



GOVERNMENT OF BELIZE

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

February 2016

**WHC Decision 39 COM 7A.18  
Thirty-ninth Session**

**Bonn, Germany**

**June 28<sup>th</sup> - July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

**Belize Barrier Reef System (Belize) (N 764)**

**Decision: 39 COM 7A.18**

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC-15/39.COM/7A.Add;
2. Recalling Decision **38 COM 7A.31**, adopted at its 38th session (Doha, 2014);
3. Welcomes the activities reported by the State Party towards the implementation of the corrective measures, but notes with concern that key legal instruments, including the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan, the Living Aquatic Resources Bill and the Mangrove Regulations, have not yet been finalized and approved;
4. Also welcomes the information provided by the State Party that no oil concession is currently overlapping the property, as well as its commitment to develop a suitable legal arrangement that would address the Committee requests regarding the elimination of all oil concession in and around the property, and urges the State Party to develop such a legal arrangement as a matter of priority;
5. Notes that a land tenure inventory is currently ongoing, including within the property, and reiterates its request to the State Party to establish, as a matter of priority, a legal instrument that would 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;
6. Further welcomes the constructive cooperation between the State Party and stakeholders and adopts the Desired state of conservation for the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger (DSOCR) they proposed (see Document WHC-15/39.COM/7A.Add, Table 1), as well as its indicators, methods of verification and timeframe, and also urges the State Party to work closely together with the World Heritage Centre and IUCN for their successful implementation;
7. Requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by **1 February 2016**, an updated report, including a 1-page executive summary, on the state of conservation of the property and the implementation of the above, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 40th session in 2016;
8. **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 the measures to address key areas negatively impacting the Property, as identified by the World Heritage Committee (WHC) in 2009 and the indicators of the Desired State of Conservation (DSCOR) as adopted by the World Heritage Committee in 2015.

During the past year, the Government of Belize has made considerable progress in implementing the corrective measures and the DSCOR with the expectation that the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System - World Heritage Site (the property) will be removed from the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2017.

Most importantly, on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2015, the Government of Belize, committed to ensuring the conservation of the property, banned offshore oil exploration within the seven sites of the Property as well as within 1 kilometre on either side of the main reef system along the entire coast of Belize. The total area banned represents approximately 15% of Belize’s land territory and encompasses approximately 1,300 square miles. A detailed mapping exercise conducted to produce the official maps to quantitatively demarcate the banned areas needs to be concluded. In addition, the petroleum exploration planning framework is currently being revised and will be finalized in 2016. This Framework will comprehensively look at the zonation of the coastal areas of Belize as it relates to future oil exploration and further incorporate technical information on the special considerations for sensitive ecosystems and areas important for other economic sectors which utilize the offshore territory of Belize.

The Government also made progress in the review and adoption of key legal instruments and processes in the protection and conservation of the Property, including the endorsement of the National Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan, the Land Use Policy, and the National Protected Areas Systems Bill. The finalization of TORs for the revision of the Mangrove Regulations and the Environmental Impact Assessment Process for developments has also been approved and it is expected that these works will commence within this year. The National Forest Policy have been finalized and is now scheduled to be tabled at the Cabinet for endorsement.

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With regard to invasive species, the Government of Belize, along with private and NGO partners, continues to strengthen national efforts addressing this issue affecting the property. These initiatives were focussed primarily on the control and/or eradication of the lionfish (*Pterois spp.*) and rats (*Rattus rattus*) within the property.

Finally, the Government has initiated the implementation of the adopted Desired State of Conservation for the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger (DSOCR). This 2016 State of Conservation Report is submitted in response to Decision 39COM7A.18 and for its review at the 40th session of the World Heritage Committee which elaborates further on the progress made with reference to the corrective measures and the DSOCR.

## Introduction

The 39<sup>th</sup> meeting of the World Heritage Committee in Bonn, Germany June 28-July 8, 2015 upheld the decision to retain the property on the List of World Heritage Sites in Danger – this is a function of the 2009 decision made in Seville, Spain by the World Heritage Committee.

During the 39<sup>th</sup> meeting of the World Heritage Committee, a Desired State of Conservation for the Removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger (DSOCR) was adopted. The Government of Belize reaffirms its strong commitment in making progress in the implementation of the corrective measures and the recommendations and targets of the DSOCR.

This report represents the State of Conservation of the Property for the year 2015-2016 and is inclusive of Belize's progress to address the recommendations of the World Heritage Committee upheld at the 39<sup>th</sup> Session. As requested, the report also includes the implementation and progress of the adopted Desired State of Conservation (DSOC) for the removal of the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System from the List of World Heritage in Danger. Belize continues to work with the World Heritage Centre and IUCN as proven by the recent mission to Belize from 8-15 December, 2015 to begin the implementation of the DSOCR. It is anticipated that meeting the targets of the proposed desired state will allow the removal of the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System from the List of World Heritage in Danger possibly in 2017, given the World Heritage Committee's endorsement of the DSOCR and the Government of Belize's commitment of its implementation.

The Government of Belize's response to Decision **39 COM 7A.18** is now being presented for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its upcoming 40<sup>th</sup> session in 2016.

## **Response from the State Party to the World Heritage Committee's Decision 2015**

1. *Having examined Document WHC-15/39.COM/7A.Add;*
2. *Recalling Decision **38 COM 7A.31**, adopted at its 38th session (Doha, 2014);*
3. *Welcomes the activities reported by the State Party towards the implementation of the corrective measures, but notes with concern that key legal instruments, including the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan, the Living Aquatic Resources Bill and the Mangrove Regulations, have not yet been finalized and approved;*

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

In late 2014, the Government of Belize, through the Solicitor General's Office of the Attorney General's Ministry, reviewed the Fisheries Resources Bill (previously the "Living Aquatic Resources Bill") and presented its findings to the former Ministry of Forestry, Fisheries and Sustainable Development and Cabinet. The final approval of the draft Bill along with the draft updated fisheries regulations (developed through the ACP Fish II Project (Asia, Caribbean and Pacific Fish II Project funded by the European Commission) and reviewed by the FAO Legal Office) were unintentionally delayed due to National General Elections called in November 2015. Under the new Minister and Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, Environment and Sustainable Development, the draft legislations have been prioritized to undergo a final review in 2016 before its submission to the Cabinet of Ministers for approval.

Prior to the General Elections in November 2015, the Forest Department initiated consultations with Key Stakeholders on the draft updated Mangrove Regulations. These efforts have now been formally supported under the Marine Conservation and Climate Adaptation Project (MCCAP) to review the draft regulations for its submission to the Solicitor General's Office by mid-2016. The MCCAP is a US\$5.2 million project being funded by the Adaptation Fund and implemented through the World Bank and the Government of Belize. The final review of the mangrove regulations will be done under the 1<sup>st</sup> component of the project which focuses on the improvement of the reef's protection regime including an expansion and enforcement of the marine protected areas (MPAs) and replenishment zones in strategically selected locations in view of building climate resilience. The Terms of Reference (TOR) for the review of the mangrove regulations, includes specific reference to the Outstanding Universal Value of the property (Annex 1). The Forest Department has also finalized the National Forest Policy for Belize. Natural forest ecosystems including wetland and mangrove ecosystems are featured as areas of special interest. The Forest Policy is focused on integrated management of the forest ecosystems to ensure sustained provision of the goods and services, 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. The Forest Policy is expected to be presented to Cabinet in February or March 2016 for official endorsement.

The Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Plan developed by the Coastal Zone Management Authority, was submitted to Cabinet and approved on February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016. It should also be noted that the approval of the ICZM plan has met one of the targets of the DSOCR. The Coastal Zone Management Authority has secured funding for the implementation of the ICZM plan with effect February of this year. This funding will support the implementation of the plan for the next 4-5 years through MCCAP.

The Land Use Policy Implementation plan under the Ministry of Natural Resources with the aid of the World Bank is being established. The development of TORs for the consultants to develop the required implementation framework and coordinating mechanisms have been finalized. It is envisioned that the implementation of the Land Use Policy will further bolster the national framework for sustainable and responsible land use and conservation in Belize.

In 2015 the Government of Belize updated and finalized the National Protected Areas Systems Bill. The Bill was submitted and approved by Cabinet in mid-2015.

4. *Also welcomes the information provided by the State Party that no oil concession is currently overlapping the property, as well as its commitment to develop a suitable legal arrangement that would address the Committee requests regarding the elimination of all oil concession in and around the property, and urges the State Party to develop such a legal arrangement as a matter of priority;*

Prior to the World Heritage Centre mission to Belize in December 2015, the Government of Belize - through the Cabinet of Ministers - banned offshore oil exploration within the seven (7) sites, which forms the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System World Heritage property and an additional one (1) kilometre on either side of the Barrier Reef along the coast. The ban spans +/- 1,300 square miles of Belize's national waters, representing an area equivalent to approximately 15% of Belize's land territory. The measure is a very significant and substantial step undertaken by the Government of Belize toward the implementation of the DSOCR and reiterates its commitment to implement the required measures that will lead to the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger.

In addition to the ban, as of January 2016, there are no longer any oil concessions in or around the property. Areas that were under concessions have expired. These expired areas have not been renewed, which further affirms the moratorium held by the Government of Belize with regard to issuing new offshore exploration licenses. The Government of Belize through the new Ministry of Economic Development, Petroleum, Investment, Trade & Commerce is currently finalizing the petroleum exploration planning framework. This framework, which will be

completed in 2016, is being developed to better manage future petroleum exploration both on land and offshore in Belize's territorial waters. The framework will also identify additional areas of restriction and/or ban for onshore and offshore oil exploration.

5. *Notes that a land tenure inventory is currently ongoing, including within the property, and reiterates its request to the State Party to establish, as a matter of priority, a legal instrument that would 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), (b), (c) and (f) of the DEC 33 COM 7B.33:

As mentioned in previous reports to the World Heritage Committee, and since the listing of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2009, there has been no sale of national lands within the property. The moratorium established by the Government of Belize since the inscription on the List in Danger has thereby been maintained. Further, there has been no endorsement for private land owners in the conversion of leased lands (which are still National Lands) to titled lands. The World Heritage Centre mission in December 2015 was received by the newly appointed Minister of Natural Resources and Immigration where the importance of this corrective measure and DSOCR target was discussed and possible routes for completion of this target were explored. A follow up letter from the World Heritage Centre was received in which the request for the status of nationally held and leased lands was detailed. The Ministry is currently preparing and collecting the information to respond and anticipates to further collaborate with the World Heritage Centre in implementing the measures that will allow the property to be removed from the List in Danger.

Under the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Environment and Sustainable Development, the EIA process is one of the primary mechanisms which informs 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 this 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). Currently, the TORs has been finalized and bidding among expert consultancy groups to implement the project has commenced. Three main deliverables are to be submitted no later than 20 weeks after the signing of the contract. These deliverables include an assessment of the environmental clearance process, a stakeholder participation plan and the draft amended legislation. It is envisioned that this component will be completed by the end of 2016 and the outcome will meet the DSOCR targets as they relate to maintaining the property's outstanding value and mangrove protection.

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 plans for these sites since they 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.

6. *Further welcomes the constructive cooperation between the State Party and stakeholders and adopts the Desired state of conservation for the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger (DSOCR) they proposed (see Document WHC-15/39.COM/7A.Add, Table 1), as well as its indicators, methods of verification and timeframe, and also urges the State Party to work closely together with the World Heritage Centre and IUCN for their successful implementation;*

Since the adoption of the DSOCR by the World Heritage Committee, the Government of Belize continues to work closely with the World Heritage Centre and IUCN. In December 2015, there was a technical mission to Belize by the World Heritage Centre to aid in the implementation of the DSOCR. This mission began a week after the Government of Belize announced the ban of offshore drilling in and around the World Heritage Site and the reef system. The mission engaged a number of Ministers and key stakeholders in order to inform in more detail the steps needed to be taken that will allow the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger.

**Table 1** below shows the implementation progress of the DSOCR:

Indicators	Method of Verification	Timeframe	Progress
<p>1. The area of mangrove coverage in the property is maintained at least at the same level as when the property was inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2009. There is no further loss of mangrove cover within the entire property, including all mangrove types that are unique and irreplaceable, measured against the 2009 baseline.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Strengthening, adoption, implementation, and effective enforcement, of the currently proposed Mangrove Regulations</li> <li>▪ Satellite imagery/aerial photography of the property indicating the current mangrove coverage, measured against the 2009 baseline</li> <li>▪ Maps showing the distribution of the different categories of land ownership within the property and cadastral data of land tenure compared against the 2009 base year (the date when the site was inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger)</li> <li>▪ Adoption by law of a permanent cessation of all sales and leases of state owned land throughout the property, measured against the 2009 baseline</li> <li>▪ Adoption by law of a zoning plan covering the entire property that specifies clearly defined regulation for allowed development and use for each zone, based on scientific, ecological and biological information about the property's OUV and its attributes.</li> </ul>	<p>Completed by 31 December 2016</p>	<p>The government maintains a voluntary moratorium in the sales of nationally held lands since 2009.</p> <p>TOR for the consultancy to review the mangrove regulations has been approved and will occur under the new project: Marine Conservation and Climate Adaptation Project (MCCAP). Final draft mangrove regulations expected to be adopted by Cabinet by mid-2016.</p> <p>Land ownership maps are being compiled in response to the WHC mission (December 2015) and follow up letter and maps will be submitted by May 2016.</p>
<p>2. No areas within the property and in its immediate vicinity are developed in ways that affect the property's natural outstanding</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Adoption by law, implementation and adequate enforcement regulations that specify the type, scale and density of coastal development consistent with the requirements to maintain the property's natural outstanding beauty and that of its</li> </ul>	<p>Completed by 31 December 2016</p>	<p>Revision of EIA regulations will be carried out under the GEF Project. The TOR is finalized and a consultant should be hired by March 2016. It is envisioned that the review and strengthening of the Environmental</p>

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<p>beauty and status as a globally significant natural phenomenon of Outstanding Universal Value</p>	<p>immediate surroundings, including establishment of areas where no development should be permitted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Satellite imagery/aerial photography of the property measured against the 1996 and 2009 baselines</li> </ul>		<p>Clearance Process as well as the amended regulations will be completed in 2016 as project component should be completed in 5 months of the signing of contract.</p>
<p>3. All areas within the property and the surrounding areas that support the ecological functioning of the system are excluded from oil exploration and exploitation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A map that defines, on the basis of oceanographic, ecological and other scientific information, the property's surrounding areas where no oil exploration and exploitation can be permitted</li> <li>▪ Legal adoption of a permanent exclusion of the entire property and the defined surrounding areas from oil exploration and exploitation</li> </ul>	<p>Completed by 31 January 2016</p>	<p>Government of Belize adopted policy decision on permanent ban for offshore oil exploration in the seven sites of the World Heritage Site and one (1) kilometre on either side of the reef system along the entire coast of Belize.</p>
<p>4. The property is managed effectively and in an integrated way that will ensure the protection of its Outstanding Universal Value, and appropriately allows for achieving both sustainable socio-economic and environmental goals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Adoption, implementation and effective enforcement of the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan, reflecting the World Heritage status of the property and its conservation and sustainable use requirements and consistent with the plan's draft version of January 2015</li> </ul>	<p>Completed by 31 December 2016</p>	<p>ICZM plan approved on Feb. 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016.</p> <p>The newly Marine Conservation and Climate Adaptation Project (MCCAP) has secured funding for the implementation of the plan.</p>

## **Updates on other conservation initiatives/issues identified by State Party**

- I. In addressing the corrective measure 6(g) of DEC 33 COM 7B.33, the "National Replenishment Zone Expansion" initiative continues to be implemented by the Government of Belize along with its NGO and private sector partners. The project seeks to increase the current functional 'NO TAKE' areas in Belize from the current 3.15% (58,699.4 ha) to 10% (186,541.7 ha) of the territorial seas taking into consideration both near shore and deep sea areas deemed critical for the overall ecosystems functioning of Belize's coastal systems and safeguarding of marine biodiversity. This commitment by the GOB will be a major accomplishment towards achieving the biodiversity and conservation targets as outlined under the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. In 2015, a draft map identifying the potential replenishment expansion to 10% of national waters was finalized. Consultations and validation of this proposal is ongoing with fishing communities, NGO partners and Government regulatory agencies.
  
- II. Efforts to control the population of the Lionfish (*Pterois spp.*) in Belizean waters are 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 basis through hunts within marine reserves, dive tours and lionfish tournaments. Currently under the Meso American Reef Fund (MARFund), there is an initiative to develop a National Exploitation Strategy in 2016 for the long-term control of the Lionfish population. This is in addition to the National Lionfish Management Plan, which was developed years ago to aid in the control and eradication of the lionfish population. In addition to developing the strategy, the project will also address mechanisms to manage the population in no-take zones, determining density and population size and the marketing of lionfish to control the population. This initiative continues to address corrective measure 6(e) of DEC 33 COM 7B.33.
  
- III. The Belize Audubon Society, co-manager for the Halfmoon Caye National Monument (WHS), conducted a Feasibility Study in 2015 for the eradication of the invasive rats on the island. Working with regional experts, the Belize Audubon Society proposed a pilot project which the organization will receive funding from OAK Foundation in 2016 to eradicate the rats *Rattus rattus* (Corrective measure 6 (e) of

DEC 33 COM 7B.33). As for the invasive coconut trees on the island, an assessment was done in 2014. Results from the study indicated that the eradication of the coconut trees had to be controlled as all can't be eradicated due to climate change purposes. Only half of the island was cleared to allow the littoral forest to naturally regenerate.

- IV. The MCCAP under the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, Environment and Sustainable Development is a \$5.2 Million US project being funded by the Adaptation Fund and implemented through the World Bank. The project will focus on: 1) the improvement of the reef's protection regime including an expansion and enforcement of the marine protected areas (MPAs) and replenishment zones in strategically selected locations to climate resilience, namely the Corozal Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, Turneffe Atoll Marine Reserve, and South Water Caye Marine Reserve, 2) Supporting viable and sustainable alternative livelihoods for affected users of the reef in the areas impacted by project activities and 3) Raising awareness, building local capacity, and disseminating information regarding the overall health of the reef ecosystem and the climate resilience of coral reefs.

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

- I. The Climate Change Unit under the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Environment and Sustainable Development finalized the National Climate Change Policy and Strategy which Cabinet approved in March 2015. The Unit continues to finalize Belize's Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs), the Third National Communication and the Technical Needs Assessment (for three main sectors) to be submitted in 2016.
- II. The Fisheries Department in partnership with its local and international NGOs is implementing the national roll-out of managed access. Managed Access is a stakeholder-based (rights-based) approach to managing Belize's fisheries with the goal of growing Belize's economy, improving the livelihoods of fishers and fishing communities and protecting the ecology of Belize's barrier reef. It is focussed on ending open access fishing in Belizean waters and empowering fishers and

managers to collaborate as stewards of the resource. This approach builds on and integrates the existing management efforts (MPA's and output control measures currently in place) with a focus directly on rebuilding and/or sustaining fisheries populations to support the overall health of the ecosystem.

- III. The Belize Audubon Society in consultation with the Fisheries Department with support from the OAK Foundation and WWF conducted a workshop in June 2015 with ten organizations to inform and discuss the OUV, assessed threats and gaps in data and monitoring to be more effective in the management of the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System (WHS). Now with a better understanding of the OUV, the site managers are now equipped to establish better monitoring plans at an individual site level.
- IV. Coral restoration efforts in Southern Belize are still ongoing from its inception nine 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 in the Laughing Bird Caye Natural Park (one of the seven sites which make up the WHS Property). Under the MCCAP, these efforts will now be extended to the South Water Cay Marine Reserve which is one of the sites within the property.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Government of Belize has made considerable progress towards implementing the DSOCR and the corrective measures as well as other concerns of the World Heritage Committee in maintaining the inscription of the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System as a World Heritage Site. Most importantly, the government adopted a policy for the permanent ban of oil drilling in the entire property and is currently finalizing the legislation and the petroleum framework. Several key pieces of legislation are in the final stages of their review and/or adoption by the Cabinet. The aforementioned points confirm the priority importance the newly elected Government gives to implementing the DSOCR. It is anticipated that the property could be removed from World Heritage List in Danger in 2017.