countries, the majority caught by purse-seiners using FADs.

In the longer term, a FAD ban will push Spanish operators towards the fishing patterns traditionally followed by the French fleet in the Indian Ocean, which has largely fished without FADs. However, the EU is still considering challenging the ban, which under Indian Ocean Tuna Commission rules would allow the continued use of FADs until the dispute is resolved.



▲ Flying fish: climate change could take the iconic Barbados seafood staple off the menu.