



PRESS RELEASE

Official Launch of Belize's Marine Spatial Planning Process

Thursday, October 20th, 2022

The Government of Belize, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, launched the Marine Spatial Planning process on October 19th, 2022. The launch of this planning process marks a milestone accomplishment under the Blue Loan Agreement and the Conservation Funding Agreement signed last November 2021 between the Government of Belize and TNC. These agreements underpin the country's trailblazing debt conversion for marine conservation.

The launch, which was held at the Best Western Belize Biltmore Plaza, was attended by representatives from the government, civil society, and the private sector as well as Belize's international development partners. This broad-based participation reflects the critical importance of this planning process to the tourism, fisheries, natural resource management, marine and coastal conservation, shipping, and national security sectors. Members of the public were also invited to view and participate virtually in the launch, which was live-streamed on Facebook.

Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) is a public, inclusive, and participatory process through which stakeholders determine the optimal distribution of human activities across marine areas to achieve the country's ecological, economic, and social objectives. The launch was an opportunity to share with the Belizean public what the MSP is, what to expect from the planning process, and how they can participate in developing a plan that serves their diverse interests.

Prime Minister Hon. John Briceno and Minister Andre Perez of the Ministry of Blue Economy and Civil Aviation, as well as Narda Garcia, Chief Executive Officer, Office of the Prime Minister & Investment, and Kennedy Carrillo, Chief Executive Officer, Ministry of Blue Economy and Civil Aviation, spoke on the government's commitment and aspirations for the MSP.

Prime Minister John Briceño pointed out that *"The Belize Blue Bond is a triple win for Belize! It resulted in the reduction of our public debt by 12 percent of GDP, the advancement of conservation and climate policy expansion and the creation of a long-term financing mechanism to support marine conservation and the wise use of our Blue Natural Capital. Through the Marine Spatial Plan, the blue bond will allow us to develop a blueprint for sustainable development and growth, as well as see the protection of up to 30 percent of our total Ocean Space. We are determined to employ a framework that results in a vibrant and robust blue economy contributing meaningfully to our national economy and the welfare of our citizenry"*

Speaking on the importance of the MSP process, Hon. André Perez noted that, *"MSP must be embraced as a valuable tool in delivering Belize's Blue Economy objectives. It is necessary to balance demands for development and economic growth with the need to protect our environment and cultural heritage. This MSP will complement the Belize Blue Economy Development Policy and Strategy (2022 - 2027) and Maritime Economy Plan, and advance other MSP approaches currently used in Belize such as Marine Protected Areas, Managed Access, and the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan."*

For this official launch, the Government of Belize was joined by Ms. Julie Robinson, Director of The Nature Conservancy – a key partner in realizing Belize's marine conservation commitments under the Blue Loan Agreement and the Conservation Funding Agreement.

"Ms. Julie Robinson emphasizes that "The Nature Conservancy will continue to support Belize by providing the latest scientific knowledge so that Belize's MSP process is conducted using state-of-the-art methods, which serves as a model to other nations. The TNC Country Program comprises talented and experienced Belizeans who will work on the ground with local stakeholders to develop an equitable plan that meets Belize's conservation and development needs."

A highlight of today's event was the unveiling of the name of this plan by Prime Minister John Briceño and the TNC Belize Programme Director. Through an open voting process hosted on Facebook, the **Belize Sustainable Ocean Plan** was chosen by the public.

During the event, the Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute, (CZMAI) the agency leading the MSP process, described the vision for the MSP as *"A healthy, resilient, and equitably shared ocean that supports a thriving national economy and nurtures the culture and well-being of all Belizeans"*, which would be achieved by developing and implementing a legally enforceable plan that guides sustainable development and designates up to 30% of Belize's ocean as Biodiversity Protection Zones. The planning process will be based on cutting-edge science and the best available data, and it will be guided by the principles of inclusivity, participation, transparency, and equity. CZMAI also shared the 5-year timeline for this planning process and explained how it will be integrated with other initiatives within the national planning framework.

Belize's \$US 364 million debt conversion for marine conservation, signed in November 2021, allowed Belize to lower its sovereign commercial debt by BZ \$378 M (US \$189 M) and create long-term, sustainable financing of approximately BZ \$8.4 M (US \$4.2 M) annually for ocean conservation for the next 20 years. The development of a legally enforceable MSP will be a critical process and tool in ensuring that Belize meets its conservation commitments, preserves its valuable natural resources, and supports the growth of the national economy.

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