Belize Sustainable Ocean Plan

Biodiversity Protection Zones Expansion in Belize Under Milestone 6 of the Conservation Funding Agreement

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION REPORT

Prepared by The Marine Spatial Planning Unit of
Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute

29th May 2026

Ministry of Blue Economy & Marine Conservation

Belize Coastal Zone Management Authority & Institute

Belize Fisheries Department — Sustainable Fisheries For Our Future

Blue Bond and Finance Permanence Unit — Office of the Prime Minister

Belize Fund For A Sustainable Future

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Introduction

The Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute (CZMAI), in partnership with the Belize Fisheries Department (BFiD) under the Ministry of Blue Economy and Marine Conservation (MBEMC), conducted a series of stakeholder consultations regarding the proposed expansion of Biodiversity Protection Zones (BPZs) to fulfill the remaining 4.95% required to achieve Belize's 30% ocean protection target under the Blue Loan and Conservation Funding Agreement (BLA & CFA).

Milestone 6 of the Conservation Funding Agreement states:

> *"No later than five (5) years after signing the Agreement, (a) the National Assembly shall approve and the Government shall formally sign into law and Gazette Biodiversity Protection Zones covering a total of 30% of Belize s Ocean, or the percentage stated in the MSP and (b) the MSP shall have been completed and approved by the National Assembly, signed into law, Gazetted and Implemented. After achievement of this Milestone, a Conservation Event will occur under the Agreement in respect of this Milestone if and only if Belize shall thereafter have less than the lower of 30% and the percentage stated in the MSP of its Ocean in Biodiversity Protection Zones or Belize shall rescind the enactment of the MSP."*

A total of eleven consultation sessions were conducted across twenty-seven coastal communities, engaging approximately 822 stakeholders representing a broad range of sectors and interests, images form sessions can be noted in the annex. The consultation team comprised representatives from CZMAI, BFiD, MBEMC, the Blue Bond Finance for Permanence Unit (BBFPU), the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the National Fishers Network of Belize (NFNB), and the Belize Flats Fishing Association (BFFA). A summary of the consultation sessions and stakeholder participation is provided in table 1.

This report outlines the consultation methodology, summarizes stakeholder feedback and areas of consensus, and highlights the principal concerns raised throughout the consultation process.

The objectives of the consultations were to:

1. Inform stakeholders about the Belize Sustainable Ocean Plan (BSOP) and the commitments associated with Milestone 6 of the Conservation Funding Agreement;
2. Present the proposed areas comprising the remaining 4.95% required to achieve the 30% Biodiversity Protection Zone target; and

3. Obtain stakeholder feedback and consensus regarding the proposed areas.

Table 1. Meeting Attendance Records

#	Sessions	Community Representation	Number of Stakeholders	Date of Session
1	Chunox Village	Chunox Village Copper Bank Village San Esteven Village	175	17/04/2026
2	Sarteneja Village	Sarteneja Village	175	17/04/2026
3	Corozal Town	Corozal Town	40	18/04/2026
4	Belize City	Belize City Ladyville Village St. Georges Caye	50	20/04/2026
5	Dangriga Town	Dangriga Town Hopkins Village	50	21/04/2026
6	Placencia Village	Placencia Village Seine Bight Village Independence Village Monkey River Village	185	21/04/2026
7	Riversdale Village	Riverdales Village	40	22/04/2026
8	Punta Gorda Town	Punta Gorda Town Punta Negra Village Barranco Village	40	22/04/2026
9	Caye Caulker Village	Caye Caulker Village	75	23/04/2026
10	San Pedro Town	San Pedro Town	60	24/04/2026
11	Deep Sea Fishers	Belize City	2	06/05/2026

Methodology

Stakeholders were engaged through in-person consultation sessions utilizing a structured presentation format. Opening remarks were delivered by the Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Blue Economy and Marine Conservation, Ms. Beverly Wade, and the Acting Fisheries Administrator, Mr. Adriel Castaneda, who provided an overview of the Biodiversity Protection Zones and their relationship with the Blue Bonds and Conservation Funding Agreement. These introductory remarks established the context for the broader Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) process and its relevance to Belize.

The consultation sessions included an overview of Marine Spatial Planning, its objectives, and its role in supporting sustainable ocean governance in Belize.

Marine Spatial Planning was defined as a public process used to analyze and allocate the spatial and temporal distribution of human activities within marine areas in order to achieve ecological, economic, and social objectives.

Participants were informed that MSP supports the organization and management of marine space, assists in balancing competing ocean uses, reduces user conflicts, protects marine ecosystems and biodiversity, and promotes sustainable economic development.

The MSP Process Lead, Mr. Samir Rosado, and GIS Mapping and Spatial Analyst, Mr. Delwin Guevara, presented the key objectives of the Belize Sustainable Ocean Plan. The first objective focused on developing a legally enforceable marine spatial plan that allocates marine space in support of Belize's traditional and emerging blue economy sectors, including fisheries and aquaculture/mariculture, tourism, maritime administration, finance and investment, energy, marine and coastal ecosystems, and marine and coastal development.

The second objective focused on expanding Belize's Biodiversity Protection Zones to achieve the national commitment of protecting up to 30% of Belize's ocean space. Participants were informed that Belize had already achieved 25.05% ocean protection through previous milestones, consisting of 11.6% High Biodiversity Protection Zones and 13.5% Medium Biodiversity Protection Zones (Image 1).

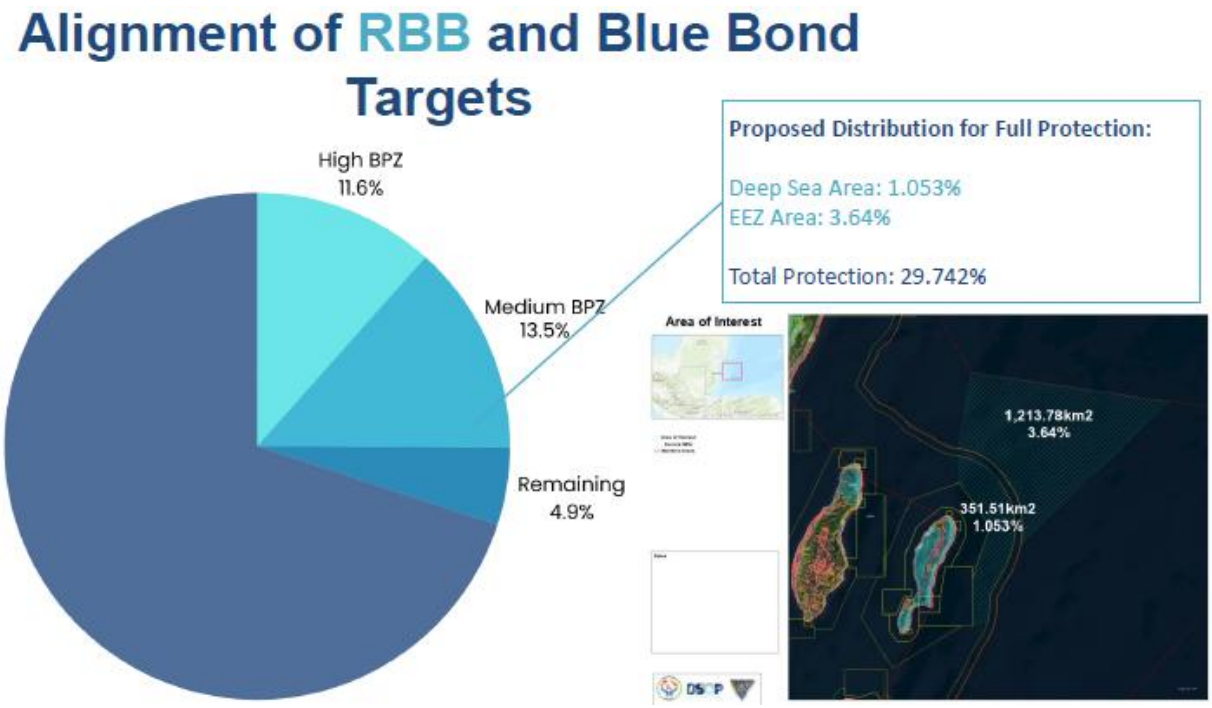


Image 1: Blue Bonds targets with percentage breakdown. Map and chart developed by CZMAI.

The newly proposed areas representing the remaining 4.95% included:

- Areas east of Lighthouse Reef Atoll extending into the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), accounting for approximately 4.693% (Image 2); and
- A proposed redesignation within the Sapodilla Cayes Marine Reserve involving the reclassification of a portion of the existing full protection zone to Medium Biodiversity Protection Zone status, offset by an equivalent area further offshore within the deep-sea environment (Image 3).

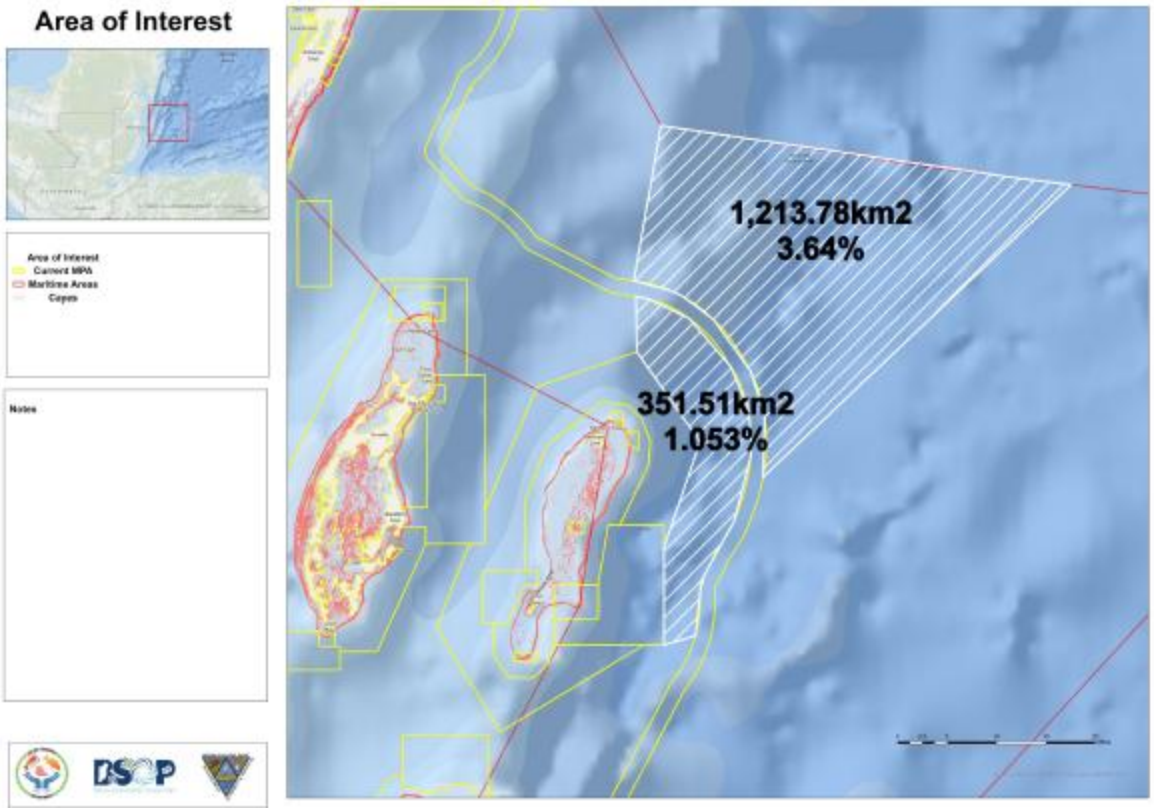


Image 2: Proposed area of interest for remaining 4.5%. Map developed by CZMAI.

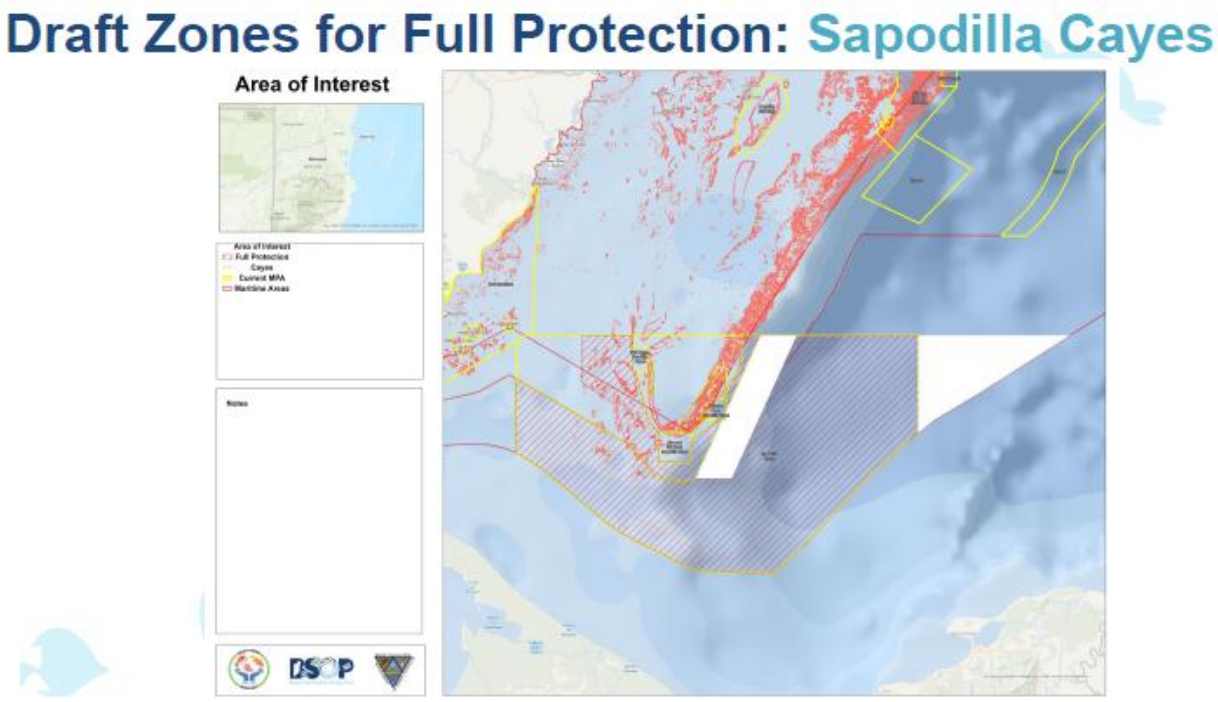


Image 3: Proposed redesignation within the Sapodilla Cayes. Map developed by CZMAI.

At the conclusion of the presentations, stakeholders were asked whether they utilized the proposed areas, knew of individuals who utilized the areas, or anticipated being affected by the proposed designations. Stakeholders were also asked whether they agreed with the proposed redesignation within the Sapodilla Cayes.

Following the presentations, the floor was opened for stakeholder feedback, comments, and recommendations. All comments and concerns raised during the sessions were documented and categorized for further analysis.

Findings

Stakeholders actively participated in the discussions and shared perspectives regarding the proposed expansion of High Biodiversity Protection Zones. Stakeholder input was documented according to the communities and sectors represented in order to identify recurring concerns, potential impacts, and recommendations for consideration.

Documenting stakeholder feedback enabled CZMAI and BFiD to identify actionable recommendations while maintaining transparency, stakeholder trust, and continued participation throughout the Belize Sustainable Ocean Plan process.

The consultations also provided insight into broader management and governance issues affecting coastal communities and marine resource users. Findings were grouped into two categories:

1. Issues directly related to the proposed Biodiversity Protection Zone expansion areas; and
2. Issues indirectly related to the proposals but relevant to broader marine governance and fisheries management concerns.

Key Concerns

Across all eleven consultation sessions, several recurring concerns were consistently raised by stakeholders. The principal concerns included:

- The need for improved management and enforcement of existing protected areas prior to the establishment of additional protected zones;

- Concerns regarding inadequate enforcement capacity, illegal fishing activities, and maritime security issues, including piracy and incursions by foreign fishing vessels;
- Concerns regarding dredging activities, mangrove deforestation, and coastal development impacts contributing to shoreline erosion and habitat degradation;
- Requests for greater transparency regarding the scientific basis and ecological rationale for the proposed deep-sea protection areas;
- Opposition to any future expansion of protected areas beyond the national 30% commitment; and
- Requests for improved stakeholder communication, transparency, and inclusion in future decision-making processes.

Table 2: Key Findings

Sessions	**Directly Related to Proposal 1 – East of Lighthouse Reef Atoll & EEZ**	**Directly Related to Proposal 2 – Swap of Sapodilla Cayes**	**Indirectly Related to Proposal**
Chunox Village	-No stakeholder indicated direct use of the proposed area. Approval to protect the proposed area. -Stakeholders questioned future policy protections, particularly regarding deep-sea areas and potential commercial exploitation. Requests were made for greater transparency, including access to fisheries data and assurances that Belizean fishers will be prioritized in future developments. - Stakeholders indicated that deep-sea areas may be less impactful if designated for protection, as they are not widely used by Chunox fishers.	-Area is not relevant to Chunox stakeholders.	-Expressed opposition to further protection beyond the 30%. -Request transparency about how attendance records, photographs, and community input will be used. -The need for stronger communication in both English and Spanish to ensure that all participants understand the proposals and can provide informed feedback. -Expressed concern about enforcement. How additional protected areas could be designated if existing reserves are not effectively enforced.

			-Concerns were raised about ongoing illegal activities, including reports of piracy and safety risks at sea. - Stakeholders emphasized their support for sustainability but expressed concern that conservation measures should not undermine livelihoods. -Stakeholders expressed distrust toward government and partner organizations, including concerns about the use of participation records. - Stakeholders emphasized that consultations and closed seasons result in loss of income, with the conch season closure leaving fishers without employment for approximately three months.

			-Concerns were raised regarding restricted access to traditional fishing areas, including locations such as Turneffe Atoll.
Sarteneja Village	-No stakeholder indicated direct use of the proposed area. Stakeholders did not express opposition to the newly proposed BPZs expansion areas. -Stakeholders suggested that deep-sea fishers be consulted directly on areas that may affect them.	-Area is not relevant to Sarteneja stakeholders.	-Stakeholders emphasized that greater notice and practical support are needed to help fishers sustain their households during closed seasons of lobster and conch. -Stakeholders questioned why private organizations hold quota allocations and expressed limited understanding of how fishing quotas, measured in pounds, are allocated and distributed through cooperatives. Requesting greater clarity and transparency on the quota allocation process. -Stakeholders questions about the possibility of rotational fishing

			approaches, improved markers for restricted areas, and coordination with relevant authorities regarding fishing near boat pathways such as the English Channel. -Stakeholders expressed dissatisfaction with existing fishing associations, inadequate sharing information. Leading to the formation of new associations and created tension among fishers. -Expressed opposition to further protection beyond the 30%. -Issue of illegal activities, regarding foreign fishing vessels, particularly from Honduras, and requested stronger measures to protect Belizean waters and safeguard local fishing livelihoods.
Corozal Town	-No stakeholder indicated direct use of the proposed area. Stakeholders did not express	-Area is not relevant to Corozal stakeholders.	-Stakeholders expressed dissatisfaction with existing fishing

	opposition to the newly proposed BPZs expansion areas. -Stakeholders suggested that deep-sea fishers be consulted directly on areas that may affect them.		associations, inadequate sharing information. Leading to the formation of new associations and created tension among fishers. -Expressed opposition to further protection beyond the 30%. -Issue of illegal activities, regarding foreign fishing vessels, particularly from Honduras, and requested stronger measures to protect Belizean waters and safeguard local fishing livelihoods. -Stakeholders emphasized that greater notice and practical support are needed to help fishers sustain their households during closed seasons of lobster and conch.

			-Stakeholders questioned why private organizations hold quota allocations and expressed limited understanding of how fishing quotas, measured in pounds, are allocated and distributed through cooperatives. Requesting greater clarity and transparency on the quota allocation process. -Stakeholders questions about the possibility of rotational fishing approaches, improved markers for restricted areas, and coordination with relevant authorities regarding fishing near boat pathways such as the English Channel.
Belize City	-Stakeholder indicated there might be about 5 to 7 users of proposed area. But are okay with the protection, with adjustment considering users of the area.	-Area is not relevant to Belize City stakeholders.	-Concern that the marine space is not for fishers and consider mostly tourism.

	-What is being protected in the proposed areas. -Why protect an area of little to no use? -What is the economic benefit to fishers under this protection? -What does “no-take” mean? -Will there be policies put in place to stop persons from using the area, along with enforcement? -What activities will be allowed in the areas, e.g. Tourism? -Suggest consulting deep sea fishers that were not present at the engagement.		-Fishermen Cooperation to assist with the decision making. -Expressed extreme dissatisfaction with enforcement and security measures.
Dangriga Town	-No stakeholder indicated direct use of the proposed area. -Needed clarity on what is meant by medium and high BPZs.	-Area is not relevant to Dangriga stakeholders. -What updates are available about the Stann Creek waters.	-Areas of concerns to Dangriga stakeholders are Tobacco Caye, Glover’s Reef and Water Caye.

	-What is being protected in the proposed areas. -What are the benefits of protection in these areas to the current protections. -Monitoring will be needed for the new proposed areas.		-Expressed extreme dissatisfaction with enforcement and security measures. -Issue of dredging. Major concern to key ecosystems and habitats. On Tobacco Caye.
Placencia Village	-No stakeholder indicated direct use of the proposed area. -Stakeholders indicated knowing of Belize City uses of the space. -To inform them of areas that are directly related to them, in the Placencia areas. As they cannot speak on areas they don't use.	-Stakeholders did not agree or disagree but indicated it does not mean they are satisfied with the proposal. -Question whether enforcement be increased in the area.	-Do not recommend increasing protected areas beyond the 30%. -The need for better protected of current MPA, before increase of more areas. -Expressed extreme dissatisfaction with enforcement and security measures. -Marine reserves to have seasonal measure to assist fishier during hardship.

			-Addressed the previous proposal in 2024 about Resilient Bold Belize (RBB) coral protection proposal. Should not be full protection but a replenishment with sessional access to fishers for harvest. -Issue of major deforestation of mangrove, as it causes great problem to shoreline/beach erosion. -Issue of dredging. Major concern to key ecosystems and habitats. -Issue of overwater structures. -Issue of overcrowded fishing areas, to reassess the licensing areas for fishers to work the areas they reside.

Riversdale Village	-No stakeholder indicated direct use of the proposed area. Approval to protect the proposed area. -What is being protected in the proposed areas. -Concerned of other communities that use the area are being consulted.	-Area is not relevant to Riversdale stakeholders. -Concerned of other communities that use the area are being consulted.	-Expressed extreme dissatisfaction with enforcement and security measures.
Punta Gorda Town	-No stakeholder indicated direct use of the proposed area. Approval to protect the proposed area. -What is being protected in the proposed areas.	-Express their gratitude for the consideration for the concern that was addressed in 2024. Approval of the swap in redesignation. -Will the demarcation (coordinates) be shared?	-The possible expansion of the Port Honduras Marine Reserve (PHMR). -Expressed extreme dissatisfaction with enforcement and security measures, especially in PHMR. -Co-Manager of the areas to be better relay of information to the stakeholders. -Would like a special meeting with BFiD and TIDE to address issues related to PHMR.

			-Issue of fish traps being placed in the reserve. -Recommend better training for the TIDE rangers to address illegal fishing and encroachment of neighbouring countries.
Caye Caulker Village	-Stakeholder indicated there might be about 2 to 3 users of proposed area. But are okay with the protection, with adjustment considering users of the area. -What is being protected in the proposed areas. -Would fishers still be able to access zone 9?	-Area is not relevant to Caye Caulker stakeholders. As it is out of range.	-Consideration for the redesignation for the Northern part of Turneffe Atoll for deep see fishers. -High priority areas for fishers have been placed under protection. -Issue of dredging. Major concern to key ecosystems and habitats. -Expressed extreme dissatisfaction with enforcement and security measures.
San Pedro Town	-No stakeholder indicated direct use of the proposed area.	-Area is not relevant to San Pedro stakeholders. As it is out of range.	-Issue of major deforestation of mangrove, as it causes great

	-What is being protected in the proposed areas. -What is the reason behind the 30% protection and the classifications of medium and high BPZs.	-Concern about the current dispute about the Sapodilla Cayes with Guatemala and Honduras currently at the International Court of Justice.	problem to shoreline/beach erosion and loss of habitat. Mangrove to be acknowledge as a national tree. -Recommended protection of areas where manatee reside. -Recommended protection of the lagoon behind San Pedro as it a hot spot for marine animals. -Issue of dredging. Major concern to key ecosystems and habitats. -Issue of developers -Expressed extreme dissatisfaction with enforcement and security measures. Fisheries officers uses their authority to exploit fishers.

			-Issue of private ownership of lands in the Hol Chan Marine Reserve. -Issue of no proper patrol in the Hol Chan Marine Reserve.
Belize City Deep Sea Fishers	- Recommended adjustment to use the 1000m contour line depth outward into the EEZ to use for the proposed protection.		-Concerned about the protection in the Mauger Caye areas, as is an areas used by fishers. In need for accurate coordinates.

Recommendations & Adjustments

While the majority of stakeholders expressed support for the proposed Biodiversity Protection Zone expansion, consultations identified approximately 10 deep-sea fishers who may utilize portions of the proposed area east of Lighthouse Reef Atoll.

Stakeholders recommended that additional consultations be conducted with deep-sea fishers from Belize City, as well as representatives from the National Fishermen Cooperative, to further refine the proposal and ensure that traditional fishing activities are adequately considered.

A key recommendation involved adjusting the proposed protection boundary to follow the 1000-meter contour line extending outward into the Exclusive Economic Zone. Stakeholders indicated that areas inward of the 1000-meter contour line adjacent to Lighthouse Reef Atoll are actively utilized by deep-sea fishers and should remain accessible.

Conclusion

Stakeholders generally accepted the proposed expansion of the Biodiversity Protection Zone east of Lighthouse Reef Atoll into the Exclusive Economic Zone, subject to the recommended adjustments identified during the consultations.

Although stakeholders did not express significant opposition to the proposed areas, concerns were raised regarding the rationale for selecting the proposed deep-sea areas over other locations perceived to be under greater environmental pressure, including areas such as the Placencia Lagoon. Stakeholders also requested additional information regarding the ecological significance, habitats, and resources present within the proposed deep-sea protection areas. In addition, proper demarcation to MPAs and other restricted zone to be properly and visibly know with the installation of buoys and sharing of coordinates.

Importantly, stakeholders consistently emphasized that they would not support additional protected areas beyond Belize's national 30% protection commitment.

With respect to the proposed redesignation within the Sapodilla Cayes, stakeholders from the southern region expressed appreciation that recommendations raised during the 2024 consultations had been taken into consideration, particularly regarding continued access to traditional fishing grounds.

Broader concerns related to enforcement, marine resource management, coastal development, mangrove deforestation, and maritime security were consistently raised throughout the consultation process. These discussions highlighted the need for strengthened management measures and enhanced inter-agency collaboration.

BFiD informed stakeholders that national enforcement efforts are being strengthened through increased collaboration with the Belize Coast Guard, including the use of drone technology and satellite monitoring systems to improve surveillance and enforcement capacity.

Next Steps

As the Belize Sustainable Ocean Plan process continues toward achieving the Milestone 6 deadline of November 4, 2026, work will continue simultaneously on continued stakeholder engagement and development of the plan document.

Stakeholders are encouraged to remain actively engaged throughout the process and to continue contributing to the development and implementation of the Belize Sustainable Ocean Plan.

Annex

Photos from consultations




Chunox Village




Sarteneja Village




Corozal Town




Belize City Session




Dangriga Town Session




Placencia Village Session




Riversdale Village Session




Punta Gorda Town Session




Caye Caulker Village Session




San Pedro Town Session

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