

**Fishing Vessel Circular Letter No. 061**  
**08 December 2023**  
**Series: RFMO-2023**

To: All Ship Owners, Operators, Deputy Registrars, Resident Agents, Representatives, and other Stakeholders

Subject: **BYCATCH AND DISCARDS**

Reference: Issued in accordance with Part VIII, Section 50(1)(c) of the High Seas Fishing Act, 2013

Circular Superseded: FVC-019/2017, Issued 9<sup>th</sup> March 2017

## **BACKGROUND**

Bycatch and discards are two interconnected concepts in the fishing industry that have significant ecological and economic implications. Bycatch refers to the unintended capture of non-target species in fishing operations. This can include various marine animals such as dolphins, sea turtles, seabirds, and juvenile fish. Discards, on the other hand, refer to the practice of throwing back unwanted or unmarketable catch into the sea.

Bycatch and discards are prevalent in both commercial and artisanal fishing, often resulting from the use of non-selective fishing gear and techniques. These practices have raised concerns due to their negative impact on marine ecosystems and the sustainability of fish stocks. Bycatch can lead to the depletion of vulnerable species, disrupt food chains, and harm biodiversity. Discards contribute to waste and inefficiency in the fishing industry, as valuable resources are discarded rather than utilized.

Efforts to address bycatch and discards have been made through the implementation of various management strategies and technological innovations. These include the use of more selective fishing gear, fishing area closures, and the adoption of fishing practices that minimize bycatch. Additionally, policies and regulations have been put in place to encourage the reduction of discards and promote more sustainable fishing practices.

The concept of bycatch and discards highlights the importance of responsible fishing practices and the need for collaboration between stakeholders, including fishermen, scientists, policymakers, and conservationists. By addressing these issues, a more sustainable and balanced approach to fishing, preserving marine ecosystems and ensuring the long-term viability of the industry can be achieved.

## **MANAGEMENT MEASURES**

When it comes to managing bycatch and discards, there are several effective measures that can be implemented. These management strategies aim to minimize the unintended capture of non-target species and reduce the wasteful practice of discarding unwanted catch. Below are some key management measures.

1. Juveniles and undersized individuals of target species are considered bycatch and should immediately be discarded and recorded in the vessel's fishing log and/or monthly reporting forms.
2. Species that are under quota restrictions, where management measures exist, and for which the vessel has no allocation should be immediately discarded, and the method should be recorded in the vessel's monthly reporting.
3. Dead bycatches should be recorded, landed, and retained for accurate data collection and assessment of non-target species impact. Proper handling and documentation can help develop effective mitigation strategies to minimize future bycatch incidents.
4. Vessel operators should ensure that their vessels are equipped with the necessary mitigation measures to ensure the proper release of any incidentally caught seabird or sea turtles.
5. Operators engaged in non-shark fisheries should ensure that live sharks are released, particularly juvenile sharks that are accidentally caught and not utilized for food or subsistence.
6. Operators should try to improve the selectivity and use of fishing gears, such as changing the design, rigging and deployment of the gear (example mesh size, hook size), installing bycatch reduction devices (sorting grid, square mesh panels etc), turtle excluding devices or using operational techniques during fishing to reduce encounters with bycatch.

7. ALL bycatch and discard data should be reported in the monthly data submissions. It is important that this information be submitted as Belize is obligated to report this data to the relevant RFMO as part of its annual reporting requirement.
8. Operations through observer coverage, catches and landings will be monitored to ensure compliance with these bycatch measures. Not documents will be issued or validated for species caught or landed in contravention of this circular.

## **APPLICABILITY**

Circulars setting out mandatory requirements shall be construed to have the same effect and applicability of rules and policies under the provisions of the HSFA 2013. Each circular is applicable to all Belize flagged fishing vessels engaged in fishing and related activities. The owner, operator and master of every Belize flagged fishing vessel shall be familiar with all applicable Circulars applying to their vessel and it shall be no defense that any person in breach of any Circular was not aware of it or has not been advised of it.

## **MAINTENANCE**

Ship owners, and operators shall ensure that all Circulars are disseminated to their master and crew as well as any other person affected by or having an interest in the subject matter in a language understood by all. A Circular once issued shall be disseminated electronically to all stakeholders and a listing of ALL Circulars shall be published on the BHSFU website [www.bhsfu.gov.bz](http://www.bhsfu.gov.bz) for future reference.

## **COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT**

Failure to comply with any Circular shall result in disciplinary actions taken in accordance with Belize's Sanction Regulations S.I. 32 of 2014

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

This circular shall take effect immediately.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information direct all inquiries about this Circular to the Director of High Seas Fisheries of the Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit, Ministry of Finance, Government of Belize.

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Issued by

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