



PR#347

## PRESS RELEASE

### **Collaborative Partnerships Define New Shark Regulations and Cooperation with Fishers in Belize**

*Belmopan. June 24, 2021.*

The Ministry of Blue Economy and Civil Aviation met this week with the Fisheries Department, fisher folks and international partners to collaborate on shark conservation and management.

Sharks are being threatened in the Caribbean and around the world. Belize aims to improve shark conservation and management with newly adopted regulations. The new regulations protect sharks as apex predators of the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System, a World Heritage Site. Shark fishing will be prohibited within a two nautical mile radius around Lighthouse Reef, Glover's Reef, and Turneffe Atolls, establishing a safe haven measuring 1,500 square miles. These recommendations were made by the National Shark Working Group, a team comprised of the Government of Belize, shark fisher folks, NGOs and researchers.

"The group looked at the scientific data available and concluded that these regulations were a good investment to better protect some of Belize's threatened shark species," said Ms. Beverly Wade, Policy and Planning advisor for the Ministry of Blue Economy and Civil Aviation (MBECA).

The new shark regulations are to be signed into law next month and are similar to regulations for the protection of other iconic species such as jaguars in the Cockscomb Basin area.

Kennedy Carrillo, CEO in the Ministry of Blue Economy explained that "the Ministry of the Blue Economy welcomes the opportunity to further demonstrate its commitment to the preservation and conservation of our blue resources, in particular those that are most endangered."

The initiative of the National Shark Working Group combined fishers' knowledge of how and where to catch sharks in Belize with the experience of using electronic tracking devices by the Mote Marine Laboratory Sharks & Rays Conservation Program. The team has already fitted five sharks in Belize with satellite tracking devices.

"These sharks have already made some interesting movements that can inform management here in Belize," said Dr. Chapman from Mote Marine Lab.

Belizean fisher folks have expressed enthusiasm for the work and the resulting shark management regulations, noting that through their collaboration, fisher folks and researchers have come to respect each other's viewpoints.

Other collaborators and partners include The Ellen Fund/ Ellen DeGeneres Foundation and Greg Manocherian, supporter of the shark conservation program of the Georgia Aquarium. Additional funding comes from the Mays Family Foundation, Earthwatch International, and Betsy and Peter Snow.

## **Ends**

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