



# Special Fisheries Conservation Areas Fish Sanctuaries

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**Writer: Mr. Shaundae White**  
**Editor(s): Ms. Tavia-Ann Carr**

## Definition and Purpose

Special Fisheries Conservation Areas (SFCA's) are defined as areas that are strictly forbidden to fishers and the activity of unauthorized fishing (MOAF, n.d). They are set aside as safe zones for the reproduction of marine animals such as fish. These areas were given the title of nature reserve by the Agriculture Minister of Jamaica in 1975 (Fishing Industry Act 1975) (MOAF, n.d). Any fishing activities carried out in these areas without the required permission of the Ministry of Agriculture will lead to prosecution.

There are now eighteen SFCA's in Jamaica and the first two to be commissioned were the Bogue Island Lagoon (Montego Bay) and the Bowen Inner Harbour (St. Thomas). According to Aiken (2017), the purpose of a fish sanctuary or special fisheries



conservation area is to provide a protected space where fish and other economically important marine species can breed successfully, and their eggs can be carried (by water) into areas in the periphery of the SFCA. Once in these peripheral areas, they can mature and be captured for use (consumption).

The fish sanctuary also protects and aids in the maintenance of coral reefs by extension of increasing the fish population. Fish excretes ammonium that is used by the corals to facilitate its growth and reproduction rate. (Dussault, 2016) So the more fishes present, the more coral reefs that serves as a habitat and food source for many marine lifeforms.

These SFCA's are a very important part of the effort to conserve and protect our declining fish stocks, which is why the government has spent tens of millions in the proper management of the SFCA's.

The benefits of an SFCA are numerous and help to further prove the importance of these areas (Alligator Head Foundation, 2016). Some benefits that are seen from the use of SFCA's include:

1. Increase in fish populations in the sanctuary and its peripheries.
2. Areas used for fishing that are close to the sanctuaries have increases in the fish populations as fish move out of the SFCA's and into the fishing areas outside.
3. The size of the fishes as well as the frequency of larger fish being caught will increase.
4. Increase in fish stocks over time means that the Jamaican fishery will be restored and possibly the tourism industry as well.



## **Oracabessa Bay Fishing Sanctuary**

The Oracabessa Fish Sanctuary is one of approximately 18 sanctuaries established across the island. The sanctuary, a joint project between the Oracabessa Foundation and the St. Mary Fishermen's Cooperative, is a 96.1 hectare protected area of the sea where fishing is prohibited, and it houses mangroves, sea grass, coral reef and a river.

Williams (2017) in 2016, reported that there was a 17-fold increase in fish biomass per area inside the fish sanctuary. In the initial phase, 69 different species of fish were recorded in the sanctuary, inclusive of snapper, parrot, doctor, blue tangs, bar jacks, graysby and Coney.

As such, this sanctuary confirms the purpose and importance of having a protected area that acts as a breeding ground for a variety of reef fishes.