



# LIONFISH CULLING AND COOKING COMPETITION

## EVALUATION REPORT

MONTEGO BAY MARINE PARK TRUST,  
February 2018





## Foreword

This report was written in reaction to the Lionfish culling a cooking competition organized by the Montego Bay Marine Park Trust. The activities were held from 20<sup>th</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup> of February 2018 with hunting in the park and cooking competition at the Pier 1 restaurant. This report is an evaluation report on that event mentioning what was done / needed to be done differently next time. This is divided in 3 main topics the culling week leading up to the event. The cooking competition during the event and the other activities during the day. This report can be used by the trust itself for upcoming events, but it is also a guideline for other organizations all over the world to do similar events. This report concludes the event was a success and is a great pilot project. fighting against the invasive lionfish and creating awareness among local people. On top of that it gives recommendation on marketing and other points of improvement.

Making this report not only an evolution but also a summary of a pilot event.

Kornelis Kramer,  
Montego Bay Marine Park Trust



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## 1.0 Introduction

To create awareness around the invasive lionfish the Montego Bay Marine Park Trust (MBMPT) organized an event. It was a combination of a cooking competition and a culling competition. This was held during February 2018, within the boundaries of the Montego Bay Marine Park. This report could be used by other organization to organize familiar activities. On top of that it will be used for the trust itself to improve similar events in the future.

The report is divided in 3 main compartments. Each focussing on their own subject of the event. First culling, it will explain what was needed, who participated and recommendation for the next time. Same topics will be discussed for the cooking competition and the event itself.

This event was organized with the main goal to encourage the consumption of lionfish. By doing this MBMPT hopes to create a bigger demand for lionfish stimulating the local fisherman to fish more for lionfish. In this way hoping to reduce the negative effects of the the invasion. This is via a cooking competition to demonstrate the different ways of enjoying lionfish. This should inspire guests to prepare the fish themselves. Leading up to the event the lionfish used for the cooking was collect by a culling competition. The week before the event dives where organized and competitors were motivated to participate for prize money.

At the end of the week an event was held where people could see the award ceremony for the best cullers and witness the different cooking styles. The judges tasted the different creations and the best chef received a prize. There were presentations by local musicians and poets. The MBMPT had an open house and organized glass bottom boat tours during the day. All in all, a vibrant week where a lot of knowledge and ideas where shared.

## 2.0 Culling

As mentioned before the week leading up to the event was all about culling and collecting enough fish for the cooking competition. This part will cover all information on the culling.

The competition was open for everybody if they meet all the rules set by the park. These rules can be found in the appendix. On these terms people could join. Gear was partially provided by the trust. Depending on the amount of contestant. However, they were encouraged to bring their own gear and tanks. Next to diving gear the park also had a number of culling spears available for the competition. Other items needed for the competition is a boat. The parks' boat was used. However, fisherman's own boat could be used if assigned staff would join on that particular boat. For safety purposes the divers had to use the culling bag provided by the marine park. During the dive every duo had 1 cull bag. On top of that the staff was responsible for bringing Slates, Surface Marker Buoys, Noise makers, Cameras, Whistles. After the culling the park collected the fish and cleaned them for the chefs later that week. For the competition every fish was weighted and measured to determine who had caught the biggest, the smallest and the most fish. For this measuring equipment is needed like a scale and measuring tape. After all measurements where collected the fish where stored in a freezer.



*Figure 1 Lionfish caught on a culling spear.*

During the whole week a total of 5 contestants participated. This was a variety of water sports man, and hobby divers. They were allowed to participate in as many organized dives if they liked. The dates and times of the culling dives where announced before the competition started. Below the diving schedule can be found. Every dive was a 2-tank dive except Sunday, it was only a 1 tank dive. Making a total of 13 dives during the week.

- 5:30 am Tuesday 20th
- 3:30 pm Wednesday 21st
- 5:30 am Thursday 22nd
- 3:30 pm Friday 23rd
- 5:30 am and 4:00 pm on Saturday the 24th
- 5:30 am on the 25<sup>th</sup>

These 13 dives lead to a total of 76 individual fish being caught weighing in at 2364 kilograms. From all different sizes smallest being 13 grams and the biggest 399 grams.

These fish were collected from different dive sites. A list of dive sites is listed below in no specific order together with the number of dives at that location.

- Ben up plateau 1x
- Secrets reef 1x
- Near the yellow marker 1x
- Hard rock café 1x
- Radical reef 3x
- Sunscape 3x
- Old hospital demarcation 1x
- Mason reef 2x

Important to mention is that all dives were drift dive. Meaning divers would dive in direct area around the stated location.

The first thing noticed was the lack of contestants. There were no fishermen participating. This could've had different causes, these include the time, the rules, knowledge of the event. First of all, the trust tried to plan the dives in such way everybody was satisfied, and it was possible for everyone to participate in diving. However this was an obstacle to the fishermen. Therefore, it could be considered to do dives later at night or on different times of the day. Next to this people have been mentioning to dive later at night to find more lionfish. As they would come out at night in contrast to the morning when they hide more. Secondly fishermen mentioned that the rules were too strict. They wanted to go out of the park boundaries or go deeper as mentioned in the rules. These are things that could be taken in consideration for follow up events. However, as a trust managing the marine park we would prefer to have it take place within park boundaries. Moreover, for safety reasons we choose the depth and the time limit at that depth considered decompression illness. Safety before anything else.

Furthermore, the competition could be done during a longer period of time to collect more fish for the cooking competition. But this all depends on the size of the event.

Overall, the culling went pretty well. There were no injuries or accidents.

There was a good catch rate and the participants enjoyed their culling. However, for next time we could

focus on more sportsmen as it was shown the most participants came from that work of field. On top of this more marketing of the event could be implemented to gain more participants. Like already mentioned a lot could be done differently next time including amount of culling's, culling times, location, rules and focus group. All in all the culling went well and gave good results.



*Figure 2 Placing lionfish in culling bag, safe and easy transportation of the lionfish.*

### 3.0 Cooking

After the week of culling, the fish could be cooked. This was done in a cooking competition. Different chefs where challenged to participate in a cooking competition. Their goal was to convince the judges with their dish. Guest of the event could see how the chefs prepared their dish. This helps to give the visitors inspiration on how to prepare the lionfish. Hoping they will try it at home increasing the demand of lionfish. Leading to more local fishers to go out to fish for lionfish.



Figure 3 Chef Buddo tasting lionfish

The chefs where supplied with fish and a cooking station. Other ingredients and spices had to be brought by the competitor himself. There was enough room for every contestant to prepare their dish. They were assigned a cooking station including a stove. When all dishes where ready they were judged by 3 judges, Marlene Stephenson-Dalley (tourism product development company), Orville Grey (board member MBMPT) and Tamara Woodit (regional director NEPA). Judging the sushi and lionfish in coconut sauce made by the chefs.



Figure 4 Steamed lionfish with vegetables and pineapple made by one of the park rangers.

Sadly, not every chef showed up. This was maybe due to their jobs as the event was on a Sunday afternoon which is a busy for chefs. To prevent this next time, it could be decided to invited people which are not chefs. Invitations could be send to people who have cooking as a hobby or just really enjoy it. This could also lead to a greater interested of the general public as it because more relatable. Aside from this the cooking competition was a success.



Figure 5 Judges tasting lionfish

## 4.0 Event

Next to the cooking competition there was much more to enjoy during the event on Sunday. Local artist and performers were invited to show their talent during the cooking of the fish. On top of that the MBMPT had an open house for people to walk in and learn more about the park. For the more

adventurous visitors of the event the MBMPT had their glass bottom boat ready. Tickets could be bought with a great discount and visitors could enjoy the light sea breeze as they discover the marine park above and under water.



*Figure 6 One of the ranger explaining about the Marine park on a boat tour*

All day long visitors could enjoy Jamaican entertainment brought to them by Jamaica Drums 4 Peace, Rhyming king, Heights Marching band and more.

After the judges had taste the different dishes the visitors got the opportunity. They could buy a ticket with which they could try a sample of the lionfish. This was a great success and the lionfish was soon sold out. Next to this Pier one had the lionfish on their menu for the day. These were also sold out really quick. People really enjoyed the taste of the fish in every different dish.



*Figure 7 Visitors enjoying some lionfish.*

During all this there was an award ceremony for the best fisherman and the best chefs. The winner would receive a prize for their achievement.

The winners for the cullers were;

- 1, Garfield Grand received \$25000 for most fish and \$5000 for the largest catch and a medal
- 2, Wayne Taylor received \$10000 and a medal
- 3, Zavier Shim received \$5000 and a medal

The winning chefs where

1. Chef Bullings receiving \$30,000, trophy and Gift Basket
2. Dr. Dayne Buddo receiving \$25,000, trophy and Gift Basket





The amount of people which showed up to event was a little disappointing. A lot more people should've come. The low number in people showing up could be caused by the lack of marketing of the event out of the contact circle. The event was mainly marketed by email, social media and some worth of mouth. This could be extended with handing out flyers and hanging posters. In this way more people outside of the MBMPT network could be reached. This is a mandatory thing because the locals are the people which need to be reached. They are the ones who eventually need to buy the lionfish from the fisherman. For this time, it all worked out fine because there wasn't enough lionfish for much more visitors. However, a bigger crowd should be reached to create a real effect and more lionfish is needed to provide everyone with plenty of fish.

## 5.0 Conclusion and recommendation

The lionfish festival was a success in that it was a good pilot project which should be extended to other regions. It can help reduce the lionfish invasion and create awareness among locals. On top of that, it benefits the fisherman of a new source of income and introduces the locals to a relatively new fish for them. This report can be used by different institution or organizations to create a similar event. It includes different parties and people seem to enjoy it. The culling went very well with great results. Bringing fisherman and water sportsman together with the MBMPT. Creating better connection. On top of that, the culling is a great opportunity to check on the reef regularly and explore sites where people don't dive every day. The caught fish had a perfect purpose in the cooking competition. Where locals where engaged to see how to prepare this invasive fish species. Chefs where enthusiastic about working with this unusual fish. the visitors loved the taste and they helped fighting the lionfish invasion. Local artist and performers created the perfect atmosphere to enjoy this day. Maybe even recruiting potential customers for their services. As there where people from different restaurants. All in all, this event was great success and can be seen as a pilot project for bigger project all over the Caribbean.

If one decides to create a similar event, please notice the next recommendations. First of all, the cullers could be found in different places. MBMPT focussed on fisher man but it was shown more water sports men came to join to the event. Giving 2 option, using a different strategy to gain the fisherman to join the competition or focus more on water sport men. Of course, these to option could be combined and extended to bring different groups together. Kind of similar challenge for the cooking part. Chefs could be coming from not only professional cooks. Hobby cooks are also intended to enjoy cooking and participating in the competition. This could even lead to more people visiting from outside the MBMPT network. On top of this overall marketing strategy could be changed to involve more people. Attracting more locals and other interested. Overall the event is very flexible and there is a lot of room for creative thoughts to put in place.



Appendix 1.0 Poster for the event



# LIONFISH COOKING COMPETITION & DEMONSTRATION



**PIER 1 RESTAURANT**

**FEBRUARY 25, 2018**

**10 AM - 4 PM**

**ADMISSION: FREE**

Awards Ceremony for  
Lionfish Hunter Competition



**LIONFISH SAMPLES ON SALE \$300  
MEALS ON SALE!**

**Activities:**

- ~Glass Bottom Boat Tours    ~Exhibits
- Entertainment by:
- ~Heights Youth Club    ~Rhyming King
- ~Jamaica Drums 4 Peace



**SEAFOOD SUNDAYS**



[www.mbmpt.org](http://www.mbmpt.org)



Montego Bay Marine Park Trust



mbmpt\_official



952- 5619

## Appendix 2.0 Culling rules

### **RULES**

Any participant who is non-compliant or commits a violation of the rules stipulated will be disqualified

1. Participants have to be certified scuba divers to participate.
2. Participants must use a pole spears and cull bags during competition. The Trust has limited gear available for use. (Participants are liable to replace gear given if damaged or lost).
3. All Participants must be registered and have signed the liability waiver form and the statement of safe dive practices before they can cull.
4. All participants need to be certified by MBMPT staff as a Lionfish culler before they can cull.
5. Each participant must oversee, in the presence of the wardens and judges, the data collection, marking and storage of fish culled.
6. The Trust encourages participants to carry their own dive gear – including tanks.
7. Limited gears (weights, tanks, masks and fins) may\* be available for rent.
8. Participants must obey the instructions of event wardens at all times.
9. PADI/ Dive regulations and Project aware stipulations must be adhered to limit potential damage to person and reefs.
10. Only Lionfish can be caught. Any participant found with any specie or organism that is not a Lionfish will be liable for prosecution.
11. PADI/ Dive regulations and Project aware stipulations must be adhered to limit potential damage to person and reefs.
12. Maximum depth permitted is 115 ft/ 35m, Maximum bottom time below 80 ft is 15 mins.
13. Participants will dive in groups of three – four (3 – 4) divers in the presence of one monitor.
14. In a group sighting of a lionfish the diver closest to the fish is the qualified shooter.
15. Divers must stay within visible range of the monitor/ group members at all times.
16. Groups end the dive when the first person in the group reaches 1000 psi.
17. Divers are not allowed to remove Lionfish from fish pots or other tackle seen while diving
18. All Fish caught on dives will be used by the Montego Bay Marine Park in the hosting of the Lionfish Cooking Competition.
19. Only Lionfish caught during the scheduled dives will be accepted from entrants.