



PR#214-26

PRESS RELEASE

GOB Secures Landmark Agreement to Protect Turneffe Atoll

Belmopan, August 20, 2026.

On Wednesday, August 19, 2026, the Government of Belize signed the Turneffe Conservation Land Trust Deed of Mutual Release, Compromise, and Settlement. The agreement represents the successful transformation of an earlier agreement between the Government of Belize and the Turneffe Atoll Trust into a stronger and more comprehensive national agreement. Under the new arrangement, approximately 17,000 acres will remain as national lands under public ownership, with the Government of Belize holding the lands in an irrevocable conservation trust for the benefit of the people of Belize.

The agreement provides for the Turneffe Atoll Sustainability Association (TASA) to play an important role in the management of the lands, while maintaining the continued participation of the Turneffe Atoll Trust. This collaborative approach brings together the Government and conservation partners already working to safeguard Turneffe Atoll and its natural resources. The agreement further strengthens the protection of three essential flats-fishing habitats within the Turneffe Atoll Marine Reserve. These habitats support Belize's multi-million-dollar flats-fishing industry and species such as bonefish, permit, and tarpon, while sustaining guides, tourism operators, communities, and businesses across the country.

Prime Minister Hon. John Briceño underscored the significance of the agreement for Belize's conservation and development priorities. He stated, "These lands remain Belizean lands. They remain under public ownership. And they are being secured permanently for present and future generations of Belizeans. May this agreement mark the beginning of an even stronger era of conservation, science, sustainable livelihoods, and responsible development at Turneffe Atoll."

Through the agreement, BZ\$2.2 million is being secured to support the establishment of a marine research facility at Turneffe Atoll through the University of Belize. The Turneffe Atoll Trust has also committed to assisting the University in mobilizing up to approximately BZ\$5 million in additional funding for marine research. The proposed facility is expected to support marine science and long-term monitoring, university education and field training, fisheries and ecosystem research, climate and blue-carbon science, international research partnerships, and innovation supporting Belize's growing blue economy.

Prime Minister Briceño also recognized the Turneffe Atoll Trust, Senator Hon. Christopher Coye, and the Government team involved in the negotiations, as well as the Ministry of Natural Resources, Petroleum and Mining, the Ministry of Blue Economy and Marine Conservation, the Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute, the Attorney General's Ministry, the University of Belize, and other partners that provided technical and legal support toward the agreement.

The signing marks an important milestone in safeguarding Turneffe Atoll as part of Belize's natural heritage, while creating opportunities for conservation, science, sustainable livelihoods, and responsible development for future generations.

Ends