

Importing Queen Conch

What You Need to Know



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What is prohibited?

Queen conch, with its beautiful pink shell and tasty meat, has become a symbol of the Caribbean region where it is found on beaches, restaurant menus, and in souvenir shops. Be aware, however, that the United States currently prohibits import of queen conch (including meat, shells, live animals, and products made from queen conch) from Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Honduras, and Trinidad and Tobago. This action is part of a global conservation effort under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to stem continued and significant declines in queen conch populations. Before trade can resume with these countries, they must implement specific long-term conservation measures to sustainably manage queen conch populations in their waters.

How does CITES regulate queen conch?

Queen conch was listed in Appendix II of CITES in 1992. Appendix II includes species that, although currently not threatened with extinction, may become so without trade controls. CITES regulates international trade through a system of permits designed to ensure that trade is legal and will not threaten the species' survival in the wild.

What makes queen conch vulnerable?

Queen conch (*Strombus gigas*) is an edible marine snail that occurs throughout the Caribbean Sea, including Florida, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, into the Gulf of Mexico, and in the Atlantic Ocean around Bermuda. It is heavily fished for its meat, and the shells and pearls are sought by collectors and for jewelry. Because these animals are slow growing, late to mature (3-5 years), and tend to aggregate in shallow water to spawn, they are particularly vulnerable to over-fishing.

What other steps is the U.S. taking?

Steps have been taken to conserve U.S. native populations of queen conch. All harvest in Florida waters and adjacent Federal waters has been banned since the mid-1980s. Populations in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are managed under local regulations and a Fishery Management Plan for queen conch developed by the Caribbean Fishery Management Council. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, and Department of State are also committed to working with the international community to ensure that queen conch remains a sustainable and valuable commercial resource throughout the Caribbean region.

What is allowed?

You may import queen conch into the United States from parts of the Caribbean not subject to the trade prohibitions, provided it is allowed by the country of export and it is accompanied by any required CITES documents. Countries from which import may be allowed include: Anguilla, Aruba, Bahamas, Belize, Bermuda, Brazil, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Colombia, Costa Rica, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Guatemala, Jamaica, Mexico, Montserrat, the Netherlands Antilles, Nicaragua, Panama, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Turks and Caicos, and Venezuela. Please contact the CITES Management Authority in the country from which you wish to export (www.cites.org/common/directy/e_directy.html) for information on additional restrictions or regulations that may apply. For information on how to import wildlife, including queen conch, please contact the port of entry nearest you. Contact information for wildlife ports is available from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Law Enforcement at www.le.fws.gov or by calling 703-358-1949.