Charting an Aquaculture Future for the Caribbean

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# Abstract

The development of marine aquaculture in the Caribbean has been identified as an avenue to stimulate local economies, increase employment opportunities, and improve seafood supply and food security. However, when located close to shore, aquaculture’s environmental impacts can jeopardize valuable habitats (e.g., mangroves, coral reefs, seagrass beds) and competition for coastal space can lead to conflicts with fisheries, tourism, and other uses. Farming further offshore is a possible option for alleviating these stresses. Using high-resolution environmental and economic data, we develop a spatial bio-economic model to identify suitable areas throughout the Caribbean for offshore finfish aquaculture, parameterized based on cobia (*Rachycentron canadum*), and to estimate potential outcomes in terms of yields and profits under different market scenarios. We find that Caribbean nations contain XXXX hectares of marine space technically feasible and profitable for cobia aquaculture. Accounting for spatial differences in cobia growth and production costs, we estimate the offshore cobia aquaculture production potential of the Caribbean to be XXX (MT). Areas associated with the highest relative economic potential were X, X, and X. Offshore aquaculture is a capital intensive activity mediated by socioeconomic conditions, such as foreign investment risk and XX, which were found to be factors limiting production in our analysis. The results of this research can be used to help prioritize areas for offshore cobia aquaculture development and as a framework for identifying priority areas for offshore aquaculture of other species. Additionally, we discuss the future potential of the development of offshore aquaculture in the Caribbean.

# Introduction

1. Summary and importance of global aquaculture production
   * Projected increase in seafood demand and aquaculture as the most likely means to fill this demand (i.e., limited ability of wild fisheries to increase production)
   * Brief summary of ecological, social and economic benefits of aquaculture
   * Despite strong arguments for aquaculture growth to meet increasing seafood demand at a global scale, how aquaculture development and growth can and should be realized at a regional scale requires an understanding of the sustainable and economically viable production potential of a region

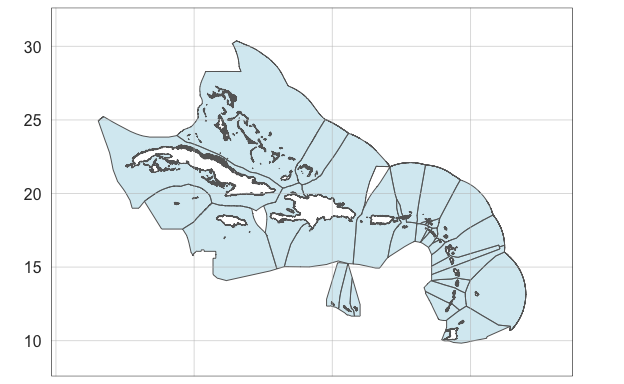
* \*Description of factors that must be considered when determining aquaculture production potential of a given region ( see (McKindsey et al. 2006); Dunn et al. 2013).
  + physical
  + ecological
  + social
  + economic

1. The Caribbean as a region where aquaculture development could be particularly beneficial and current challenges to development
   * Caribbean seafood consumption production, and trade (include information on seafood exports and imports)
   * A sentence or two about the characteristics and status of fisheries in the Caribbean….probably not a lot of scope for increased production without risk of overfishing and/or negative ecosystem impacts (e.g., algal overgrowth of reefs from overfishing herbivores)
   * Describe current aquaculture production occurring in the Caribbean (minimal), and specifically marine
   * Recently, further development of aquaculture has been identified as a priority in the Caribbean to reduce reliance on imports and provide a new source of income and livelihoods.
   * Potential for land-based and coastal aquaculture in the Caribbean is extremely limited (explain why…..limited space on land, limited freshwater, limited energy resources(e.g. reliable electricity), , environmental concerns with coastal aquaculture), suggesting the need to look to offshore aquaculture
   * Barriers to the development of aquaculture in the Caribbean are lack of infrastructure, and political and economic stability, risk factors that deter private sector investors (**???**). In general, both political and economic conditions of a country determine how much risk is associated with investing in that country, and thus how much foreign direct investment is likely to occur (Schneider and Frey 1985). Political and economic instability has been identified as a major limiting factor to aquaculture development in the Caribbean (Rojas and Wadsworth 2007), with potential investors concerned that policies affecting aquaculture business will shift before they are able to make a profit.
2. Offshore aquaculture is an emerging approach to mariculture where farms are some distance offshore
   * Overview of offshore aquaculture worldwide (very brief)
   * Brief discussion of advantages of offshore aquaculture (specifically in the Caribbean)
   * Likely species/technology in the Caribbean (concluding that cobia is one of the more promising species because it is fast growing, has had demonstrated success in offshore farms, is a high value species, etc. and thus is the focus of our analysis)
3. Overview of cobia biology and cobia farming (this section should make it clear why SST was not a necessary layer in our suitability assessment , but was important to consider in our growth model).
4. Introducing our study
   * Offshore aquaculture is nearly untapped in the Caribbean, raising questions about what the actual potential is, how that potential varies across the many EEZs of the Caribbean, and what factors are currently most likely to be limiting development
   * Using high resolution spatial data, we develop a spatial bioeconomic model to estimate the total production potential (in terms of weight and revenue) of offshore cobia mariculture in the Caribbean region. We examine the spatial distribution of offshore mariculture potential to identify ‘hotspots’ locations (in terms of weight and revenue) for future offshore mariculture farm development. We examine the variation of individual farm profitability between and across EEZs to determine the importance of site selection in mariculture development and to quantify the potential benefits of strategic spatial planning. We explore these results under several scenarios of cobia production using a supply and demand curve to set cobia market price. We also run sensitivity analyses on fixed parameters to identify and quantify the effects of factors constraining our model. Our approach could be applied to other farmed species or applied to other regions, and our results can help to chart a course for a sustainable and economically prosperous offshore mariculture industry in the Caribbean.

# Methods

## Description of Study Region

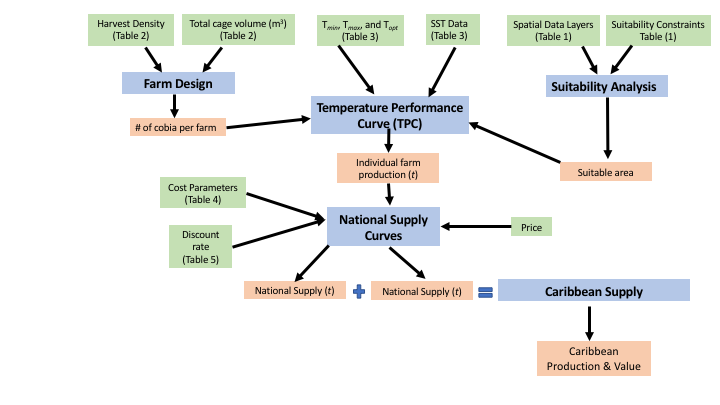
Our study domain includes the territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) surrounding the 28 island countries that comprise the Greater and Lesser Antilles of the Caribbean Sea (Figure 1). All analyses are performed at a 1 km2 spatial resolution. We do not consider the potential of offshore aquaculture development in the high seas or disputed waters. A shapefile from VLIZ (2014) is used to define the maritime boundaries for all island countries.



The study area for this project is indicated in blue. EEZ boundary data were obtained from VLIZ (2016).

## Overview

We develop a spatial bioeconomic model to estimate the production potential (in terms of biomass (*t*) and Net Present Value (NPV)) for offshore cobia mariculture in the Caribbean region (Figure 1). The first steps of our analysis are to identify 1 km2 sites throughout the study region that would be suitable for mariculture development and create a hypothetical farm design to apply to all suitable sites. Next, we apply a temperature performance curve (TPC) to predict temperature-dependent growth of cobia at each farm and we establish supply curves to determine national and Caribbean-wide cobia production that would be achieved under several scenarios of cobia price and production costs. We also consider a scenario where Caribbean production affects the global price of cobia. Finally, we use our production model and estimated economic parameters to calculate Net Present Value (*NPV*) over a 10 year time horizon. We assume that only farms that have a positive NPV will be developed.



Model schematic for estimating cobia aquaculture production potential. Green squares indicate model inputs, blue squares indicate model components, and orange squares indicate model outputs.

## Suitability Assessment

The first step in our analysis identifies areas that are potentially suitable for the development of offshore mariculture. To determine what areas are suitable, we consider six factors: depth, current speed, coral reef presence, shipping activity, oil structures, and areas designated for conservation (Table 1).

Table 1: Description of spatial data layers and criteria used to identify cells suitable for development of offshore aquaculture in the Caribbean

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Layer | Year | Criteria | Source |
| Marine Protected Areas | 2016 | Not an established, designated or proposed Marine Protected Area | IUCN and UNEP-WCMC 2016 |
| Oil Rigs | 2003 | No existing benthic oil structures | Halpern et al. 2008 |
| Shipping | 2005 | Not included in the top 10% of relative shipping activity in the Caribbean | Halpern et al. 2008 |
| Coral Reefs | 2010 | No coral reefs are present in the 1 km2 area | UNEP-WCMC, WorldFish Centre,¾WRI,¾TNC¾2010 |
| Depth | 2009 | Depths >=25 and < = 100 | Kapetsky et al. 2013 |
| Current Velocity | 2005-2015 | Maximum average monthly zonal or meridional current velocity < 1 | ESR 2009 |
| Deep sea bed mining claims | 2016 | No mining claim or contract present | deepseaminingwatch.ms.ucsb.edu |

Our suitability assessment assumes the use of SeaStation cages, which are submersible, self-tensioned, single rim cages and are the most widely used offshore aquaculture cages in the U.S. [Loverich (2010); Open Blue 2016]. The minimum site depth for installation of a SeaStation cage, listed by the original manufacturer, is 25 m (OceanSpar 2013). The maximum suitable depth for cage installation for this analysis is set at 100 m because, in waters deeper than 100 m, cage installation and inspection of mooring and anchoring systems are more difficult and costly (**???**; Kapetsky, Aguilar-Manjarrez, and Jenness 2013). Using spatial bathymetry data for our study region, areas within a 25 - 100 m depth are scored as suitable for offshore mariculture development. Additionally, SeaStation cages (or fish?) can withstand consistent current velocities up to 1 m/s (Loverich 2010). To identify areas with unsuitably high current velocities, we use 10 years (2005-2015) of average daily zonal and meridional current velocity. The absolute maximum zonal and meridional average daily velocities that occurred over the 10-year time period are extracted for each cell, and any cell with a maximum zonal or meridional velocity greater than 1 m/s are scored as unsuitable. To minimize the ecological impact of offshore mariculture development, we also identify as unsustainable any cells with coral reef habitat.

To identify areas currently designated or utilized for purposes that would preclude offshore mariculture development, we use spatial data on: shipping activity, existing benthic oil structures, areas permitted for deep sea bed mining, and areas that have been designated as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) or conservation priority areas (Table 1). Areas that fell in the 10% of the highest relative shipping activity areas designated for conservation or deep sea bed mining purposes, and areas with existing benthic oil structures, are considered unsuitable for offshore mariculture development.

All spatial data layers listed in Table 1 are converted to raster format with a 1 km2 spatial resolution. Data files that had a resolution > 1 km2 are interpolated to the 1 km2 grid using 'nearest neighbor technique' in R's [raster](https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/raster/index.html) package. All 1 km2 cells from each layer that fell outside of the suitable threshold are given a score of zero and cells falling within the threshold are given a score of 1. We then overlay all data layers and multiply the values of all layers in each cell. This result is a final single data layer, where cells suitable for offshore aquaculture development based on all criteria listed in Table 1 have a score of 1, and unsuitable cells a value of 0.

## Farm Design

To estimate production, we assume a fixed farm design, per 1 km2 sites, across our study region. SeaStation cages are typically configured using a mooring system that includes a grid, anchor, and mooring lines secured at varying distances from the cages (**???**; Xu, Zhu, and Miao 2015).We develop a hypothetical farm design for a 1 km2 cell that has 16 SeaStation cages (each 6,400 m3) configured in two eight-cell grid mooring systems that occupy a total space of approximately ~ 0.48 km2 and provide a total cage capacity of 102,400 m3 (Figure 2). The cages are held in position by the mooring system at depths of 15-20 m below the surface(Loverich 2010).

This cage configuration is similar to a 0.4 km2 offshore mariculture farm located off the coast of Kona, Hawaii that has an eight-cage SeaStation array with a total cage volume of 64,000 m3 (Sims 2017). The total cage volume per unit of total farm area for our hypothetical farm design falls within the range of total cage volume per unit area of farm area for the Kona farm (Sims 2017) and another offshore farm using SeaStation cages in the Gulf of Maine (D. W. Fredriksson et al. 2004); (J. DeCew et al. 2010). Additionally, the total space occupied by the farm's infrastructure (0.48 km2) follows the guidelines issued in NOAA's Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for offshore aquaculture development in the Gulf of Mexico that specifies the total mariculture farm area should be twice the size of the total area occupied by farm infrastructure.

To maintain a steady supply of product, commercial mariculture farms typically stage the stocking of cages so that fish of a harvestable size are available year-round.Cobia take twelve months on average to grow from fingerling (~3 kg) to a harvestable size of 5 - 6 kg (Holland, n.d.). For our cobia farms, we assume that 5 cages are stocked with cobia fingerlings during the first month, and that one cage is stocked with fingerlings each of the remaining months. The number of fingerlings stocked in each cage remain constant, and is calculated assuming a conservative harvest density of 15 , or 16,000 individual fish per cage.

Table 2: Farm design specification for hypothetical 1 square kilometer offshore cobia farms

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Farm Specification | Value |
| Cage volume (m3) | 6,400 |
| Number of cages | 16 |
| Harvest size (kg) | 5 |
| Harvest density (kg/m3) | 15 |
| Harvest desnity (# of individiuals per cage) | 16,000 |
| Natural mortality rate (M) |  |
| Stocking density (# of individuals per cage) |  |

## Bioeconomic Model

### Temperature Performance Curve

Temperature is one of the primary abiotic factors controlling growth in ecotherms, including cobia (Brett 1979), and is a factor that cannot be easily controlled in offshore mariculture grow-out settings (Tidwell 2012). To reflect spatial differences in productivity across farms attributed to temperature variations, we use a thermal performance curve (TPC) to model temperature dependent individual growth of cobia (Dane ref). We use 10 years of satellite-based sea surface temperature (SST) data (NASA 2014) to calculate 1 km2 resolution spatial data layers of average monthly SST. Monthly biomass ()for each cage is then calculated as:

*insert TPC equation*

where is 22 C, t\_*max* is 32 C, and max growth occurs at t\_*opt* (29 C), and SST is the average monthly SST over the last 10 years for locations, , is the initial stocking density of each cage, and , the total survival rate is assumed to be 85% (Benetti et al. 2008).

Annual production () at each farm is then calculated as:

Where is the number of cages per farm and is the monthly total biomass per cage.

### Economic Model

#### Costs

The total cost of production consists of start up costs () and operating costs () for each farm at year as:

and for all subsequent years ():

Start-up costs () include initial capital expenditures as a function of average site depth , installation costs as a function of distance from port and EEZ (), and EEZ-specific permit and/or lease cost :

Annual operating costs in year at site are modeled as follows:

Where is the hours required at site as a function of wave exposure; is the number of workers required to service a farm; is the EEZ-specific hourly wage; is distance from shore (km); is average boat speed to farm sites; is the number of trips required per month for running the farm; is the cost of fuel as a function of EEZ; is the average fuel efficiency of the vessel; is the fixed cost of fingerlings for a individual farm in year ; and is the fixed cost of feed in year for a individual farm.

#### Revenues

Total revenue () during each year for each farm is calculated as:

Where is the total biomass of cobia at farm in year , is the export tax as a function of EEZ, and is the global price of cobia in year . Cobia farms in the Caribbean are assumed to be price takers and thus production in year does not affect price in year . We also explore a scenario with a downward demand curve where Caribbean cobia production does affect price (see *Production Scenarios* section).

Total annual farm profit () for farm at year is then total farm revenue less total farm costs .

We then calculate the 10-year net present value (NPV) of farm using EEZ-specific discount rates () (Table 5):

#### Discount Rate

Individual discount rates are determined for each Caribbean country that incorporate the foreign investment risk associated with that country. We modify previously published methodologies to quantify a country’s relative investment risk in the Caribbean, where limited data on economic and political conditions are available. Bhalla (1983) developed the Foreign Investment Risk Matrix (FIRM) to assist investors in classifying the political and economic risks associated with investing in different countries using discrete risk categories. An expanded version of FIRM was developed by McGowan and Moeller (2009) that utilizes three political and three economic continuous risk variables that are readily available for most countries.

Limited data were available for the risk variables described by McGowan and Moeller (2009) for Caribbean island countries. Only three countries in our study have data available for the “conflict” variable and only nine have data available for all five of the other McGowan and Moeller risk variables. Therefore, to calculate risk scores for the island countries in our region, we identify comparable, substitute risk variables for each of McGowan and Moeller’s risk variables. We then calculate Pearson’s correlation coefficients and significance vales between McGowan and Moeller’s risk variables and our selected substitute variables using countries with data available for both sets to validate our substitute variables (Table XX). Although there are not enough data for the conflict variable in the Caribbean to calculate a correlation coefficient, we assume WRI’s political stability score to be a logical substitute.

Averages of political and economic variables are calculated by removing any variables for which data qre not available for that country. In some cases this means that the only data available to calculate a final relative risk score is GDP per capita. Bhalla (1983) states that GDP per capita is one of the most important variables determining both political and economic risk because income per capita reflects both the underlying economy and the effectiveness of political management. For the 14 countries with data available for all variables, we find GDP to be a significant (r = 0.88, *p*-value = < 0.001) predictor of the final risk score, providing further support for this approach (Figure 1).

For each variable, a country’s rating is determined by transforming the data for that variable to a scale of 1 (low risk) to 5 (high risk) and multiplying by the specified weight to determine the variable’s final score (R x W) (Table 3). Political and economic risk scores are calculated by taking the sum of final scores for all three variables, and the total risk score is calculated by multiplying the political and economic risk scores by the specified weight and summing the values (Table 3). The weights shown in Table 3 were arbitrarily chosen by McGowan and Moeller (2009). In practice, they recommend weighting variables according to relevance and importance to the particular project that is being assessed. For this analysis, all political and economic variables are given equal weight.

### Supply Curves

Using the cost function described in equation X, we construct national and Caribbean-wide supply curves for cobia by aggregating farm-level supply curves. For a given price, only farms that generate positive profits are considered feasible for development. We then calculate the total summed biomass (MT), , and NPV () over a 10-year period produced by all profitable farms in an EEZ across a range of prices (X-XXX).

National supply curves are aggregated into a single Caribbean-wide supply curve to estimate total potential cobia production and NPV for the Caribbean over a 10-year period.

Lastly, feasible farms within each EEZ are ranked according to yield and profit (highest to lowest) and ranges for farm-scale yield and revenue were compared within and across EEZs.

## Production Scenarios

We apply our bioeconomic model to three production scenarios that consider different price structures:

* Fixed-price scenarios:
  + 1. Maximum production scenario: The global price required to make all suitable cells profitable is estimated and all suitable cells are developed
    2. Current market scenario: Total production assuming current market price (insert value and reference) of cobia
  1. Demand curve scenario: We assume a global demand curve for cobia and estimate total production assuming the price of cobia in year t + 1 adjusts to Caribbean supply in year t. We assume suitable cells that remain profitable in year t + 1 given the new price continue production while unprofitable cells do not

For each scenario, we examine and compare the following:

* Total production (in terms of profit and weight) for the entire study (Caribbean) region (do economic constraints restrict things to below ecological limits (see below).... if its below then economic constraints will keep it below ecological capacity)
* Total production (in terms of profit and weight) for each EEZ
* Range of individual farm production within EEZs (to see potential gains of strategic spatial planning) and across EEZs (to determine the island countries with the greatest potential for offshore aquaculture development)

### Ecological Carrying Capacity

Determining the aquaculture production level that a given region (in this case, an EEZ) can sustain without resulting in negative impacts to the surrounding ecosystem and environment is difficult, and will depend on the specific local oceanographic conditions and ecosystem dynamics. Although models have been developed to simulate conditions of a local area and to generate impacts of given aquaculture production scenarios on the surrounding ecosystem (AquaModel; FARM), currently, limited empirical evidence exists to estimate the ecological carrying capacity for aquaculture production at a regional scale.

We examine the production estimates for each scenario and determine how they compare to two benchmarks we define as ecological capacity limits:

1. Existing practices capacity limit - Ecological production limit is determined by identifying the highest aquaculture per unit area of EEZ worldwide. At the scale of an entire EEZ, no EEZ currently has such extensive aquaculture to have resulted in a documented surpassing of the ecosystem’s capacity, so this could provide a useful point of reference.
2. Precautionary ecological capacity limit - Aquaculture production per unit area allowed in the Gulf of Mexico by the current NOAA Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for offshore aquaculture development in the region. The FMP regulations were designed with the intent to be precautionary in terms of avoiding detrimental impacts on the ecosystem, so this can be viewed as a conservative limit.

## Sensitivity analyses

Finally, to identify the current major hurdles to the development of offshore aquaculture in the Caribbean, we determine the main factors contributing to variability of farm and EEZ level aquaculture production by performing a suite of sensitivity analyses.

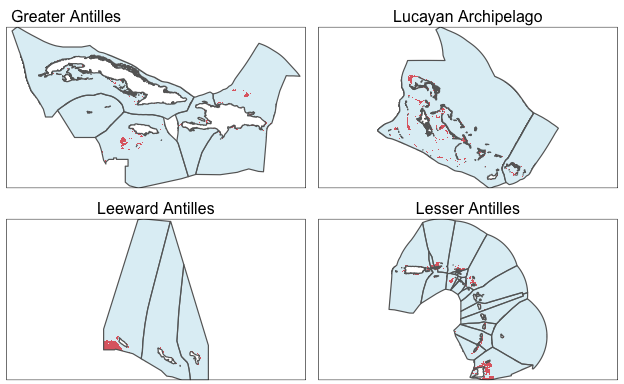
Specifically, we compare the output at both the individual farm, EEZ, and regional level by running the model under a range of values for the following parameters:

* Range of suitable depths
* Costs fingerling and feed
* Cobia price
* shift in demand curve
* Risk parameters

# Results

## Suitability Assessment

Based on the factors and criteria described in Table 1, we find a total of 50,380.6 km2, or 1.698449 % of EEZ area in the Caribbean, suitable for offshore aquaculture development (Figure 3).



The suitable area based on each of the factors considered in our analysis are listed in Table 4.

Depth is the largest constraining factor, with less than 2% of the total study area within the suitable depth range required for deployment of offshore SeaStation cages. Deep sea mining did not eliminate any areas because currently no deep sea bed mining permits have been issued in the region. However, this may be an important factor to consider in other regions or in the future in the Caribbean. .

Table XX: Estimated suitable area (km2 by EEZ) (continued below)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | EEZ | Total Area | Suitable Area |
| **25** | Trinidad and Tobago Exclusive Economic Zone | 76,575 | 10,189 |
| **17** | Saba Exclusive Economic Zone | 9,488 | 1,050 |
| **12** | Grenadian Exclusive Economic Zone | 25,577 | 1,142 |
| **24** | Sint-Maarten Exclusive Economic Zone | 466 | 19.52 |
| **23** | Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Exclusive Economic Zone | 36,243 | 1,415 |
| **3** | Aruban Exclusive Economic Zone | 29,950 | 945.9 |
| **19** | Sint-Eustatius Exclusive Economic Zone | 2,175 | 65.25 |
| **20** | Saint Kitts and Nevis Exclusive Economic Zone | 9,502 | 256.3 |
| **4** | Bahamas Exclusive Economic Zone | 618,667 | 14,314 |
| **27** | Virgin Islander Exclusive Economic Zone | 38,290 | 813.9 |
| **21** | Saint Lucia Exclusive Economic Zone | 15,413 | 285.5 |
| **14** | Jamaican Exclusive Economic Zone | 257,049 | 4,720 |
| **2** | Antigua and Barbuda Exclusive Economic Zone | 111,560 | 1,949 |
| **29** | Haitian Exclusive Economic Zone | 103,498 | 1,780 |
| **7** | British Virgin Islands Exclusive Economic Zone | 81,583 | 1,271 |
| **1** | Anguilla Exclusive Economic Zone | 90,154 | 1,221 |
| **26** | Turks and Caicos Exclusive Economic Zone | 91,028 | 1,028 |
| **15** | Montserrat Exclusive Economic Zone | 7,190 | 73.67 |
| **16** | Puerto Rican Exclusive Economic Zone | 154,652 | 1,515 |
| **11** | Dominican Republic Exclusive Economic Zone | 350,698 | 3,290 |
| **10** | Dominican Exclusive Economic Zone | 28,590 | 242.3 |
| **28** | Cuban Exclusive Economic Zone | 352,266 | 2,475 |
| **6** | Bonaire Exclusive Economic Zone | 12,980 | 42.62 |
| **9** | Curaçaoan Exclusive Economic Zone | 25,397 | 71.02 |
| **18** | Saint-Barthélemy Exclusive Economic Zone | 4,179 | 7.32 |
| **8** | Cayman Islands Exclusive Economic Zone | 118,398 | 114.4 |
| **5** | Barbados Exclusive Economic Zone | 185,006 | 84.08 |
| **13** | Guadeloupean Exclusive Economic Zone | 90,859 | 0 |
| **22** | Saint-Martin Exclusive Economic Zone | 1,099 | 0 |
| **30** | Martinican Exclusive Economic Zone | 47,600 | 0 |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Percent Suitable |
| **25** | 13.31 |
| **17** | 11.07 |
| **12** | 4.46 |
| **24** | 4.19 |
| **23** | 3.91 |
| **3** | 3.16 |
| **19** | 3 |
| **20** | 2.7 |
| **4** | 2.31 |
| **27** | 2.13 |
| **21** | 1.85 |
| **14** | 1.84 |
| **2** | 1.75 |
| **29** | 1.72 |
| **7** | 1.56 |
| **1** | 1.35 |
| **26** | 1.13 |
| **15** | 1.02 |
| **16** | 0.98 |
| **11** | 0.94 |
| **10** | 0.85 |
| **28** | 0.7 |
| **6** | 0.33 |
| **9** | 0.28 |
| **18** | 0.18 |
| **8** | 0.1 |
| **5** | 0.05 |
| **13** | 0 |
| **22** | 0 |
| **30** | 0 |

The identified suitable areas are not distributed evenly across EEZs (Table 5). The Bahamas Exclusive Economic Zone contains the largest amount of suitable area and Trinidad and Tobago Exclusive Economic Zone (13.3056986 %) and Saba Exclusive Economic Zone (11.0667284 %) includ the highest percentages of suitable area (>10%), while no suitable areas are identified in the EEZ's of Guadeloupe, Saint Martin or Martinique.

# Discussion

# References

# Appendix

## removed text (just in case we need later)

Guidelines for aquaculture development in U.S. waters of the Gulf of Mexico listed in a recent Fishery Management Plan stated that all aquaculture farms should be a minimum of 3 km apart and set a production limit of r prettyNum(Totalproduction, big.mark=",") mt for a total area of prettyNum(Totalarea,big.mark=",") km2 identified for aquaculture development, or r prettyNum(Productionrate,big.mark=",") mt/ km2. This production limit was identified as precautionary and based on historical wild fisheries capture for the region, due to lack of better methods or information on the ecological capacity of the region. To determine how this specified limit on production per unit area compared to production levels in other regions, we conducted a global assessment of production per unit of EEZ area in depths of 0 to 90 m for all EEZs. We obtained total marine aquaculture production by country, including finfish, invertebrate, and algae aquaculture production, for 2014 from FAO and calculated the total area in a depth range of 0-90 m for aquaculture by EEZ using global 1 km2 resolution bathymetry data from Becker *et al* (**???**). Total marine aquaculture production included finfish, invertebrates, and algae, thus we did not apply a minimum depth limit, because some these species are farmed in shallower water than is required for finfish cage culture. Although this does not allow for a direct comparison to production as modeled in our study, it provides another regional production level benchmark for comparison.

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