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PRESS RELEASE

Official Launch of Belize Blue Economy Development Policy & Strategy and Belize Maritime Economy Plan

Belmopan, October 31, 2022.

Today, the Government of Belize through the Ministry of Blue Economy and Civil Aviation, with support from the Biodiversity Finance Initiative Belize (BIOFIN) and the United Nations Development Program, hosted the historic launch of Belize's first Blue Economy Development, Policy and Strategy (BEDPS) and the first Belize Maritime Economy Plan (MEP) at the Grand Caribe Resort in San Pedro Town, Ambergris Caye. This milestone is a significant step forward in defining what the Blue Economy means for Belize's economic growth and sustainable ocean governance.

According to the World Bank, '*Blue Economy*' as a concept is the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth and improved livelihood and jobs while preserving the health of ocean ecosystems. Therefore, the Belize Blue Economy Development Policy, Strategy, and Implementation Plan 2022-2027 (BEDPS) sets out an enabling framework for Blue Economy (BE) development in Belize. The five-year policy and strategy was developed, with the support from Turneffe Atoll Sustainability Association and the Belize Marine Fund, through a consultative process with multiple stakeholders across the Government of Belize, civil society, private sector, academia, non-governmental organizations, community-based organisations, local authorities and municipalities, associations, and cooperatives. The BEDPS provides overarching high-level strategic guidance for BE development, with its vision for "*Belize's Blue Economy, by year 2030, is productive, sustainable, resilient and vibrant, contributing sustainably to the socio-economic well-being of the country and its people.*" The Ministry of Blue Economy and Civil Aviation through its Blue Economy Unit will coordinate implementation of this policy and strategy through a multi-sectoral approach with stakeholders and collaborative partners, incorporating BE guiding principles to ensure sustainable economic growth while maintaining our healthy ocean resources.

Aligned with the Blue Economy Development Policy and Strategy, the first Belize Maritime Economy Plan (MEP) provides an overview of the existing maritime/ocean economy of Belize. The MEP presents an analysis of existing sectors and strategic guidance to enable support for a transition to sustainable practices, sustainable development and growth of our ocean space. This supports our national blue economy development vision and direction, while keeping in mind national issues and targets such as reducing emissions and addressing impacts of climate change, international commitments such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals – specifically SDG 14 – Life below water, and common challenges faced by Small Island Developing States.

The Maritime Economy Plan and accompanying Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) for Belize’s Blue Economy (2022-2027) were developed with the support of the Government of the United Kingdom through the Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme and is aligned with the BEDPS 2022-2027. The MEP presents potential development pathways, and strategic guidance for economic growth of Belize’s blue space within sectors that use our ocean resources. Focusing on ‘bedrock’ traditional sectors such as fisheries, tourism and shipping as well as emerging sectors such as marine renewable energy, aquaculture, marine biotechnology, and ecosystem services. The complementary SIP builds on the three pillars of sustainable development, environment, social and economic, and aligns with the BE guiding principles to promote Belize’s transition to a sustainable blue growth.

Valdemar Andrade, Executive Director of Turneffe Atoll Sustainability Association, stated, *“The success of any of these guiding documents will not only be based on the content and practicality of the content and clarity with which these were compiled and written but in the ownership that we all have for the implementation, “the division of labour”, from each governmental ministry, from each fishing association, from each fishing cooperative, from each fish trading entity, from each tourism business, from each NGO within the sector, from each private sector or public sector entity etc. Therefore, the challenge for all of us on the Blue Economy Cluster along with the Ministry is to now socialize and mainstream these guiding documents and to ensure the “delivery of the practical solutions”. We must continue to take up our share and support others in accomplishing theirs.”*

H.E. Nicole Davison, British High Commissioner to Belize, stated in her remarks, *“The UK Government is pleased to partner with the Government of Belize to develop the Maritime Economy Plan launched today. We were keen to ensure the Plan was aligned to the Government Blue Development Strategy and Policy. Together the implementation of the Plan and the Strategy will be critical next steps in creating sustainable and long-term use of Belize’s marine area. It is our aim to support you on your journey to ensure that the economic development of your ocean ensures prosperity for Belize.”*

Hon. Andre Perez, Minister of Blue Economy and Civil Aviation said, *“Both the Blue Economy Development Policy and Strategy and the Maritime Economy Plan comes at a pivotal time in Belize’s development as we shift onto a blue growth pathway and provides clear national direction for development of our blue economy. As we conserve and protect our Belize Barrier Reef and our marine wealth untold, let us all work together to build our Blue Economy, improving our livelihoods and sustainably managing our ocean resources for ourselves and our future generations.”*

The launch of these documents will guide the Ministry of Blue Economy and Civil Aviation, and signal to national, regional and international partners and stakeholders and the public of the Government of Belize’s national direction and continued forward momentum in shifting Belize onto a blue economy development pathway to join and align with our already green economy pathway.

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