



# BELIZE PRESS OFFICE

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## PRESS RELEASE

### **Minister of National Security Visits Sapodilla Cayes Marine Reserve**

*Belmopan. August 4, 2020. 2:20 p.m.*

Minister of National Security Hon. Michael Peyrefitte, accompanied by the Belize Coast Guard, visited an extensive coral reef complex known as the Corona Reef located south of the Sapodilla Cayes Marine Reserve just within our maritime border, which is now a protected area.

The initiative to reserve this area was put forward by the Belize Coast Guard and taken to Cabinet for approval by the Minister of National Security. After a unanimous decision by Cabinet, on July 30th, 2020 Minister of Fisheries, Forestry, the Environment and Sustainable Development Hon. Omar Figueroa signed the statutory instrument that enshrines protected status upon this ecologically important marine system.

This particular reef complex includes some of the healthiest coral reefs, with 60% live coral cover, in the Mesoamerican Reef System. It is comprised of shallow reefs with depths ranging from 18-30 feet and also includes ridges and spurs that rise hundreds of feet to within 60 feet of the surface. This magnificent reef, covered with large and abundant barrel sponges, is one of the most underrepresented marine habitats in the Marine Protected Areas System of Belize. It is believed to be a biologically important hotspot that serves as a spawning aggregation site for numerous finfish and a habitat for deep-slope snapper, bottom dwellers and commercially important species like the Atlantic spadefish.

Being adjacent to the deep waters of the Cayman Trench, the Corona Reef attracts numerous megafauna such as whale sharks, blue marlins, sailfish, and sperm and pilot whales.

Unfortunately, due to the proximity of neighboring countries, primarily Guatemala and Honduras, the reef complex faces a continuous threat of transboundary illegal fishing. The signing marks another major stride in protecting critically important natural systems that define us as a country.

Belize continues to be a global leader in our efforts to protect our natural systems, both terrestrial and marine.

**Ends**