

PUBLIC INSPECTION PERIOD

Public Sensitization Feedback Report

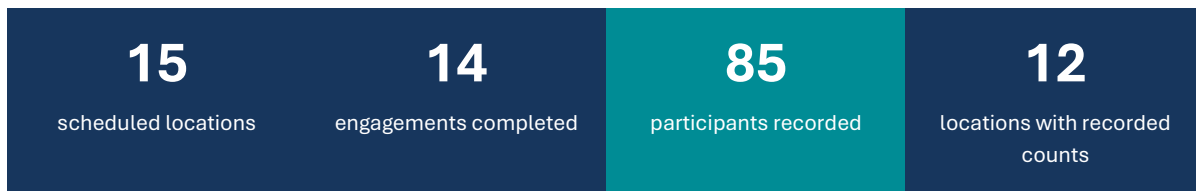
Draft Belize Sustainable Ocean Plan (BSOP)

24 May–25 July 2026

Prepared by Marine Spatial Planning Unit

Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute

Executive Summary



The Public Inspection Period created a national opportunity for stakeholders to review the Draft Belize Sustainable Ocean Plan (BSOP), seek clarification and provide feedback on the proposed management framework. Engagements used an interactive information-booth model that supported one-on-one dialogue, map-based discussion and direct exploration of zoning information.

Stakeholders generally demonstrated support for sustainable ocean management and marine conservation. Their feedback focused less on whether marine spatial planning is needed and more on how the BSOP will be implemented, enforced and communicated, and how zoning decisions may affect livelihoods and access to traditional fishing grounds.

CENTRAL FINDING: Stakeholders are moving from asking “What is the BSOP?” to asking “How will it be implemented, who will enforce it, and how will it affect our livelihoods?”

The strongest national themes were fisheries access and livelihood security; governance, trust and transparency; enforcement; access to clear spatial information; community-specific communication; and the need to connect the BSOP with the wider marine governance system.

Attendance note: The consultation schedule listed 15 locations. Fourteen engagements were completed, including a mobile pass-through engagement in Consejo; the Barranco session was cancelled because of inclement weather. A total of 85 participants was recorded across 12 locations. Participant totals were not entered for Copper Bank and Consejo, so 85 should be treated as the minimum documented reach rather than the total number of people engaged.

1. Introduction and Background

The Public Inspection Period for the Draft BSOP ran from 24 May to 25 July 2026. It provided coastal stakeholders with an opportunity to examine the Draft Plan, discuss proposed zoning categories and contribute practical feedback before finalization.

The engagement programme covered northern, central and southern coastal Belize. Scheduled locations were Sarteneja, Chunox, Copper Bank, Corozal, Consejo, Riversdale, Seine Bight, Hopkins, Caye Caulker, San Pedro, Placencia, Punta Gorda, Barranco, Belize City and Dangriga. Full scheduling and attendance details are provided in Annex 1.

Although participation varied considerably by location, the discussions were substantive. Participants engaged most strongly with implementation, governance, fisheries management, enforcement, communication and access to spatial information.

2. Engagement Methodology

The Public Inspection Period used an interactive information-booth approach designed to make the Draft BSOP accessible in an informal setting. Instead of relying on presentation-led meetings, participants could move among information stations, review the material at their own pace and speak directly with members of the Marine Spatial Planning Unit.

#	Station	Purpose
1	Registration and information	Background on the Draft BSOP; QR code to the full document; proposed zoning categories; stakeholder-engagement statistics; progress towards the Biodiversity Protection Zone target; and next steps.
2	Maps and zoning	Proposed zoning maps, the compatibility matrix and other spatial information used to discuss compatible and incompatible activities and identify areas of interest or concern.
3	Virtual display	A laptop and monitor displaying SeaSketch, enabling closer review of interactive maps and data layers and documentation of observations or potential adjustments.
4	ICZM information	Information on the updated Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan and its relationship to the Draft BSOP, where applicable.

Sessions in Sarteneja, Chunox and Copper Bank were conducted bilingually in English and Spanish with the assistance of a contracted Spanish interpreter. Venues and formats were also adapted to community preferences. Indoor and outdoor settings, combined with an informal conversational style, helped participants ask questions and discuss the Draft BSOP comfortably.

3. Participation and Geographic Reach

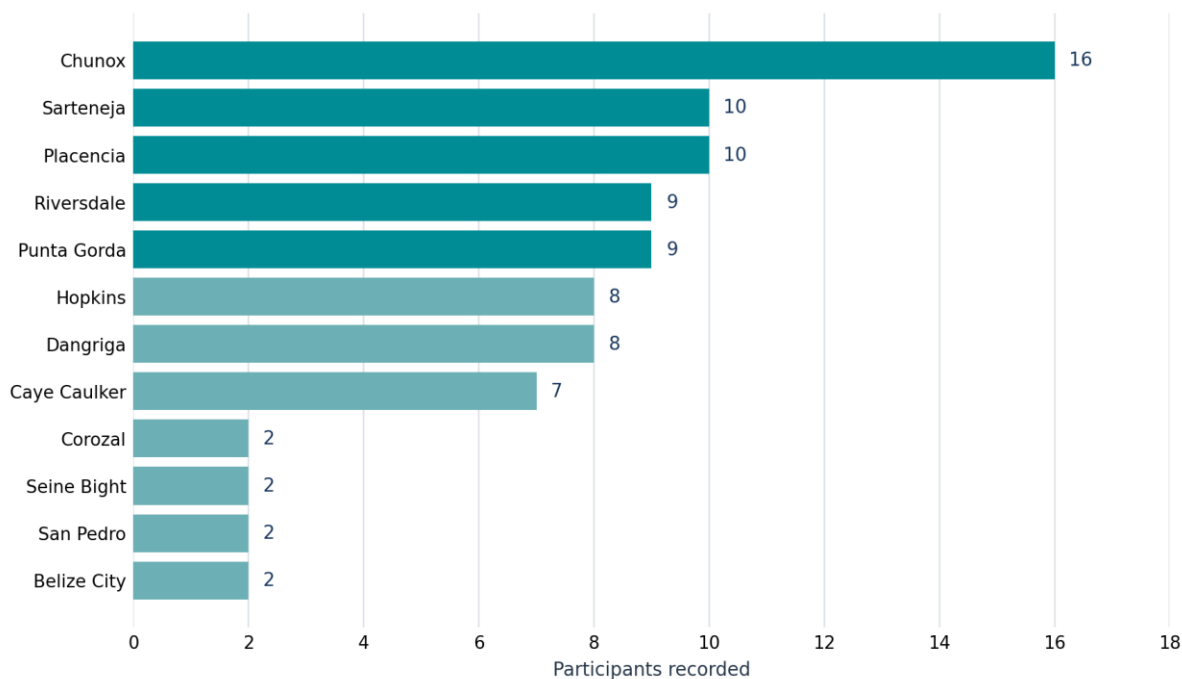


Figure 1. Recorded participation by location (n = 85)

Recorded participation ranged from 2 to 16 participants per location. Chunox recorded the highest attendance (16), followed by Sarteneja and Placencia (10 each), and Riversdale and Punta Gorda (9 each). The chart reflects registered attendance only; it excludes Copper Bank and Consejo because participant totals were not entered.

4. National Themes Emerging from Stakeholder Feedback

4.1 Fisheries Access and Livelihood Security

This was the most dominant theme nationally. Across fishing communities, stakeholders were concerned about continued access to traditional fishing grounds, displacement, reduced fishing space and the balance between conservation and development. Very few comments opposed marine conservation itself.

- Concerns were recorded in Sarteneja, Chunox, Copper Bank, Hopkins, Placencia and Punta Gorda.
- Participants asked how proposed protection and other spatial designations would affect traditional and overlapping uses.
- Tourism and fishing-sector conflicts were also raised, including the placement of fishing shades and traps.

INTERPRETATION: Stakeholders appear to accept conservation objectives but need confidence that implementation will not disproportionately affect traditional users. Zoning decisions should therefore be explained alongside their socioeconomic considerations.

4.2 Governance, Trust and Transparency

Stakeholders repeatedly questioned how decisions were made, whether earlier recommendations were considered, why particular areas were selected, who would make final decisions, and whether implementation would occur.

- Northern communities expressed notable mistrust of authorities and marine protected area co-managers.
- Some participants were reluctant to sign attendance sheets or be photographed because of previous experiences.
- Several communities asked for visible evidence that consultation feedback influenced the final Plan.

INTERPRETATION The issue is less about opposition to the BSOP than confidence in governance institutions. Without transparent reporting and clear feedback loops, this could become a significant implementation risk.

4.3 Enforcement Before Further Expansion

A consistent message was that existing protected and managed areas should be effectively enforced before additional protection is expanded. Concerns included illegal foreign fishing, insufficient patrols, poor compliance, illegal harvesting, safety risks and inadequate monitoring.

- Hopkins and Punta Gorda participants raised safety concerns and requested stronger collaboration between the Belize Fisheries Department and the Belize Coast Guard.
- Dangriga participants raised out-of-season harvesting, speeding vessels and inadequate signs or boundary markers.
- Punta Gorda fishers called for stronger enforcement in the Port Honduras Marine Reserve.

INTERPRETATION: Stakeholders are asking for effective conservation, not simply more conservation. Implementation communications should connect new designations with credible management plans, enforcement responsibilities and resources.

4.4 Spatial Information and Mapping

Participants showed strong demand for practical and accessible mapping products, including coordinates, printable maps, large display maps, mobile and offline tools, updated boundaries and official datasets.

- San Pedro participants requested accurate maps and coordinates for newly designated and established areas.
- Placencia participants recommended displaying approved large-format maps at cooperatives and fisher organizations.
- Punta Gorda participants suggested a free centralized application, similar to Avenza Maps, with offline access and real-time updates.

INTERPRETATION: Stakeholders are ready to use spatial-planning information in their day-to-day activities. Accessible mapping is therefore an implementation tool, not merely a communication product.

4.5 Communication and Engagement Preferences

Stakeholders emphasized that communication must be tailored to each community. Recommendations included direct phone contact, localized meetings, continued use of translators, community-based information sharing and less reliance on radio alone.

- San Pedro fishers were described as unlikely to receive information through typical radio channels.
- Placencia participants expressed a preference for direct telephone calls.
- Participants generally preferred the information-booth approach to formal presentations.

INTERPRETATION: Future engagement should use multiple channels and retain the interactive booth model, while working through trusted local organizations and representatives.

4.6 Biodiversity Protection

Most stakeholders supported protecting Belize's marine environment but requested clearer scientific explanations, evidence for site selection, ecological benefits, management plans and monitoring responsibilities.

- Hopkins participants endorsed the proposed final areas needed to achieve the 30% target.
- Belize City participants questioned the evidence supporting some new designations and raised a proposal concerning St. George's Caye and Gallos Point.
- Participants asked who would manage, finance, monitor and protect newly designated areas.

INTERPRETATION: The feedback reflects a demand for stronger explanation and accountability rather than a rejection of protection. Scientific rationale should be translated into clear, community-accessible language.

4.7 Wider Marine Management Issues

Many comments concerned responsibilities beyond the direct scope of the Draft BSOP, including dredging, tourism impacts, no-wake zones, riverbank erosion, navigation hazards, marine debris, speed limits, trap relocation and lagoon management.

- Caye Caulker participants linked dredging to fisheries, tourism and ecosystem impacts.
- Placencia participants discussed development and protection in the Placencia Lagoon.
- Dangriga participants raised vessel speed, erosion, waterway debris and demarcation of the South Water Caye Marine Reserve.

INTERPRETATION: Stakeholders see the BSOP as part of an interconnected marine governance system. Successful implementation will require coordinated responses and referral mechanisms among responsible agencies.

5. Cross-Cutting Findings

Stakeholders want action

Many comments reflected frustration that consultations do not always lead to visible change. Reporting how input changed the final BSOP will be essential.

Consultation fatigue is affecting participation

Communities reported repeated engagement demands and limited visible outcomes. Future consultations should demonstrate progress, report back and avoid unnecessary repetition.

Trust varies geographically

Scepticism was especially pronounced in some northern communities, reflecting prior experiences with projects and management institutions. Engagement strategies should account for this uneven trust.

Communities think nationally

Participants raised national fisheries policy, illegal foreign fishing, enforcement, biodiversity protection and ecosystem connectivity—not only local concerns. This suggests a growing national understanding of marine spatial planning.

6. Positive Outcomes

The Public Inspection Period also demonstrated meaningful progress in stakeholder understanding and engagement.

- Improved understanding of marine spatial planning concepts.
- Greater confidence in reading and discussing maps.
- Increased interest in zoning and implementation.
- Constructive recommendations rather than broad opposition.
- Strong support for interactive, conversational engagement.

GOOD PRACTICE: The information-booth format should be retained for future engagement because it allows participants to focus on the material most relevant to them and encourages more open one-on-one discussion.

7. Implementation Risks and Recommended Responses

Risk	Potential impact	Recommended response
Consultation fatigue	Reduced future participation	Show how feedback changed the final Plan and avoid repetitive engagement.
Low or uneven trust	Reduced stakeholder confidence and buy-in	Use transparent decision records, regular updates and trusted local intermediaries.
Weak enforcement	Low confidence that zoning will be effective	Clarify agency roles, strengthen inter-agency operations and report enforcement improvements.
Limited access to maps	Confusion about boundaries and permitted uses	Provide user-friendly print, digital and offline mapping products with coordinates.
Poor institutional coordination	Mixed messages and unresolved referrals	Harmonize communication and establish a clear issue-referral mechanism among agencies.
Incomplete attendance records	Under-reporting and limited evaluation	Use a standard register and record the status and reach of every engagement.

8. Strategic Opportunities and Way Forward

- 1. Close the feedback loop:** Publish a concise account of what was heard, what changed in the final BSOP and why some recommendations could not be incorporated.
- 2. Make spatial information usable:** Develop a public BSOP map portal with downloadable maps, coordinates, mobile-friendly access and an offline option.
- 3. Prepare community implementation briefs:** Explain the implications of the final Plan for each community, including relevant zones, permitted uses, contacts and referral pathways.
- 4. Maintain regular implementation updates:** Provide predictable updates through channels suited to each community, including direct calls, local organizations, WhatsApp, printed materials and targeted meetings.
- 5. Strengthen inter-agency coordination:** Work with the Belize Fisheries Department, Belize Coast Guard, Belize Port Authority and MPA co-managers to respond to enforcement and management issues that sit beyond the BSOP.
- 6. Improve monitoring of engagement:** Track scheduled and completed events, participant numbers, participant type, language support, issues raised, referrals, commitments and follow-up status.

9. Conclusion

The Public Inspection Period shows that stakeholders are increasingly engaging with Belize's marine spatial planning process at an implementation level. They generally support sustainable marine management but want transparent governance, effective enforcement, continued livelihood access, clear maps and meaningful participation.

Many concerns extend beyond the Draft BSOP and relate to the wider ocean governance system. Fisheries management, safety, dredging, tourism, navigation and institutional coordination will therefore require collaborative implementation and clear referral to responsible authorities.

The next phase should convert consultation into visible action. Demonstrating how feedback informed the final BSOP, making zoning information accessible and maintaining consistent communication will be critical to stakeholder confidence and the long-term success of the Plan.

Annex 1. Consultation Schedule and Recorded Participation

#	Location	Date and time	Venue	Participants	Status
1	Sarteneja Village	6 Jun 2026, 10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.	Sarteneja Inn	10	Completed
2	Chunox Village	6 Jun 2026, 3:00–6:00 p.m.	Chunox Fishermen Association	16	Completed
3	Copper Bank Village	7 Jun 2026, 10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.	The Palapa	Not recorded	Completed
4	Corozal Town	7 Jun 2026, 3:00–6:00 p.m.	St. Xavier School Basketball Court	2	Completed
5	Consejo Village	8 Jun 2026, 9:00–10:00 a.m.	Mobile pass-through engagement	Not recorded	Completed
6	Riversdale Community	9 Jun 2026, 3:00–5:00 p.m.	Riversdale Park	9	Completed
7	Seine Bight Village	10 Jun 2026, 10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.	Seine Bight Community Centre	2	Completed
8	Hopkins Village	10 Jun 2026, 4:00–7:30 p.m.	Ben's Place	8	Completed
9	Caye Caulker Village	22 Jun 2026, 4:00–7:00 p.m.	Caye Caulker Community Centre	7	Completed
10	San Pedro Town	23 Jun 2026, 4:00–7:00 p.m.	Lion's Den	2	Completed
11	Placencia Village	2 Jul 2026, 4:00–7:00 p.m.	Placencia Basketball Court	10	Completed
12	Punta Gorda Town	6 Jul 2026, 3:00–6:00 p.m.	Waluco's Restaurant	9	Completed
13	Barranco Village	7 Jul 2026, 10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.	Barranco Community Centre	—	Cancelled: inclement weather
14	Belize City	10 Jul 2026, 4:00–7:00 p.m.	ITVET Dining Room	2	Completed
15	Dangriga Town	16 Jul 2026, 4:00–7:00 p.m.	Dangriga Town Council	8	Completed

Recorded participation total: 85 participants across 12 locations. Copper Bank and Consejo were completed engagements, but participant totals were not entered. Barranco was cancelled due to inclement weather.

Annex 2. Detailed Community Feedback

The table below preserves the substance of the community-level feedback as recorded, with light editing for clarity. Blank fields indicate that no recommendation, response or observation was recorded.

Community	Issue or stakeholder feedback	Recommendation	CZMAI response	General observation
Sarteneja Village	Asked how the MSP document will guide development through compatible and incompatible activity designations.	—	—	Stakeholders spent majority of their time at station #2 zoning and maps.
Sarteneja Village	Concerned about the proposal that was brought up by Mr John Suerl of St Goerges Caye and its impact and displacement of Sarteneja fishers that use a part of that area being proposed.	—	—	—
Chunox Village	Raised a same-sector conflict involving shared space with lobster shade fishers; zinc placed on the seafloor can obstruct finfish fishers.	—	—	—
Chunox Village	Concern that MPA expansion could reduce fishing space, especially at Turneffe Reef Atoll.	—	To be informed and understand the regulations are in place within the areas that you work	—
Copper Bank Village	Reported inconsistent information being shared with the community by MPA managers in the area.	To standardise the shared documentation of final areas and access to GSP coordinates/points.	—	In the northern communities there is a huge mistrust with the authorities/MPA-Co managers, making them reluctant to participate in the sessions. This is due to previous mishaps with projects and information. Hence the reason they do not like attendance sheets and their photos being taken.
Copper Bank Village	Safety concerns for fishing within the Turneffe Atoll by foreigners with weapons.	—	—	—
Copper Bank Village	Questions regarding the access of Belizean waters to neighbouring countries. Is it allowed for them to have fishing access with a permit or other type of tourism activities. Where could these information be accessed.	—	To be relayed to the Belize Fisheries Department	—
Copper Bank Village	Concern of being displaced by tourism and trap fishers.	—	—	There is a Copper Bank fisherman association. Meeting fatigue within the community, as this session was the third for the week.

Community	Issue or stakeholder feedback	Recommendation	CZMAI response	General observation
Riversdale Community	—	to potentially have open and close season for the MPA areas	—	—
Hopkins Village	Areas that I use are not being affected by the remaining 4.95% to complete the 30% BZP.	—	—	—
Hopkins Village	Fishers from other areas like San Pedro travel down south to use the deep slope areas of the south.	—	—	—
Hopkins Village	Safety concerns for fishing from foreigners. Asking assistance from Fisheries Dept. and Belize Coast Guard.	—	Ongoing efforts to strengthen enforcement through increased collaboration between the Belize Fisheries Department and the Belize Coast Guard, including enhanced monitoring and surveillance initiatives.	—
Hopkins Village	The maps being displayed capture all of inputs from previous consultations and the OUS.	—	—	—
Hopkins Village	Endorse the final areas for the 4.95% to achieve the 30%.	—	—	Indicated that Eworth Garbutt is their representative
Caye Caulker Village	Where dredging occurs creates problems for the fisheries and tourism, marine and coast ecosystem sectors.	—	—	There is a consultancy by the Village Council to conduct stakeholder session for the development of a Caye Caulker Strategic Plan.
San Pedro Town	—	To provide access to accurate maps and GSP coordinates/point for all the newly designated areas and established areas. In accessible format.	—	—
San Pedro Town	—	Need better means of communications with the San Pedro fishers. They don't use typical communications means, e.g. LoveFM Radio Station.	—	—
Placencia Village	Concerns about the Placencia lagoon and the halting of development in that area, as it needed to provide surrounding community with jobs.	Recommend having sessions in Independence Village for stakeholders of that community.	—	There is a fishing group association in that community of Independence/ Mango Creek
Placencia Village	A balance is need with protection and development in the Placencia area.	—	—	There were a recent consultation on the discussion of the Placencia lagoon to be placed under some type of protection.

Community	Issue or stakeholder feedback	Recommendation	CZMAI response	General observation
Placencia Village	Concerned about a “no take” area in southern Belize. Highlighted on the maps. (that was designated during milestone 1 or before).	Recommend to have approved maps displayed at cooperatives and fisher’s headquarters (large maps).	—	—
Placencia Village	Concern about where sports fishing can occur.	Community members prefer a phone call as means of communication.	—	—
Punta Gorda Town	Concerned about new buoys markers that have been placed in the Port Honduras Marine Reserve (PHMR). Noted on the “Fisheries Sector” map as a red box by Snake Caye. This is/was a lobster fishing area. PHMR is big areas, but there is very little space for harvesting by stakeholders, due to muddy substrate.	More enforcement is needed to protect the areas from illegal foreign fishers (Guatemala).	—	Fishers call for more enforcement not the expansion of protection.
Punta Gorda Town	Grievance against MPA Co-Manager TIDE, as they are not doing proper enforcement nor proper dissemination of information. The relocation of the TIDE from the area called abalone was ideal for enforcement, as they view of entire areas. The now location puts them in a blind spot which is not ideal for enforcement.	Recommend having a specific session with the Belize Fisheries Dept and TIDE to discuss the issues of PHMR.	—	Stakeholders are feeling the consultation fatigue and not getting any effective outcomes in their eyes. They see no benefits in attending.
Punta Gorda Town	—	To clearly denote on the map, that areas that were swapped in the south for the new designation. To also indicate to put the size of the space and coordinates.	—	—
Punta Gorda Town	—	To have centralised app or point to have access to the maps and coordinates similar to Avenza map app used by stakeholders. To be able to work offline and free. Can also be used to give real time updates to stakeholders.	—	—
Belize City	Propose the inclusion of St. Georges Caye to be places under protection due its historical significant. The area has all the IUCN requirements and should be considered.	—	—	—
Belize City	The method of designation is not inclusive.	Should have been done differently	—	—

Community	Issue or stakeholder feedback	Recommendation	CZMAI response	General observation
Belize City	Believe stakeholder recommendation on designation of areas where not taken into consideration. Do these new designations have any benefit? Is it just going to be a paper park? Do these areas have any evidence to being a high biodiversity zone with high level of biodiversity needing protection? Or is there some type of secret agenda being done with these new areas are that no being disclosed to the public?	—	—	—
Belize City	In the documentation for Milestone 4, there was the recommendation of a Marine Protected Area (MPA) around St. George's Caye and Gallos Point.	—	Northern communities members would be displaced and consideration need to be given to all users of the area.	—
Belize City	Gallos Point has the potential to be like Hol Chan Marine Reserve bring benefits to the users and stakeholders in that area. A push was need to get the area under protection, as cold 30 people uses that space.	—	30 northern families and associated persons benefit from that areas. More consideration and stakeholder analyses would have to be done as this would displace uses. A full assess of the areas must be done.	—
Belize City	What are the benefits of the underwater features? Who will be in charged of monitoring and protection of the new designation?	—	To be capitalised through the Belize Fund, all these areas must have a management plan.	—
Dangriga Town	Large vessels driving pass Tobacco Caye with high speeds creating huge waves that crash on the beach creating erosion. Area is where fishing is done and tourism activities.	To have Belize Port Authority put some no wake zone sign or speed limit for that area.	—	—
Dangriga Town	Tourism vessels harvesting out of season products (lobster and conch) and not being reprimanded for these actions.	—	—	—
Dangriga Town	Vessels speeding in the river (estuary) causing large waves that cause other parked boats to hit the pair being damaged, also causing erosion of the rive bank.	To have Belize Port Authority /Belize Fisheries Dept. put speed limit size/no wake signs in the river. To have partnership with community groups to assist with regulating the speeding of the river. To have regulatory authority do regular checks of signs and markers for safety and enforcement.	—	—

Community	Issue or stakeholder feedback	Recommendation	CZMAI response	General observation
Dangriga Town	Which organization is responsible fallen trees and debris in the water ways. Causes blockage and hazard. More prevalent during the rainy season.	—	—	—
Dangriga Town	Concern about the no demarcation of the South Water Caye Marine Reserve.	To have markers being placed to indicate the boundary of the MPA.	—	—
	Some fishers have traps/shades in that area and need to be moved. Difficult as it comes a cost fishers cannot afford.	To provide assistance to fishers who have to move their traps/shades.		

Annex 3. Sensitization Photos





Annex 3. Information-Booth Approach Designed

Station 1- Registration & Information



Station 2- Maps & Zoning



Station 3 – Virtual Display



Station 4 – ICZMP Information





Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute

Princess Margaret Drive, P.O. Box 1884, Belize City,
Belize, Central America

Tel: 501-223-5739/0719

E-mail: info@coastalzonebelize.org

Website: www.coastalzonebelize.org

Belize Sustainable Ocean Plan

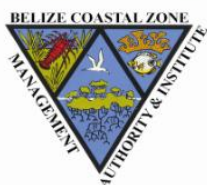
E-mail: bsop@coastalzonebelize.org

Website: bsop.coastalzonebelize.org

Mobile: 501-6149825



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