

# Resilient Central America (ResCA) Belize

**Belize is a country known for its impressive biodiversity, incredible marine ecosystems and beautiful coral reefs.**

Belize is rich with diverse landscapes, from the tropical forests and mountains in the southwest, to estuaries and mangrove and littoral forests along the eastern shore. Alongside the 386km of Belizean coastline, over 35% of Belize's population live in coastal communities and fisheries have played a prominent role in the country's history and future. Therefore, fisheries have played a prominent role in the past and future of Belize as a country.

Internationally, Belize's fisheries have garnered significant attention for its country-wide initiatives to invest and improve its' small scale artisanal fisheries. A well-organized network of fishing cooperatives, managers and authorities, Belize's small-scale artisanal fisheries are a model for other countries in the region. Belize's seas harbor two of the country's most commercially valuable species –lobster and conch– as well as 301 km of the world's second longest coral reef in the world, the Mesoamerican Reef. Due to the health of the reef, the fisheries and tourism industries are amongst the top five economic contributors to Belize's GDP.

## THE PROBLEM

HOWEVER, DUE TO A CHANGING CLIMATE AND LIMITED RESOURCES to react to these issues, Belize's fisheries have undergone drastic changes over the last two decades. Unsustainable fishing practices, compounded by the effects of rising temperatures, coastal development and loss of habitat have caused fisheries stocks to severely decline, resulting in widespread impacts on the country's society, economy and environment. Two of the most impacted fisheries in Belize are the lobster and conch fisheries, which bring in over \$10M USD annually for Belize and are valued at over \$1B USD in the Central America region.



## THE URGENCY

FISHERIES ARE VALUABLE RESOURCES TO COMMUNITIES and governments, and without sound policies and management practices implemented, these stocks will decline even further. While Belize's fisheries sector is more stable compared to other fisheries in the region, there is still ample opportunity to improve practices and provide a solid model for other small-scale fisheries to replicate. Without action, Belize's fisheries and those in the region may soon be approaching the brink of no return.

## THE SOLUTION

STAKEHOLDERS HAVE IDENTIFIED THAT SECURING THE FOOD supply, security and livelihoods in Belize and the Mesoamerican Reef region will directly impact over 100,000 people. The most pragmatic solution to addressing this challenge is to improve capacity in implementing effective fishery management practices, designing and executing adequate policies, and providing alternative economic activities to traditional fishing

By working with the fisheries sector, TNC will work to design a multi-sector compact that will improve data input and management of this fisheries information. Alongside the improvement of these better management practices, an alternative economic model of seaweed aquaculture will be developed with the potential of linking into value chains regionally and globally.



## TNC'S PROPOSAL

Through ResCA, TNC Belize will work through four key pillars:

- 1 Empower fishing communities.** Intervening on the ground with multiple fishing communities, ResCA will design management approaches to train fishers in sustainable fisheries diversification activities that promote climate mitigation and adaptation at the local level.
- 2 Promote sound science and technology at national and regional scales.** Utilizing TNC's science based approach, ResCA proposes to design effective tools and systems that will improve ecological and socioeconomic data collection and analysis. ResCA's goal is that this science and technology will guide management decisions for fisheries to become climate resilient. This approach will focus on at least one key fishery in the region.
- 3 Strengthen policy and governance.** Collaborating with the public sector, ResCA intends to create supportive policy and legal frameworks for fisheries management at the national and regional level.
- 4 Improve fisheries sustainability, profitability and resilience.** Creating resilience in the fisheries value chain, ResCA strives to increase seafood product quality and strengthen the role of diverse actors, such as community fishing associations and local businesses, to achieve sustainability and success in the marketplace. By engaging with all stakeholders in the value chain, and identifying areas for improvement, ResCA will facilitate access to premium markets, create new market-based incentives, and reinforce existing market-based incentives for sustainable fishing practices.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Julie Robinson, [jrobinson@tnc.org](mailto:jrobinson@tnc.org), Belize Oceans Manager
- Mauricio Castro Schmitz, [mcastro@tnc.org](mailto:mcastro@tnc.org), LAR Lands Manager, TNC Latin America
- Jesse Festa, [jesse.festa@tnc.org](mailto:jesse.festa@tnc.org), ResCA Program Coordinator, Latin America

