

CHARTING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE: ICCAT'S Landmark Achievement in Tropical Tuna Management

RFMOs play a pivotal role in promoting cooperation for the development of conservation strategies to ensure the long-term health of global fisheries and marine biodiversity. This can be a difficult task when competing national interest are prioritized over the common good – the shared objective to conserve and manage fisheries resources of our oceans. The 28th

This fishery. The new management measure establishes a TAC of 73,011 tons for bigeye tuna and 110,000 tons for yellowfin tuna; establishing specific catch limits for the major participants in bigeye tuna fisheries. BELIZE saw an increase in its bigeye tuna catch limit from 1603 tons to 1956.33 tons. The Atlantic-wide FAD closure has been strategically moved to March 17th – April 30th (45 days) and will see a gradual reduction in total FADs per vessel from 300 in 2025 to 288 in 2026 and 2024. Observer coverage remains at 100% for the purse seiners and will be increased to 10% for long liners. The measure also includes a slew of reporting requirements to collect data and ensure compliance with the management measures.

Special Meeting of the International Commission for the conservation of Atlantic Tunas was a spectacular display of international cooperation in finding the delicate balance required for the conservation and management of tropical tunas in the Atlantic Ocean.


After 5 years of debate and negotiations, the Commission was able to adopt a new tropical tuna management measure which considers the best available scientific advice while accounting for specific needs of the Contracting Parties engaged in

The Commission also adopted two new management procedures for western SKJ tuna and north Atlantic Albacore. While the protection of sharks still requires further discussions and negotiations, the principal objectors to a



measure requiring fins attached have pledge their commitment to work with the proponents of this proposed measure to adopt meaningful protection of sharks



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This meeting demonstrated the ability and underscored the commitment of ICCAT members to sustainable fisheries and marine biodiversity despite significant geo-political challenges. The 28th Special Meeting of ICCAT was a success and is a testament of the robust institutional framework of RFMOs.



OSPESCA Representatives

BELIZE Takes a Dive into Digital Fisheries Certification

By Ernie Howe – Fisheries Officer

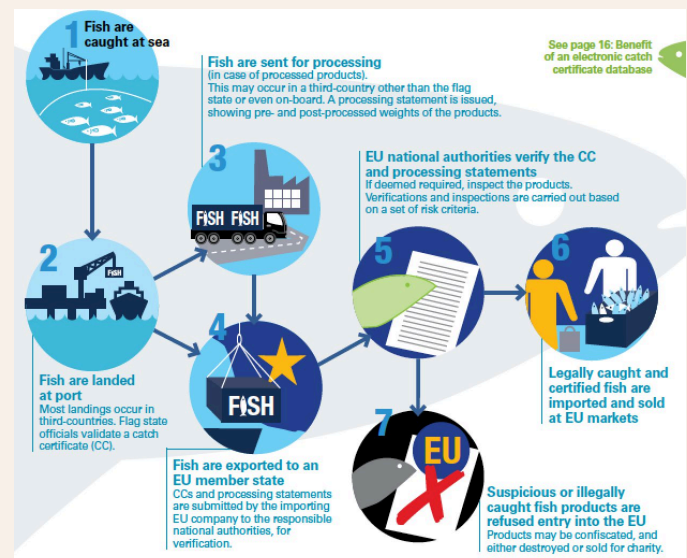
On October 2, 2024, Belize joined an online seminar hosted by The European Commission, focusing on updating non-EU countries' competent authorities. The seminar focused on amendments to the EU Catch Certification Scheme under the EU IUU regulations. The Council Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008, aimed at curbing illegal fishing, was adopted in 2008 and came into effect on January 1, 2010. The EU, as the largest importer of fisheries products, faces challenges with smugglers trying to infiltrate the market with products from illegal fishing practices, with estimates suggesting annual losses of 9-12 billion Euros, representing 19% of global catches.

The key change in the Catch Certificate Scheme is the introduction of CATCH, a real-time IT system mandated for managing all processes related to the EU Catch Certification Scheme. This system aims to streamline certification procedures, transitioning to a digital and paperless workflow. The updated certificate template now includes additional details

like fishing gear, fishing areas (EEZ or high seas), box weights for consistency, and transport specifics.

As a non-EU country, Belize engages in trading fishery products with the EU market through its flagged vessels fishing for tuna and non-tuna species in high seas.

Under the amendment, non-EU countries can opt to use CATCH voluntarily, enabling users to create, validate, and transfer catch certificates to EU importers. The universal adoption of CATCH by both EU and non-EU countries promises enhanced transparency in combating IUU practices. The amendments offer significant benefits for all parties, ensuring reliable data control through an IT platform, reducing or eradicating fraudulent certificates, and harmonizing trade procedures between EU and non-EU countries. This shift to digital certification will facilitate easier validation and inquiries for fisheries administrations like Belize, simplifying product tracing through the IT system.



The European Commission aims for full utilization of the CATCH system by 2026, providing regional explanations and training for non-EU countries to maximize its benefits. Embracing these changes, Belize demonstrates its commitment to leading in high seas fisheries management and advocating for the conservation of marine resources.

SCIENCE CORNER

Holiday Reflections: The Future of our Marine Ecosystem

By Charles Coc – Fisheries Scientist & Data Officer



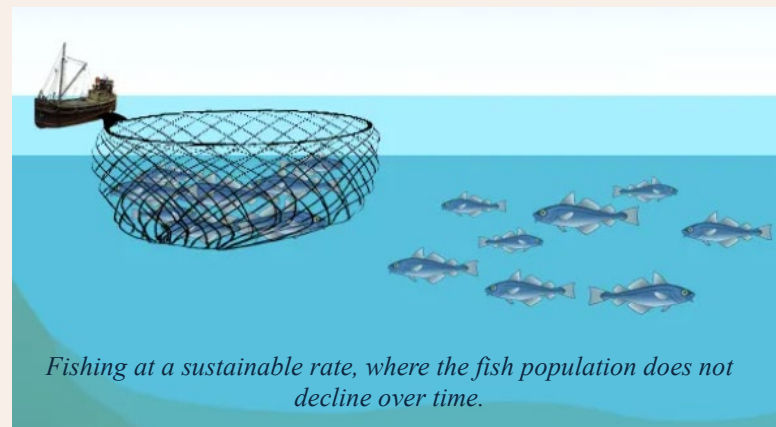
Photo courtesy Plascene.com

The holiday seasons is a time families gather, celebrate, and exchange gifts, and it can be quite easy to get caught up in the festivities. However, amidst the celebrations, we must pause to reflect on the impact our choices have had on our environment. Whether our reflections are positive or negative, the upcoming year presents an opportunity for promoting sustainability and reducing our reliance on single-use plastics, and it all starts with the decisions we make during this time.

Because the Christmas season is marked by joy and giving, it often leads to a surge of single-use plastics. From wrapping paper and gifts bags to disposable cutlery and plates at holiday gatherings; much of these contribute significantly to plastic pollution. It is estimated that millions of tons of plastics waste are generated during the holiday season alone (Besly, 2022). Much of this waste finds its ways to landfills and, ultimately, in our oceans, affecting the very fish we catch and consume.

Additionally, as we reflect on our food consumption during the holiday season and look forward to 2025, it is crucial to be more mindful of our seafood choices. The overfishing of certain species, destructive practices used in some fishing industries and the disregard for closure periods, all threaten marine biodiversity. As such, some ways to promote sustainability include choosing certified sustainable seafood options, supporting fisheries initiatives that prioritize sustainable practices, educating and advocating about the importance of sustainable seafood and of course participating in clean-up initiatives. Ultimately, the goal is to contribute to the health of our oceans and ensuring that seafood remains a viable resource for future generations.

To conclude, as we celebrate the joys of the holiday seasons, let us not forget the responsibilities we hold towards our marine ecosystems. By reducing our reliance on single-use plastics, making informed seafood choices and fostering mindfulness in our consumption habits, we can foster a healthier planet. As we step into 2025 and beyond, let us commit to nurturing our marine environment, ensuring its vitality for generations to come.



Fishing at a sustainable rate, where the fish population does not decline over time.

Reference

Besly, H. (2022). Plastic Pollution is on the Rise this Holiday Season: What It Means for our Oceans. Retrieved on December 10, 2024, from <https://www.earthday.org/plastic-pollution-is-on-the-rise-this-holiday-season/>



Employee Spotlight: Ernie Howe Celebrating Yucatec Maya Traditions for Christmas

As the holiday season approaches, we take a moment to shine the spotlight on one of our dedicated senior team members, Ernie Howe, a Fisheries Officer whose vibrant Christmas traditions bring joy and foster a sense of community in his home village of San Antonio, Cayo District.

Ernie, who is of Yucatec Maya descent, speaks fluent Yucatec, a dialect cherished by the local community and spoken in only two districts in Belize. Residing in San Antonio—previously known as Oxmulka, a name that reflects its rich cultural heritage but was changed due to Catholic influence—Ernie travels three hours each day to the office, embodying the commitment and dedication that he brings to his work.



While many Belizeans prepare for the traditional Christmas feast of ham and turkey, Ernie and his family embrace a different culinary experience that highlights their unique cultural heritage. On Christmas Eve, as the aroma of festive dishes fills the air, Ernie's family gathers to prepare a delectable spread of bollos made from homegrown chicken, corn, and banana leaves, along with a homemade potato salad. The women of the family come together to bake cakes and craft other savoury delights, while the men take charge of seasoning and barbecuing pork and chicken for Christmas Day.

The celebration is not just about the food; it's a time for family and togetherness. Ernie's family, despite holding different religious denominations, makes it a tradition to attend church services on both Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. After the evening service, they return home for a lively dinner filled with laughter, storytelling, and the warmth of family bonds.

As midnight approaches, the excitement builds for the children, who eagerly await the moment to usher in Christmas. At the stroke of midnight, they gather to exchange and open gifts, often staying up until the



early hours of Christmas Day before finally drifting off to sleep.

Christmas Day is a continuation of the festivities, filled with more delicious food and cherished family time. The Howe family takes joy in sharing their meals with loved ones and visiting neighbours, embodying the spirit of community that is central to the holiday season.

Ernie's unique holiday traditions not only reflect his cultural heritage but also highlight the importance of family, community, and the joy of sharing. As we celebrate this festive season, we are reminded of the diverse ways in which our team members embrace their traditions, spreading joy and fostering connections within our organization and beyond.

We thank Ernie for sharing his story with us and wish him and his family a joyful and blessed Christmas!

FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

As we approach the end of another remarkable year, we at the Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit want to take a moment to reflect on our journey together and share our heartfelt gratitude with you, our valued readers and stakeholders.

This year has been filled with both challenges and triumphs. We've navigated changing tides in our fisheries, embraced new initiatives, and worked tirelessly to ensure the sustainability of our precious marine resources. Your continued support and engagement have been instrumental in these efforts, and we cannot thank you enough for your dedication to preserving the rich biodiversity of our high seas.

As the holiday season draws near, we invite you to take a step back and celebrate the achievements we've made together. Whether it's through community outreach, sustainable fishing practices, or the promotion of marine conservation, each of you has played a vital role in our shared mission. It's truly a joy to work alongside such passionate individuals and organizations committed to the health of our oceans. Looking forward to the new year, we are excited about the opportunities that lie ahead. We hope that the changes and innovations we embrace will be met with enthusiasm and positivity. Together, we can continue to be stewards of our marine environment and inspire future generations.

As you gather with family and friends during this festive season, we encourage you to cherish each moment and create lasting memories. May your holidays be filled with joy, laughter, and a sense of peace as we close out this year and look forward to the adventures that await us next year.

Thank you for being a part of our community, and we wish you a wonderful holiday season and a prosperous New Year!

**Warm wishes,
The Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit Team**

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