



GOVERNMENT OF BELIZE

For more information contact:

*Ministry of Fisheries, Forestry, the Environment
and Sustainable Development
2nd Floor, Old Lands Building
Market Square, City of Belmopan*

Tel: +501-822-0160

+501-822-0162

Fax: +501-822-0433

Email: ceo.sec@environment.gov.bz

JOINT PRESS RELEASE

**Ministry of Fisheries, Forestry, the Environment and Sustainable Development
(MFFESD), the Coalition for Sustainable Fisheries and Oceana**

Statutory Instrument Signed into Law to Ban Gill Nets from Marine Waters

Belmopan, (6th November 2020). In a demonstration of commitment to maintain a vibrant and sustainable fishery sector, Dr. Hon. Omar Figueroa, Minister of Fisheries, Forestry, the Environment and Sustainable Development, has signed into law Statutory Instrument No. 158 of 2020 titled Fisheries Resources (Gill net prohibition) Regulations, 2020, banning the use and possession of gill nets in the marine waters of Belize. The area covered by the ban includes all the sea under the jurisdiction of Belize.

The passage of Statutory Instrument 158 of 2020 concludes a two-year long process which began in 2018 that saw: (i) the establishment of a stakeholder taskforce in 2018 to examine the issue of gill net use; (ii) the development of recommendations in 2019 to phase out gill nets concluding in a ban; (iii) the signing of a cooperate agreement in 2020 between the Coalition for Sustainable Fisheries, Oceana and the Government of Belize to assist gill net fishers to transition to alternative income generating opportunities and trade-in their gill nets; and (iv) the successful engagement of gill net fishers in 2020 in the transition and buy-back process. At the culmination of this two-year long process, with a successful transition programme in place, the use and possession of gill nets in the maritime waters is now prohibited by the gazetting of Statutory Instrument 158 of 2020 on 5th November 2020.

On the occasion of the signing, the Coalition stated, “The Coalition thanks those Belizean gill net fishers who have voluntarily surrendered their gill nets, thereby providing all Belizean fishers with a brighter future. These measures will ensure that productive fisheries remain available for future generations of fishers and will provide security to all those whose livelihoods depend on a healthy marine ecosystem. These include tour guides, restaurant and hotel owners, fly fishing guides and a host of others, all of whom dedicate

much time and energy toward safeguarding our natural heritage. The Coalition looks forward to continuing its work with the former gill nets fishers by providing them financial and other resources which will help them to adopt alternative fishing practices.”

Commenting on this milestone, Janelle Chanona, Vice President of Oceana, stated, “The ban on gill nets is a win for all Belizeans. We recognize the sensational voices of all fishers, activists and allies who have ensured that this issue has remained a priority. Oceana reiterates its unwavering commitment to supporting the policies and practices that increase abundance so that fishers can always depend on fishing and so Belize can always boast magnificent marine biodiversity.”

Hon. Osmany Salas, NGO Senator, offered his congratulations and support. He said, “The ban on gill nets demonstrates the serious collective commitment by the Government, NGO community and the public about improving the sustainable management of our fishery resources for the benefit of current and future generations of Belizeans. I offer my congratulations to everyone who worked hard to make the ban a reality.”

The Government of Belize recognizes the collective commitment of the private sector, conservation community and fishers to the sustainability of our fisheries sector and will continue to work to ensure that Belizeans will be able to depend on a bountiful and beautiful Caribbean Sea for generations to come.

For immediate release.

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Note to Editors:

The members of the Coalition for Sustainable Fisheries include the following organizations:

Belize Tourism Industry Association
Belize Game Fish Association
National Sports Fishing Association
Belize Federation of Fishers
Turneffe Atoll Trust
Yellowdog Conservation and Community Foundation
MAR Alliance