



# THE QUARTERLY CATCH

## E-NEWSLETTER

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## A DECADE OF SUCCESS: BHSFU CELEBRATES 10 YEARS

The Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit (BHSFU) is proud to celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of successful operations. Over the past decade, the BHSFU has played a vital role in the management and conservation of Belize's high seas fisheries sector. This milestone offers an opportunity to reflect on the achievements and future aspirations of the BHSFU.

Since its inception in 2013, the BHSFU has been committed to improving the management of Belize's high seas fisheries sector. Through the implementation of effective policies and regulations, the unit has successfully contributed to sustainable fishing practices. By collaborating with local, regional, and international bodies, the BHSFU has established robust frameworks



that promote responsible fishing and protect marine biodiversity.

The BHSFU has been instrumental in enhancing surveillance and enforcement measures to combat IUU fishing activities. By harnessing advanced technologies and partnering with local, regional, and international law enforcement agencies, the unit has significantly reduced IUU fishing activities, preserving the delicate marine ecosystem.

The BHSFU recognizes the importance of research and innovation in shaping sustainable fisheries management. Over the past decade the unit has actively supported and participated in research projects to better understand the dynamics of



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high seas fisheries. This knowledge has facilitated evidence-based decision-making, leading to the implementation of effective conservation strategies and the promotion of responsible fishing practices.

The success of the BHSFU is attributed in part, to its strong relationship with international partners. Through collaborations with regional and international organizations, the unit has gained access to expertise, resources, and best practices. These partnerships have also solidified Belize's position as a global leader in sustainable high seas fisheries management.

As the Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit commemorates its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it is evident that its efforts have made a significant impact on the sustainable management of high seas fisheries in Belize. Through its commitment to enhancing fisheries management, strengthening surveillance and enforcement, promoting research and innovation, fostering international collaboration, and empowering stakeholders, Belize has emerged as a global exemplar in sustainable fishing practices. The BHSFU's unwavering dedication serves as a model for other nations, inspiring continued progress in the conservation and management of our precious marine resources. Through steadfast commitment and impactful contributions, the Unit remains an essential guardian of Belize's high seas fisheries sector.

*Proud of our Past, Excited for our Future*

## 28<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting of ICCAT

By: Robert Robinson – Deputy Director

The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas held its 28<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting at the Triumph Hotel in New Cairo, Egypt from 11-20 November 2023. Although there were concerns about the meeting venue considering the unrest on the borders with neighboring Israel, the Commission decided that the safety precautions taken by the Government of Egypt were sufficient to guarantee the safety and security of the delegates. Additionally, the cost implications for any changes to the organization of the meeting at such a late stage would have been significant.



Notwithstanding the pre-meeting considerations, the meeting was a success – adopting 20 binding recommendations and 4 non-binding resolutions as well as a bi-annual budget and electing officers of the Commission for the next Biennium. The new conservation and management measures (CMMs) that were adopted will provide protection to cetaceans, whale sharks and mobulid rays, blue shark, and swordfish; and



establish minimum standards for the use of electronic monitoring systems onboard fishing vessels. Several CMMs were also revised to provide updated protection for sharks, tropical tunas, northern temperate tunas, swordfish, and bycatch species.



Belize's priority at this year's meeting revolved around the conservation and management of tropical tunas. Despite extensive discussions and bilateral/multilateral

consultations between the interested parties, there was a breakdown in communication and the consultative process which inevitably undermined the significant advances that were made toward the adoption of a new management measure for the tropical tuna species. Resultantly, the Commission agreed to a rollover of the existing management measure for a fourth consecutive year which will maintain the status quo for a bigeye tuna (BET) TAC at 61,500 tons, yellowfin at 110,000 tons, a 72-day fishing closure commencing January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024.



The Commission also made significant advancements to ensure the effective implementation of ICCAT's active CMMs through the adoption of a Recommendation to establish the minimum standards for electronic monitoring systems (EMS) and a Resolution to outline the core principles on labour standards in ICCAT fisheries. Additionally, it updated existing measures to strengthen ICCAT's port inspection and IUU vessel listing regulations; and established a standing working group on catch documentations schemes.



All the officers of the Commission were elected to serve for the next biennium with a minor modification for the Chair of Panel 1 where Ghana has appointed a new person to fill the role after the retirement of the previous Chair from public service. The next annual meeting of ICCAT will be held in Cyprus from 11-18 November 2024



## Charting a new Course: BHSFU Undertakes Strategic Review

By: Delice Pinkard – Compliance & Enforcement Manager

The Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit recently organized a strategic review workshop, which served as a pivotal platform for reflection and planning. This workshop aimed to assess the unit's progress, identify areas for improvement, and chart a strategic course for the future.



During the workshop, the team took the time to reflect on the Unit's past achievements. By highlighting successful initiatives and milestones, the unit's valuable contributions to sustainable fisheries management were acknowledged. This reflection provided a foundation for building upon past success and identifying strategies for continued growth.

The workshop also served as a platform to candidly discuss the challenges faced by the BHSFU. The team engaged in open and constructive dialogue, identifying key obstacles and constraints that hindered progress. This exercise was crucial in understanding the areas that require immediate attention and finding innovative solutions to overcome these challenges.



With a clear understanding of past achievements and challenges, the workshop focused on setting strategic goals for the BHSFU. The team brainstormed to define a shared vision, guided by the principles of sustainability, conservation, and responsible fishing practices. These strategic goals will serve as a compass, directing the unit's efforts in the coming years and ensuring alignment with national and international fisheries management objectives.



The workshop also aimed to develop action plans, however due to time constraints this was not possible. Nonetheless, the unit will endeavor to conclude these plans to identify specific initiatives, activities and timelines required to achieve the identified goals. This step will ensure that the strategic vision could be effectively translated into actionable steps, enabling the unit to execute its plans efficiently.



Recognizing the importance of collaboration and partnerships, the workshop also emphasized the need to strengthen existing relationships and forge new alliances. The team explored opportunities for collaboration with other government agencies, regional and international organizations. This collaborative approach will maximize the impact of the BHSFU's efforts and foster a holistic approach to sustainable fisheries management.



The strategic review workshop marked an important milestone in the journey of the BHSFU. Through reflection, dialogue, and collaborative planning, the unit has charted a strategic course that will guide its future endeavors. By acknowledging past achievements, addressing key challenges, setting new strategic goals, developing action plans, and strengthening collaboration, the BHSFU is well-positioned to continue its vital role in the sustainable management of Belize's high seas fisheries sector. The outcome of the workshop will serve as a roadmap for the unit's growth and success, ensuring that we adapt to the evolving industry landscape while achieving our goals and objectives.

## Belize Adopts the Trade in Endangered Species (CITES ACT )2023

By: Ernie Howe – Fisheries Officer

The Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is an international agreement between governments that aims to ensure that the international trade of wild animals and plants does not threaten the survival of the species. Belize has been a party to CITES since our independence but has not been able to fulfil its obligations under the convention due to a lack of the necessary legal framework. However, Belize has recently taken significant steps towards fulfilling its obligations under CITES by implementing a comprehensive legal framework to regulate the international trade of endangered species. This includes the adoption of the Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) Act, 2023, which was adopted on February 3, 2023, and came into force on December 1, 2023. This Act provides a solid foundation for Belize to effectively regulate the international trade of endangered species. This new legal framework demonstrates Belize's commitment to conservation and will help ensure the survival of threatened species within its domestic and international waters, preserving its rich biodiversity and contributing to global conservation efforts.





At the 19<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Conferences to the Parties (COP19) to CITES held in Panama City in 2022, fifty-four species of requiem sharks were included in the CITES Appendix II List, inter alia. This ultimately translated to the prohibited trade of these species unless accompanied by a CITES Certificate. Due to the domestic and international trade of these species by local fisher folk and Belize flagged fishing vessels, it was necessary for Belize to carry out due process for the development of the required non-detrimental finding (NDF) for these species. As a result, the Belize Fisheries Department and the Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit collaborated in the development of several NDFs (non-detrimental findings) for shark species of importance to both sectors. A non-detrimental finding is a science-based assessment that verifies whether the export of a specific endangered species is detrimental to the survival of that species. After several workshops and collaborations with various NGO's and international shark experts, Belize was able to complete 11 eNDFs for shark species, which will be submitted to the CITES secretariat. These shark species are being traded internationally by local shark fishermen and Belize-licensed fishing vessels.

During the consultative process, the BHSFU was recommended to become a management authority in accordance with the Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) Act adopted by Belize. The BHSFU is responsible for regulating and monitoring the trade of certain shark species taken from the high seas to ensure their protection and conservation.

Formalities are still in process for the establishment of the proper documentation and legal framework for the issuance of the CITES Certificate for Blue Shark caught by the Belize High Seas fishing fleet. The CITES Certificate for Blue Shark is necessary to ensure compliance with international regulations and promote sustainable fishing practices and trade.



## A Message from the FMC

By: Ian Constantino – Monitoring Officer



As we close this year and prepare for another fruitful and innovative year, I take this opportunity to extend my appreciation and gratitude to our clients, vessel owners, masters and crew members, and others who have cooperated with the FMC throughout 2023 and contributed to the year's success. A warm THANK YOU. As anticipated, we ran into a few challenges along the way, but with your help and cooperation, these incidents were quickly resolved to guarantee the successful operation of our fleet. A huge thank you to our VMS providers for their efforts, especially to their technical department for their quick and effective assistance and the sales department for their assistance in the procurement of equipment despite the hiccups encountered with the sourcing the units. I am excited for the coming year as this will usher in the introduction of the electronic monitoring program, which is a promising new technology that will assist us in accomplishing our mission and vision at BHSFU while simultaneously fulfilling our obligations to the respective RFMOs. As this new program takes shape globally, the RFMOs have expressed their support of this initiative and seeks to implement and adopt minimum standards for electronic

monitoring, as they recognize the potential benefits it will bring in terms of improved data collection, enhanced monitoring capabilities, and more efficient enforcement of fisheries regulations.

It is important that we all embrace this new form of technology to facilitate its smooth introduction and implementation and to maximize its potential impact on sustainable fisheries management. Let's us seize this opportunity to be at the forefront of innovation and collaboration in the global fishing industry.



# The Science Corner

By: Charles Coc – Fisheries Scientist and Data Officer



## Taking Flight: Addressing the Silent Threat of Seabird Bycatch

Birds inhabit diverse habitats worldwide, spanning from polar regions to tropical zones to lush rainforests, and even urban areas, so it is unsurprising that they also frequent the high seas. Like other environments, birds are frequently impacted by human activities, including fisheries bycatch which is a major threat to the world's oceans and it refers to the incidental catch of unused or unmanaged species such as mammals, elasmobranchs, marine turtles, and seabirds (Komoroske & Lewison 2015). Bycatches can create conservation problems when endangered species are affected or when the level of take is not sustainable for the non-target species; they can affect biodiversity and can disturb the ecosystem (Hall et al., 2000). This article focuses on seabirds as a bycatch species due to high seas fishing and the challenges they face due to their biology, habits, adaptations and feeding patterns.

To start, seabirds are known for their long lifespan and slow reproductive rates. While many fish species produce large numbers of eggs each spawning season, seabirds invest their energy into nurturing their offspring rather than producing eggs, typically laying only one egg annually or biannually. As a result, even a small decrease in the number of breeding seabirds can lead to population declines. Also, they face various sources of mortality, including both human-caused and natural factors. Some of these threats, such as El Niño events and oil spills, occur sporadically, while others, like global warming and pollution, persist over time (Hall et al., 2000).

When it comes to feeding, seabirds in the high seas obtain their food through various strategies, including surface feeding, plunge diving and scavenging. They play a crucial role in marine ecosystems by regulating prey populations, redistributing nutrients through their guano, and contributing to energy transfer within food webs. To carry out these crucial roles, they have adapted to their environment by having keen eyesight, a strong sense of smell and specialized wings for efficient gliding and soaring. Additionally, seabirds in the high seas often have complex migration patterns,



Figure 1: In the Pacific Ocean, Laysan (left) and Black-footed (right) Albatross search the oceans for food.





Figure 2: Seabird caught in fishing net while diving for food.

traveling between breeding and feeding areas. Some species even cover immense distances, utilizing different regions of the ocean for foraging. Despite these adaptations, they face threats such as bycatch in fishing gear, marine pollution (including plastic debris and oil spills), and the impacts of climate change on their habitats and food sources.

In response to these escalating concerns, various conservation initiatives have been implemented, including the establishment of marine protected areas, the adoption of mitigation strategies to minimize bycatch, and the formation of international agreements aimed at tackling issues such as plastic pollution and climate change. While these measures represent important steps toward species preservation, the formidable task of safeguarding vast and secluded high seas environments, coupled with the complexities associated with implementing and enforcing conservation protocols across multiple jurisdictions, continues to present a significant challenge (Benaka, Cimo, and Jenkins, 2012). In conclusion, the absence of effective measures to address and regulate commercial fishing, pollution, and other human-induced activities poses a threat to ocean ecosystems, biodiversity, and protected species, such as seabirds which are vulnerable to bycatch.

### References

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For those crossword puzzle enthusiasts try our seabird puzzle below.

## Seabirds: A Bycatch Species

S	E	A	L	B	A	T	R	O	S	S	C	Y	H
E	M	O	R	S	H	M	S	D	S	N	O	I	S
E	T	E	H	S	N	O	R	N	I	K	N	T	O
O	D	O	T	N	T	I	S	S	T	A	S	S	S
P	P	O	S	S	B	A	D	I	P	A	E	R	E
O	F	O	A	A	Y	B	E	E	V	S	R	E	I
L	I	I	E	T	S	S	L	R	H	A	V	V	C
L	S	S	E	H	I	A	O	T	H	Y	A	I	E
U	H	F	T	S	C	H	E	C	S	T	T	D	P
T	I	A	H	A	S	T	O	S	E	T	I	O	S
I	N	S	T	A	V	O	A	O	H	R	O	I	R
O	G	I	I	P	D	I	C	C	K	G	N	B	E
N	T	I	E	A	R	N	A	E	Y	S	I	B	R
G	U	A	N	O	S	S	H	N	Y	B	H	H	I

HOOKS  
 AVIAN  
 HIGHSEAS  
 THREATS  
 SEABIRDS  
 ECOSYSTEMS  
 SPECIES  
 BIODIVERSITY  
 FISHING  
 POLLUTION  
 CONSERVATION  
 ALBATROSS  
 GUANO  
 BYCATCH



## *A Christmas Message from the Director of High Seas Fisheries*

### **Dear Stakeholders and Friends,**

As the holiday season approaches, I wanted to take this opportunity to extend my warmest wishes to every one of you on behalf of the Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit. This year has been filled with challenges, but it has also highlighted the strength, resilience, and unity of our little unit.

Christmas is a time of reflection, gratitude, and joy. It is a time to cherish the moments spent with loved ones, to appreciate the blessings in our lives, and to come together in spirit, even if we are physically apart. As we gather around our tables, let us remember those who are less fortunate and extend a helping hand to those in need.

This festive season also serves as a reminder of the importance of sustainability and responsible stewardship of our marine resources. As guardians of the high seas, we have a collective responsibility to ensure the health and abundance of our oceans for generations to come. Let us continue to work tirelessly towards achieving sustainable fishing practices, protecting biodiversity, and preserving the delicate balance of our marine ecosystems.



I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my dedicated team. Your unwavering commitment, professionalism, and passion for our mission have been truly inspiring despite the challenges. Thank you for your hard work and dedication throughout the year.

I would like to thank our valued stakeholders, partners, and collaborators. Your support, expertise, and collaboration have been instrumental in our efforts to promote sustainable fishing practices and conservation of our marine resources. Together, we have achieved significant milestones and made a positive impact in our sectors.

As we bid farewell to this year, let us welcome a new year with hope, optimism, and a renewed determination. May it bring us closer to our goals, and may our collective efforts continue to make a lasting difference in the world of high seas fisheries.

On behalf of the Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit, I wish you and your loved ones a joyous and peaceful Christmas. May the holiday season be filled with laughter, love, and beautiful memories.

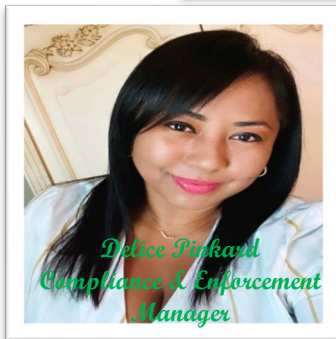
Warmest regards

Valarie Lanza  
Director of High Seas Fisheries





*Valerie Lanza  
Director*



*Delice Pinkard  
Compliance & Enforcement  
Manager*



*Robert Robinson  
Deputy Director*



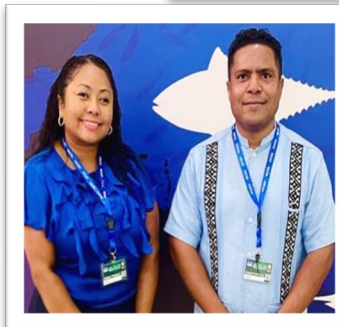
*Jan Constantino  
Monitoring Officer*



*Eric Howe  
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*Charles Coe  
Fisheries Scientist & Data Officer*



*Merry Christmas  
And a Happy New Year*

