

THE QUARTERLY CATCH

E-NEWSLETTER

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WELCOME....

Welcome to our ninth issue of the Quarterly Catch, the BHSFU quarterly e-newsletter. We are now at the end of the first quarter of 2021 and while, for some of us, things have returned to a sense of normal, others still remain in lock down due to the continued surge in Covid cases. With the introduction of the vaccine in most countries, we are optimistic that it will bring an end to the pandemic. Nonetheless, we continue to bring to you our e-newsletter and hope you will find it enjoyable reading to pass the time as well as informative and of course entertaining. We reiterate that all our articles are researched, curated and tailored to what we think will be gratifying and useful to our readers.

Valarie Lanza - Director for High Seas Fisheries



Belize - What's Happening....

By: Delice Pinkard - Senior Fisheries Officer



Without a doubt, 2020 has proven to be one of the most challenging years for the world in recent times; ushering in the Covid-19 pandemic and effectively changing the world as we know it.

Belize was not spared the wrath of this disease as it had severe social, psychological and economic impacts on the country, as it did the rest of the world. In an attempt to keep the disease at bay, Belize had to effectively lock down the country to keep its citizens safe. This had debilitating effects on the economy as the tourism industry which accounts for 60% of Belize's GDP was incapacitated and the rest of the productive sector ground to a halt. At first, it seems that Belize will be spared the onslaught of the Covid 19 pandemic; however, infection slowly began to spread and has climbed to more than 12,000 confirmed cases countrywide with a 2.55% fatality rate.

Despite the pandemic, a surreal version of her existence pressed on which saw national elections being held, and the new government being formed by the People's United Party under the leadership of Honorable John Antonio Briceño

who is Belize's 5th Prime Minister and the incumbent Minister of Finance, Economic Development and Investment. The new government introduced a new vision and new plan to stabilize the economy and arrest the Covid-19 pandemic. It broadened the scope of government's purview, introducing new ministries such as the Ministry of Blue Economy, the Ministry of New Growth Industries and the Ministry of Constitutional and Political Reform. The newly expanded Ministry of Health and Wellness also introduced measures to arrest the spread of the pandemic in Belize and procure vaccinations to fight this virus. The Ministry of Health and Wellness launched a robust vaccination schedule with vaccines procured through COVAX facility of the World Health Organization, the European Commission and the Government of France as well as vaccines donated by the governments of Barbados and India.

Many Belizeans are skeptical about receiving the Covid-19 vaccine due to the sensationalism of the mainstream media and being unaware of the the protocol and safeguards in place for the development of vaccines. However, regardless of brand or efficacy, all the vaccines that are currently available will keep you alive, out of the hospital, and prevent severe symptoms. There remains one undeniable truth that every person vaccinated, will bring the world closer to the end of this pandemic.

Despite all the challenges, the BHSFU continues to operate optimally by continuing to service our vessel owners and operators in a timely and efficient manner.



Stay alert, control the virus, get vaccinated, save lives. Together against Covid-19

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A Peek at BHSFU Partnerships

By: Robert Robinson - Deputy Director



The Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit (BHSFU), established in November 2013, continues to be a leader in global fisheries management; however, its success can be partially attributed to the partnerships and inter-agency relationships that it has forged over the years. This feature highlights some of those partnerships and brings to the forefront some of the processes that are deeply embedded in the services offered by the BHSFU.

The International Merchant Marine Registry of Belize (IMMARBE) has been in operation since the early 1990s and once served as a joint steward of Belize's high seas fisheries management. However, IMMARBE serves as the first official point of contact for all high seas fishing vessels flying the Belizean flag since vessels must first be duly registered before they can be granted any fishing authorization. Although this process works seamlessly, there is much collaboration between IMMARBE and the BHSFU before a vessel's registration is approved. The Registration Department of IMMARBE is always diligent in ensuring that vessels are eligible for a fishing license before final registration is approved.

The following two agencies play an integral role in the export of Belize's high seas fish product. Firstly, the Belize Agricultural Health Authority (BAHA) conducts exhaustive surveys and inspections to ensure that Belize flagged fishing vessels meet the standards for food safety compliance in accordance with the hazard analysis and critical point (HACCP) certification system which is an internationally recognized preventative risk management system for safety in food processing. This sanitary certification provided by BAHA allows Belize's high seas fishery products to access all global markets.



(Photo courtesy Belize Customs Department website)

Secondly, the BHSFU's partnership with the Belize Customs Department (BCED) helps to facilitate the validation of the EUR.1 Certificate which is issued in accordance with the economic partnership agreement between the European Community and CARIFORUM States. This certificate allows Belize high seas fishery products destined for European markets to enjoy preferential import tariffs upon entry into the European market.

All these partnerships, and countless others, are the reason why the BHSFU has been able to provide quality level of service that it has throughout its existence while remaining competitive in the high seas fisheries industry.

DID YOU KNOW?

Scientists can figure out how old a fish is by counting growth rings on its scales or its ear bones (called "otoliths"). The rings mark seasonal changes in fish growth, like the annual rings in tree trunks.

"Otoliths" grow like pearls, but the added material changes color depending on the season. The summer ring is whiter and the winter ring is thinner and more translucent.

In scales, a series of fine rings appear as the scale grows. In summer the rings are wider apart. In winter the rings are closer together, because the fish grow more slowly. Each pair of rings indicates one year.

Celebrating Easter in Belize



While Easter is known globally to be a sacred holiday for Christians, it is undoubtedly the most important holiday for Belizeans because of the multiple days of holidays associated with it and because it is celebrated with extra reverence in Belize where most people identify as Roman Catholic.

Easter is the single longest public and bank holiday in Belize lasting four days from Good Friday to Easter Monday and most businesses across the country closes by noon on Holy Thursday. It is both a time of peaceful reflection and celebration spent with family and friends. During this holiday, most Belizeans head out to the cays, such as Caye Caulker and San Pedro or down south to Placencia and Hopkins for clear skies, cool waters and white beaches.



(Belizean Cross Bun - Photo courtesy Cooking with Shirani on Youtube)

Holy Thursday is the beginning of the long-anticipated holiday and is the day on which most people begin traveling to their destinations. Good Friday is usually a quiet day because most people attend all-day church service or view re-enactments of the passion of Christ and as per Lenten traditions, fast from meat. Normally on this day Belizeans stick to traditional dishes such as Sere, a fish soup made from coconut milk and ripe plantains, fried fish and cross buns, which is a local sweet bread that is decorated with a cross to symbolize the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

(Photo courtesy of Delice Pinkard- Baby Model Bianka Pinkard)



On Holy Saturday the mood turns more festive with the commencement of one of the most popular sporting events of the year, the annual Cross-Country Cycling Classic. Held every year since 1928, this race features racers making a grueling 140-mile round trip from Belize city to San Ignacio. Others of course spend the day socializing, eating, drinking, attending fairs and other events across the country.

Easter Sunday is a time for celebrating Easter Mass. Later families organize Easter egg hunts for the kids while the adults enjoy fun games and activities while soaking up the sun and water or just enjoying picnics and family socials. The night life from Saturday leading into Sunday is packed with concerts and live performances.

On Easter Monday most people start to head back home or just spend the day relaxing as the holidays come to an end.

Easter is quite similar to other major holidays like Christmas and Halloween, which have evolved over the last 200 years or so. In all these holidays, many traditions have blended so that they are enjoyed by every one.

First Quarter Accomplishments

By: Valarie Lanza- Director for High Seas Fisheries

The beginning of 2021 has been very busy for the BHSFU in regards to our legislative framework. We have adopted several important policies to aid in and strengthen our fisheries management framework. These include a Quota Management Policy which outlines the guidelines for the allocation and management of quotas and catch limits for species regulated by a RFMO for which specific quota limits has been established or for which a specific management measure exists. A Fee Management Policy, which sets out the fundamental fee charging principles and the requirements, rules and practices governing application and administration of fees.

We are also working on two agreements for inter-agency cooperation. The first is with Global Fishing Watch (GFW) for data sharing of vessel position data which will help to strengthen our monitoring, control and surveillance activities. We are also finalizing an agreement with the Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute (CZMAI) for the collection and reporting of sport fishing and recreational fishing data. This will also strengthen Belize's international data reporting obligations and compliance efforts.

We have updated our requirements on the measures to mitigate the impact of fishing for all fishing stocks on seabirds and have implemented new requirements for the reporting of mitigation measures on board all Belize flagged fishing vessels. We have also commenced work on the review of our Fish Aggregating Device (FAD) Management Plan in line with new RFMO requirements. We have also commenced our annual consolidation of data for reporting to the relevant RFMOs.

For the next quarter we envisage to keep the momentum going with the streamlining of our fishing vessel circulars and commence the review and amendment of our National Plan of Action for Seabirds.

DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know, fish can get sunburn, but it is unusual unless there is something about their environment that does not allow them to seek deeper water or some kind of shelter.

The Art of Purse Seine Fishery



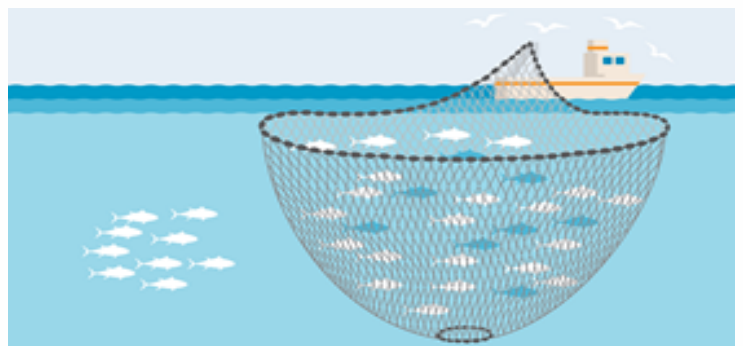
By Ernie Howe - Fisheries Officer

Purse seines are used in the open ocean to fish for species that swim in large schools near the ocean surface.

In a purse seine the top of the net is floated at the ocean's surface and the bottom of the net has nets attached that pull the walls of the net downwards.

The bottom of the net has a wire threaded through it which is pulled and tightens the net like a purse, trapping the fish inside.

The net is then pulled in toward the boat and the catch is either pumped or lifted out with small nets or the whole net is brought on board. The size of purse seine nets can be varied depending on what species are being targeted



(Photo courtesy www.msc.org)

The purse seine method of fishing is very selective as it normally targets one species at a time. This means that there is not much impact of fishing with this gear on other species. Because this type of fishing gear is set near the ocean floor and do not actually touch the sea floor, the impact on the marine environment is also negligible.

Belize currently has 10 fishing vessels which engage in purse seine fishing on the high seas.

Reference: www.afma.gov.au
www.msc.org