



PR#024-24

PRESS RELEASE

MBECA Refutes Amandala Headline, “Belize Fishers Demand Changes”

Belmopan, February 14, 2024.

The Ministry of the Blue Economy and Civil Aviation and its Fisheries Department notes with disappointment an article published in the February 9, 2024 edition of the Amandala Newspaper under the headlines, “Belize Fishers Demand Changes”.

The Ministry and the Fisheries Department commend the fishers for their interest in ensuring the long-term sustainability of Belize’s small-scale fisheries resources. The Ministry takes this opportunity to remind fishers that it remains committed to strengthening the country’s fisheries management regime. It also welcomes engagement with all fishers, individually or through their associations, to accomplish the best results through the new and innovative blue economy approach.

For this reason, the Ministry finds it incumbent to clarify misinformation that can lead to unnecessary alarm among fishing communities and stakeholders. Over the past 30 years, scientific data (fishery-dependent and independent) have confirmed the long-term sustainability of Belize’s shallow water fisheries. Recent stock assessments have confirmed high and consistent annual recruitment rates into the fisheries, well-defined population structures, and sustained catch levels over time series, which are performance indicators that demonstrate the viability of the fishery’s resources.

The Fisheries Department and its collaborating partners continue to identify areas to implement various measures to address the threat of unsustainability in fisheries proactively. Preventative measures have been taken to avoid a “crash” in our fisheries. The Department takes serious issue with the “Belize Fisheries Project”, which insists on presenting exaggerated data purporting an imminent “crash” in the country’s fisheries. This kind of external intervention is neither helpful nor beneficial to national efforts.

Like any other natural resource, there is a need for continued updates and strengthening of the management regime, especially in the face of increasing threats associated with using the resource and those presented by Climate Change. The Government of Belize, via the Ministry of Economic Development, the Ministry of Blue Economy and Civil Aviation, and the Fisheries Department, has programmed a full national assessment of the lobster, conch, and finfish (demersal and pelagic) stocks in the country’s territorial waters. Those include the deep areas in fishing area nine, a process that will inform the national status of Belize’s Fisheries. Based on this assessment, a practical plan will be developed to strengthen the management of Belize’s fisheries for long-term sustainability.

The Ministry of Blue Economy and Civil Aviation emphasizes that while overfishing has been identified as one of the threats to sustainable fisheries, the fisheries management response must be a holistic approach that takes into consideration other factors, such as the socio-economic realities, reef health and functionality, climate change, development pressures, and others, which also need to be assessed and become a part of the suite of management interventions. A process that must be home-grown and home-led.

The Department is fully aware of the Sea Around Us initiative and has welcomed the project to be a part of the Ministry's national programme. That holistic approach will ensure that the status of Belize's fisheries industry benefits from the best available information and expertise globally. The Department looks forward to a participatory and inclusive process, including the fishers and a road map for collective implementation by all parties interested in maintaining sustainable fisheries in Belize.

Belize has been and continues to be a global leader in managing small-scale fisheries. This success has resulted from a collective approach to managing the resources, including user stewardship, collaboration with on-the-ground

partners, and the vital inclusion of science from research partners. Despite the challenges, Belize can boast one of the best-managed small-scale fisheries.

The Ministry of Blue Economy and Civil Aviation reminds all Belizeans that only projects which have been reviewed and found to be in alignment with national priorities and programs of the Fisheries Department will receive the endorsement of this Ministry. Please be informed that the "Belize Fisheries Project" has yet to receive this endorsement.

Ends

For more information, please contact:
Ms. Giovanna Moguel,
Public Relations Officer
Ministry of Blue Economy & Civil Aviation
pro@blueeconomy.gov.bz