

Project Update: January 2018

Adult dog conch, *Strombus canarium*, have thicker shells in protected than in non-protected seagrass areas. Young conch have thin growing shells, but stop growing at maturity and thicken up. So thick shells are older, and thickest in protected areas where they survive longest. At Phra Thong Island, a once protected area lost its status and for 2 years harvesting has been unrestricted. Recently we showed that shell lip thickness was no longer greater in that area than in other non-protected areas. When the site was protected, conch populations failed to increase as expected and poaching was blamed. However, greater shell thickness at that time suggested other factors were responsible. Shell thickness appears to be a strong indicator of harvesting and poaching pressure, irrespective of any numerical response. As conch are the main target species for harvesting, it likely reflects site pressure on other species, such as sea cucumbers.



Left: Measuring conch length. Right: Mature *Strombus canarium* with thickened shell (R) and juvenile with thin shell (L).