

For Immediate Release:

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in Belize congratulates the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration on their announcement to increase Fishery Replenishment Zones from 4.5% to 11.6% of Belize’s Exclusive Economic Zone.

Belize City, Belize, April 5th, 2019 – The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in Belize congratulates the Belize Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration for the announcement to increase Fishery Replenishment Zones approved by the Cabinet last Tuesday, April 2nd. This initiative was implemented thanks to the leadership of the Belize Fisheries Department, in collaboration with The Nature Conservancy, Wildlife Conservation Society, Environmental Defense Fund, fisheries stakeholders and other government and non-governmental organizations.

Replenishment zones protect critically important species and habitats, allowing fish populations to thrive and impacted ecosystems to recover by prohibiting any extractive activities from these areas. This sustains a healthy balance between the needs of biodiversity protection and resource utilization; all while reducing vulnerability to climate change and benefiting livelihoods without compromising ecological integrity.

The expansion of Fisheries Replenishment (no-take) Zones ensures that Belize complies with several international obligations such as the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to conserve 10% of all marine and coastal ecological regions by 2020, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Belize’s Growth and Sustainable Development Strategy to name a few.

With guidance from the Belize Fisheries Department, Coastal Zone Management Authority & Institute, Environmental Research Institute, Healthy Reefs Initiative, Spatial Support Systems and the Wildlife Conservation Society, TNC led the spatial analysis, developed interactive decision-support tools and co-led the consultations with fishers that identified critical areas for protection.

Acknowledging that some fishers could be impacted by this expansion, TNC, along with partners, developed a comprehensive National Economic Alternatives and Fisheries Diversification Plan for fishing communities in Belize also known as the *Fish for Life* Plan. The plan provides a coordinated national level response to address the livelihood needs of those that are affected by fisheries management measures such as the expansion of Fisheries Replenishment (no-take) Zones.

All collaborators in this initiative aimed for an ambitious goal of having at least 10% of all major habitat types within Belize’s waters within Fishery Replenishment Zones.

“Great accomplishment for Belize and for the world! Once again Belize sets the standard, leading by example, and showing how functional conservation does good for nature and people. Fisheries Replenishment zones protect the very resource that sustains Belize’s coastal economies and works

towards securing healthy marine resources far into the future.” Alex Martinez, Belize Country Representative and Conservation Director

“Safeguarding our marine resources and allowing for the long-term sustainable use into the future is at the heart of Belizeans, particularly those individuals dependent on our seas.” Julie Robinson, Belize Oceans Lead.

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