



BELIZE FISHERIES DEPARTMENT
MINISTRY OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES & SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT

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April 8, 2015

Mr. Kishore Rao
Director
World Heritage Center
7, place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP, France

SUBJECT: State of Conservation Report – Belize’s World Heritage Site

Dear Mr. Kishore Rao:

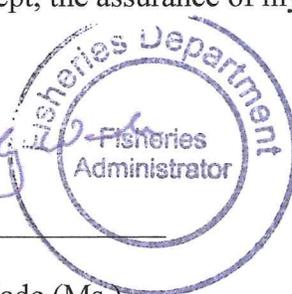
The Government of Belize is hereby making a formal submission to the World Heritage Center (WHC) of the State of Conservation (SOC) Report for Belize’s World Heritage Site.

Also, we take this opportunity to thank the WHC and the IUCN for the invaluable support provided to Belize in the preparation of the Desired State of Conservation Report (DSOCR) which will be submitted to your office no later than Monday April 13, 2015 along with the outstanding Property boundary and land tenure maps.

May I take this opportunity to thank you for your continued cooperation and support.

Please accept, the assurance of my highest consideration.

Regards,

Beverly Wade (Ms.)
Fisheries Administrator
National Focal Point

The Mission of the Department is to provide the country and the people of Belize with the best possible management of aquatic and fisheries resources, with a view to optimize the present and future benefits through efficient and sustainable management

CC: Honorable Minister Lisel Alamilla, MFFSD
Chief Executive Officer, MFFSD
Permanent Delegation of Belize to UNESCO
Belize National Commission for UNESCO
UNESCO Office in Kingston

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GOVERNMENT OF BELIZE

STATE PARTY REPORT
ON THE STATE OF CONSERVATION
OF THE
BELIZE BARRIER REEF RESERVE SYSTEM (BELIZE) (N 764)

February 2015

WHC Decision 38 COM 7A.31

Thirty-eighth Session

Doha, Qatar

June 15-25th, 2014

Belize Barrier Reef System (Belize) (N 764)

Decision: 38 COM 7A.31

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document Belize,
2. Recalling Decision **37COM 7A.16** adopted at its 37th session (Phnom Penh, 2013),
3. Commends the State Party for the progress achieved in the implementation of certain corrective measures, particularly those regarding expansion of no-take zones and eradication and control of invasive species; and for its efforts undertaken to control unauthorized development activities and eliminate their impacts on the property;
4. Urges the State Party to establish, as a matter of priority, a legislative instrument that will guarantee permanent cessation of the sale and lease of lands throughout the property and a clear definition and strict control of development rights on existing private and leased lands;
5. Welcomes the State Party's commitment to finalize the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan, the Land Use Policy Implementation Plan, the National Protected Areas Bill and the Fisheries Resources Bill by the end of 2014, and requests the State Party to submit copies of these documents to the World Heritage Centre, by **1 February 2015**;
6. Expresses its serious concern about the State Party's statement that it is not prepared to eliminate all oil concessions within and adjacent to the property and reiterates its position that oil exploration and exploitation within or affecting the property is incompatible with its World Heritage status, and also urges the State Party to remove any oil concessions that could have a negative impact on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property;
7. Also requests the State Party to ensure that the Petroleum Exploration and Development Framework clarifies that petroleum concessions overlapping on the property will not be permitted, and that no oil exploration or exploitation will be allowed to take place outside the property, in particular within its outer boundaries, if it is likely to have a negative impact on its OUV;

8. Further urges the State Party to prepare, as a matter of priority and in consultation with the World Heritage Centre and IUCN, a draft proposal for the Desired state of conservation for the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 39th session in 2015;
9. Further requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by **1 February 2015**, a report, including a 1-page executive summary, on the state of conservation of the property, including progress made in implementing corrective measures, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 39th session in 2015;
10. **Decides to retain the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System (Belize) on the List of World Heritage in Danger.**

Executive Summary

Since the listing of the Belize Barrier Reef System on the 'List of World Heritage in Danger' in 2009, the Government of Belize (GOB) continues its commitment to implement measures to address key areas negatively impacting the Property, as identified by the World Heritage Committee (WHC) in 2009.

Over the years, the Government of Belize has made progress in implementing certain corrective measures, however, the issues which still concern the World Heritage Centre and its Committee are: (a) the sale and lease of lands throughout the Property, (b) strict control of development rights and (c) the possibility of oil exploration and exploitation within and adjacent to the Property.

This 2015 State of Conservation Report being submitted for the 39th session of the WHC elaborates further on the progress made with reference to the corrective measures and above-mentioned issues.

The Government of Belize is currently working on an inventory of the different categories of land tenure within the Property in 2015. Subsequent to its completion, measures will be implemented to protect the ecosystems associated with the remaining national/crown lands, such as the mangroves and other critical habitats. The Government of Belize is also implementing key projects and initiatives to establish clear controls on future development within the property. Among these are the Environmental Impact Assessment regulations and process which are currently being revised to address gaps and to institute a more structured and comprehensive set of legislation focusing on the control of authorized and unauthorized developments throughout Belize. Management Plans for a couple of the sites will also be updated in the upcoming year. Updates will include detailed development guidelines for the respective islands within the property. The Government continues to have a voluntary moratorium on any new offshore concession until an offshore petroleum policy is developed. Currently there are no Oil Concessions within the Property and following the recent mission from WHC-IUCN, the government has stated its commitment to work toward a legal framework that will allow to fully address the World Heritage Committee's concerns regarding oil exploration/exploitation. In

addition, the Government continues to finalize the petroleum exploration planning framework; and has indicated its commitment to reflect both ecological and social considerations within the framework.

Introduction

The Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System (BBRRS) (Belize) remains on the List of World Heritage Sites in Danger – this is a function of the 2009 decision made in Seville, Spain by the WHC, which was upheld at the 38th meeting in Doha, Qatar June 15-25th, 2014.

The Government of Belize reaffirms its commitment in making progress in the implementation of the corrective measures and recommendations made at the 38th session and previous sessions of the World Heritage Committee.

This report represents the State of Conservation of the Property for the year 2014-2015 and is inclusive of Belize's progress to address the recommendations of the World Heritage Committee upheld at the 38th Session. As requested, the report also includes the draft Desired State of Conservation (DSOC) for Belize's World Heritage Site which was developed in cooperation with the WHC-IUCN during their mission to Belize from 19-25 January 2015. It is anticipated that the proposed desired state will allow the removal of the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System from the List of World Heritage in Danger, given the World Heritage Committee's endorsement of the draft DSOCR and the Government of Belize's commitment of its implementation. Belize's response to Decision **38 COM 7A.31** is now being presented for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its upcoming 39th session in 2015.

1.0 Response from the State Party to the World Heritage Committee's Decision 2014

1. *Having examined Document Belize,*
2. *Recalling Decision **37COM 7A.16** adopted at its 37th session (Phnom Penh, 2013),*
3. *Commends the State Party for the progress achieved in the implementation of certain corrective measures, particularly those regarding expansion of no-take zones and*

eradication and control of invasive species; and for its efforts undertaken to control unauthorized development activities and eliminate their impacts on the property;

4. *Urges the State Party to establish, as a matter of priority, a legislative instrument that will guarantee permanent cessation of the sale and lease of lands throughout the property and a clear definition and strict control of development rights on existing private and leased lands;*

The information below also addresses the corrective measures 6 (a), (c) and (f) of DEC 33 COM 7B:

The Government of Belize is currently working on an inventory of the different land tenures within the Property. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Agriculture, through the Lands Department, is finalizing the inventory which is to be completed by mid-2015. Once this process is completed and analyzed, the Government of Belize will then prioritize the protection of remaining National/Crown Lands.

It should be noted that since the listing of the BBRRS on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2009, there has been no sale of national lands within the Property. Likewise, there has been no endorsement for Private land owners in the conversion of leased lands to titled lands.

As mentioned before in previous reports, the new Ministry of Forestry, Fisheries and Sustainable Development was formed to increase coordination between key Departments engaged in the proper management of natural resources of Belize. Likewise, the EIA process is one of the primary mechanisms which inform the scope of developments on existing private and leased lands within the Property. The Ministry of Forestry, Fisheries and Sustainable Development, through the Department of the Environment, is one of the beneficiaries of a Global Environmental Facility (GEF) project entitled "Management and Protection of Key Biodiversity Areas". One of the components of the project is "Institutional strengthening and capacity building for enhanced enforcement of environmental regulation"; under this component it seeks to revise the EIA system in Belize in order to address all the legislative and enforcement gaps which would allow for improved management of developments in Belize especially within Protected Areas. Some of those gaps would include enforcement and compliance measures to address unauthorized developments or activities throughout Belize (inland and offshore).

The Fisheries Department who currently is the site manager for the Glover's Reef Marine Reserve and South Water Caye Marine Reserve, two of the seven sites with World Heritage status, will embark on the formulation of a new management plan for the site since it will expire

in 2015 and 2016 respectively. It is envisioned that the new 5 year management plan will include amendments and improvements to reflect more detailed development guidelines and take on board the recommendations from the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan as it relate to these sites. The Management Plan would also reflect Cabinet's decision on shoals which is that these areas are not to be developed, that no further lease applications should be entertained, and that there should be no cancellation/revocation of existing titles unless in cases where there is good and sufficient cause.

5. *Welcomes the State Party's commitment to finalize the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan, the Land Use Policy Implementation Plan, the National Protected Areas Bill and the Fisheries Resources Bill by the end of 2014, and requests the State Party to submit copies of these documents to the World Heritage Centre, by **1 February 2015**;*

The Government of Belize, through the Solicitor's General Office of the Attorney General's Ministry, is still reviewing the Fisheries Resources Bill and the Mangrove Regulations before its resubmission to Cabinet for approval. The draft updated fisheries regulations which were developed through an ACP Fish II Project and reviewed by FAO Legal Office are also currently under review at the Solicitor General's Office. It is envisioned that these draft legislations should be passed through the national assembly by mid-2015. The delay had been the need to further remove both the High Seas Fishing component and aquaculture which were transferred under two separate Ministries.

The Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Plan, which has been drafted for over a year ago, is currently undergoing review by the newly established Advisory Board. One of the Board's immediate priorities is to move forward the ICZM plan for its endorsement by the Government of Belize by the end of 2015.

The Land Use Policy Implementation plan under the Ministry of Natural Resources with the aid of the World Bank is still currently being established. Progress has already been made with the development of TORs for the consultants to help steer this initiative.

In last year's report, it was mentioned that the National Protected Areas Bill would be submitted to Cabinet in June 2014 for approval and passed into law by early 2015. However, the Ministry of Forestry, Fisheries and Sustainable Development is updating and finalizing this draft bill for its submission to Cabinet in early 2015.

6. *Expresses its serious concern about the State Party's statement that it is not prepared to eliminate all oil concessions within and adjacent to the property and reiterates its position that oil exploration and exploitation within or affecting the property is incompatible with its World Heritage status, and also urges the State Party to remove any oil concessions that could have a negative impact on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property;*
7. *Also requests the State Party to ensure that the Petroleum Exploration and Development Framework clarifies that petroleum concessions overlapping on the property will not be permitted, and that no oil exploration or exploitation will be allowed to take place outside the property, in particular within its outer boundaries, if it is likely to have a negative impact on its OUV;*

The Government of Belize through its Ministry of Energy, Science and Technology and Public Utilities, continues to finalize the petroleum exploration planning framework. This framework is being developed to manage petroleum exploration both on land and offshore in Belize's territorial waters. There are currently no oil concessions overlapping the Property.

The draft Petroleum Exploration Zones and Exploration Guidelines, which were developed by the Ministry, are currently under review by a wide stakeholder group including NGOs, user groups and regulatory agencies. This is the second round of stakeholder review in order to allow greater participation and input in order to improve and strengthen the framework. Subsequent to the feedback from stakeholders in February 2015, the Ministry of Energy, Science and Technology and Public Utilities will be hosting a consultation workshop in the short-term to discuss the inputs and changes for the proposed zonation plan and exploration guidelines.

In addition, the Government of Belize continues to have a voluntary moratorium on the issuance of any new offshore concession until a comprehensive offshore petroleum policy can be developed and approved by the Government of Belize. This future policy would be guided "by an inclusive, evidence-based and data driven process that takes into account socio-economic and environmental concerns."

The only company that has a large offshore concession is Princess Petroleum which relinquished more than the required 25% under their contract in 2013 in order that the Blue Hole Natural Monument and other areas of Lighthouse Reef Atoll be removed as part of their concession. It should be noted that the contract for Princess Petroleum will be terminated in October 2015 if no oil is found. Once again, there is currently no oil concession overlapping the Property.

Following the WHC-IUCN mission to Belize in January 2015, the government committed prepare for a suitable legal arrangement that will allow to permanently address the concerns of the World Heritage Committee with regard to oil exploration and exploitation in and around the property.

8. *Further urges the State Party to prepare, as a matter of priority and in consultation with the World Heritage Centre and IUCN, a draft proposal for the Desired state of conservation for the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 39th session in 2015;*

During the period January 19-23, 2015, UNESCO's World Heritage Centre in collaboration with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) provided support to the Government of Belize in drafting the Desired State of Conservation for the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger (See Annex 1). The mission engaged broad stakeholder consultations and meetings with relevant Government agencies, the Prime Minister, various NGOs, fisher folks, and the private sector. The Government of Belize expressed its commitment to develop a road map in addressing the critical conservation challenges of the Property.

The Desired State of Conservation suggests five critical targets or indicators which include 1) the minimum percentage coverage of mangrove, including all unique mangroves, to remain in natural state in the context of proposed developments on private lands, 2) ensuring that developments within and adjacent to the Property does not impact the integrity the property and reduce the Outstanding Universal Value, 3) Property and its immediate surroundings is excluded from all future oil exploration, and 4) proper management of the Property taking into account socio-economic and environmental goals is established, in particular through the adoption and implementation of the ICM Plan.

Updates on other conservation initiatives/issues identified by State Party

- I. In addressing the corrective measure 6(g) of DEC 33 COM 7B, the "National Replenishment Zone Expansion" initiative continues to be implemented by the Government of Belize in partnership with its NGO, private sector stakeholders and partners. Presently, a draft map showing the proposed replenishment zones near

shore and in deep sea areas has been developed and is awaiting endorsement for wider consultation with stakeholders. The project will also seek to: address economic alternatives for fisher folks through fisheries diversification, revise some strategies to address climate change and allowing areas to become resilient and developing a marketing and communication strategy to socialize with fishers about the initiative and to raise funds to implement the expansion of replenishment zones, upon its endorsement.

- II. Efforts to control the population of the Lionfish (*Pterois spp.*) in Belizean waters are still ongoing by the Fisheries Department, in collaboration with tour guide companies, fisher folks and other communities/groups. Eradication of lionfish is done on a regular through hunts within marine reserves, dive tours and lionfish tournaments. The National Lionfish Management Plan, which was developed years ago to aid in the control and eradication of the lionfish population was updated and adopted by the Fisheries Department in 2014. This initiative continues to address corrective measure 6(e) of DEC 33 COM 7B.

Measures/Efforts to maintain and improve OUV of the Property:

- I. The Climate Change Unit under the Ministry of Forestry, Fisheries and Sustainable Development continues to make progress in developing a National Climate Change Policy and Strategy. Recently, the Unit has circulated two documents for review by Government Agencies and Stakeholders. These include the: Organizational Framework for managing Climate Change in Belize and the Climate Change Policy, Strategy and Action Plan. The Unit plans to host a consultation workshop in February to discuss both documents.
- II. Coral restoration efforts in Southern Belize are still ongoing from its inception eight years ago. Fragments of Hope Limited continues their research and restoration efforts through an Inter-American Development Bank Project for coral reef restoration. The project is being carried out both in Belize and Jamaica. In 2014, the Fragments of Hope Limited established another five (5) new nurseries and more than

2000 nursery grown Acroporidae spp. were outplanted in the Laughing Bird Caye Natural Park (one of the seven sites which make up the WHS Property).

- III. The Fisheries Department continues its partnership with the Environmental Defense Fund, Rare Conservation, Wildlife Conservation Society and OAK Foundation in the implementation of managed access and catch shares in Belize. Founded on the rights based approach to fisheries management, the pilot project within two of the marine reserves has been successful. It is envisioned that by the end of 2015 the roll out of manage access nationally would be implemented.
- IV. The Belize: Green, Clean, Resilient and Strong (2014-2024) National Environmental Policy and Strategy was developed through a consultative process with Public and Private Sector, Academia, Civil Society and Non-Governmental Organizations. The Strategy puts forward national environmental focus in four areas. A **Green Belize** which proposes the transitioning of Belize to a Greener Economy. A **Clean Belize** which focuses on reducing and addressing pollution and waste management within Belize. A **Resilient Belize** focuses on implementing disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. A **Strong Belize** focuses on strengthening environmental governance, transparency and institutions.
- V. The Forest Department is in the process of finalizing the National Forest Policy for Belize. Natural forest ecosystems including wetland and mangrove ecosystems are featured as areas of special interest. The Forest Policy focus is on integrated management of the forest ecosystems to ensure sustained provision of the goods and services, this requires drawing on planning instruments such as, *inter alia*, the National Land-Use Policy and Implementation Framework, the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan and Sustainable Tourism Plan. Upon finalization, the Forest Policy will be presented to Cabinet for official endorsement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Government of Belize continues to make progress towards its commitment in maintaining the inscription of the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System as a World Heritage Site. Belize expresses its gratitude to the World Heritage Centre and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature for their assistance (through the financial support of the Government of Flanders, Belgium) in drafting the Desired State of Conservation to address the critical conservation issues related to the Property in order to achieve the goal of having the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System removed from the List of World Heritage in Danger.