

A Decade of WIMAC: Advancing Regional Unity and Marking One Year of Local Impact in Belize

By: Kennisha Allen – Administrator (IMMARBE)

This year marks an applaudable milestone in regional maritime history as the Women in Maritime Association Caribbean (WiMAC) celebrates 10 years of advocating for women’s advancement in the maritime sector across the Caribbean. Founded in April 2015 in Montego Bay, Jamaica, under the support of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), WiMAC was established to advocate for gender inclusion objectives by providing a platform for networking, mentorship, and education. The association now spans twenty countries and territories in our region, representing a powerful collection of female maritime professionals dedicated to increasing participation, performance, and leadership.

Alongside the celebration of WIMAC’s 10th Anniversary, Local WIMAC Chapter proudly commemorates its first anniversary, a year of building



Figure 1: Inaugural launch of the WiMAC Belize Chapter, held on May 17, 2024

networks, breaking barriers, and creating opportunities for Belizean women in maritime. WiMAC Belize was officially launched on May 17, 2024, in honour of the International Day for Women in Maritime which is celebrated globally on May 18. The chapter debuted with forty-three founding members, and within just one year, has grown to a vibrant community of 59 women representing diverse maritime roles throughout Belize.

WiMAC Belize operates with a clear mission to empower women in the maritime sector through networking, education, and advocacy, fostering an inclusive and diverse maritime community in Belize.

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Its vision reflects a broader goal for national transformation where women contribute, lead, and thrive at all levels, fostering equality and excellence.

In its first year, the chapter has actively engaged in public outreach, awareness campaigns, and strategic partnerships to promote women's visibility and advancement within the sector. From students aspiring to maritime careers to seasoned professionals, WiMAC Belize has created a space where women can connect, collaborate, and grow.

As WiMAC Caribbean celebrates a decade of influence, and WiMAC Belize marks a year of dynamic growth, the message is clear: the tide is turning. Women are claiming their place in the maritime sector not only as contributors, but as changemakers and leaders shaping the future of the industry. You can follow WiMAC Belize Chapter's journey [here](#).

IATTC Advances Ecosystems and Bycatch Mitigation Measures

By: Delice Pinkard – Compliance & Enforcement Manager

The Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) is the Regional Fisheries Management Organization (RFMO) responsible for the conservation and management of tuna and tuna-like species in the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO), held two major working group meetings from 26-29 May 2025. These included the 3rd Meeting of the Permanent Working Group on Ecosystems and Bycatch and the 9th Meeting of the Ad-Hoc Working Group on Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs).

A key concern addressed during these meetings was the inadequate management of non-target species, commonly referred to as by-catch. These include species such as seabirds, sea turtles, rays, and certain sharks, many of which are vulnerable due to low economic value, high discard rates, or infrequent encounters.

The Commission emphasized the need for targeted action to reduce mortality rates among these species and to ensure that bycatch issues are addressed alongside management or targeted tuna stocks. One promising development is the draft of a Best Handling and Release Practice (BHRP) guideline aimed at improving post release survival of sea turtles and sharks. This low cost, practical approach is expected to be adopted by the IATTC later this year.



Figure 2: Various bycatch species incidentally caught during industrial fishing operations.

An Action Plan for Seabird Conservation was also proposed, underscoring the Commission's ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management. Though the IATTC's primary mandate is tuna, it recognizes the importance of sustainably managing all species affected by fishing activities. On

the issue of FADs, the Commission is evaluating a transition to biodegradable FADs to reduce marine pollution. A modern design known as the “Jelly FAD” which mimics the efficiency of traditional FADs while reducing environmental harm, is also being trailed and is expected to be made available to fishers soon.

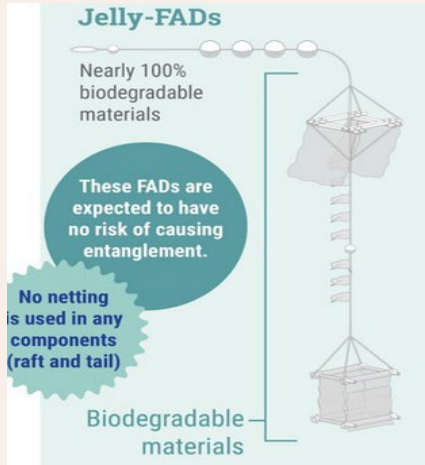


Figure 3: Jelly FAD- Image retrieved from ISSF.com

For longline fisheries, the use of circle hooks continues to be a major discussion point. These hooks, which reduce sea turtle bycatch, are being standardized across fleets. A new working group on circle hook sizes will meet in 2006 to finalize acceptable hook sizes and implementation strategies.

These discussions reflect IATTC’s growing commitment to eco-system-based fisheries management, ensuring that conservation and management measures extend beyond commercial species to include the broader marine environment.

How Illegal Transshipment Undermines Stock Assessment and RFMO Measures

By Ernie Howe – Fisheries Officer

Commercial tuna fisheries are among the most economically valuable in the world, generating over US\$40 billion annually and supporting the livelihoods of millions, especially in coastal and island states (Galland et al., 2016). However, the practice of illegal transshipment at sea, defined as the unauthorized transfer of fish from one vessel to another without proper documentation, poses a serious threat to the sustainability of these fisheries.

Transshipment can occur legally in two primary ways: at sea under strict regulations and observer coverage, or in port under the authority of a coastal state. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), transshipment at sea must be closely monitored, typically under the regional observer programs implemented by Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs).



Figure 4: At Sea Transshipment. Image by Jiri Rezac | Greenpeace

When conducted at port, the process must be authorised, documented, and inspected by the coastal state in collaboration with the flag state of the vessel (Mosteiro Cabanelas et al., 2020).

Illegal transshipment, by contrast, circumvents these requirements and significantly undermines fisheries governance. It introduces uncertainty in catch data, results in underreporting or misreporting of species, and enables laundering of IUU-caught fish into legitimate supply chain. This leads to distorted stock assessments, inaccurate estimates of fishing pressure, and potentially misguided management decisions such as setting inappropriate quotas or closed seasons. Biological sampling is also disrupted, as illegal transshipped catches bypass port inspections resulting in gaps in data critical for age-structured stock models and sustainability projections.

As a flag state, Belize authorizes its distant water vessels to transship only within port areas, and only with prior verification and clearance from the Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit (BHSFU). The designated coastal state authorities must supervise these transshipments. Furthermore, the High Seas Fishing Act of 2013, along with its Sanctions Regulations, provides the legal basis to penalize any vessel engaged in IUU fishing, including violations related to transshipment, underreporting, or misreporting of catch.

In conclusion, eliminating illegal transshipment is vital for maintaining accurate data, protecting marine ecosystems, and preserving the integrity of management measures set by RFMOs. As Belize strengthens its inspection regimes and embraces innovative monitoring tools, it demonstrates its commitment to sustainable, accountable, and legally compliant fisheries.

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Strengthening Port Inspections to Combat Illegal Fishing on the High Seas

By Ian Constantino – Monitoring Officer

The global fishing industry, particularly areas beyond national jurisdiction, has long been vital for global food security, economic development, and coastal livelihoods. However, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing continues to undermine these benefits by depleting fish stocks, distorting markets, and threatening marine biodiversity. One of the most effective tools in the fight against IUU fishing is robust port inspection regimes.

Port inspections serve as a critical checkpoint in the seafood supply chain. They allow national authorities to verify that vessels are operating in compliance with

conservation and management measures before allowing the catch to enter domestic or international markets. Fisheries inspectors play a central role in this process by ensuring that landed catches do not exceed legal quotas, and by checking for illegal landings of protected or undersized species. These inspections also help monitor bycatch practices and verify that catch documentation, logbooks, licenses, and landing declarations are accurate and complete.

In addition to regulatory enforcement, port inspections support scientific data collection. Inspectors gather species-specific data on catch weight and size, which contribute to stock assessments and fisheries management decisions, such as adjusting quotas or defining closed seasons. Inspections may also include checks on environmental practices such as waste management, fuel use, and compliance with safety-at-sea standards. The importance of port inspections is underscored by international agreements such as the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement (United Nations, 1995) and the FAO Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA) (FAO, 2009). The latter being the first binding international treaty focused specifically on combating IUU fishing through port controls. Countries that implement rigorous inspection procedures not only fulfil their international obligations but also build trust and credibility as responsible stewards of marine resources.



Figure 5: Image retrieved from maritimesurveyaustralia.com

In conclusion, regular and well-executed port inspections are essential to safeguarding marine ecosystems, ensuring legal compliance, and promoting fair and sustainable fishing practices. They function as a deterrent to illicit activities and help secure the long-term viability of the fisheries sector for future generations.

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SCIENCE CORNER

Why Quality Data Matters for Sustainable Fishing

By Charles Coc – Fisheries Scientist & Data Officer

Effective fisheries management on the high seas depends fundamentally on the availability of high-quality data. For Belize and other coastal states engaged in tuna and deep-sea fisheries, accurate information on the location, method and outcome of fishing activities is critical, not only for ensuring compliance with international obligations but also for safeguarding marine ecosystems and the livelihood they support. Among the most vital data streams are catch, observer, and bycatch data.

Catch reports submitted through vessel logbooks provide essential information on species caught, quantities harvested, and locations of fishing activity. These data feed directly into national systems, regional databases, and scientific stock assessments used to inform catch limits and conservation measures. Inaccurate or incomplete reporting can lead to overexploitation or misrepresentation of fishing pressure in sensitive areas. Within Belize's high seas fleet, logbook reporting is a principal component of data collection for both longline and purse seine vessels. This reporting system support efforts to monitor fleet performance and track catch composition, particularly for economically significant species such as yellowfin (*Thunnus albacores*) and bigeye tuna (*T. obesus*) (Schiller, 2014).

Also, observer data provides critical verification and insight into fishing operations. Collected by trained, independent personnel onboard fishing vessels, these observers confirm the accuracy and reported catch and capture additional details often omitted from logbooks, such as how fishing gear is deployed, what species are discarded, and whether any unreported or illegal activities occur. Observer programs strengthen transparency and are essential for credible fisheries monitoring. Within the ICCAT convention area, longline vessels measuring twenty meters or more in length overall (LOA) and targeting tropical tunas are required to achieve at least 10% observer coverage by 2026. For purse seine vessels, ICCAT Recommendation 16-14 mandates 100% observer coverage to enhance oversight of tropical tuna fisheries.



Figure 5: Observers collecting data. Image by Hrasi.org

Another critical yet often underreported component of fisheries data is bycatch information, referring to non-target species that are incidentally captured during fishing operations (Hall & Roman, 2013). This includes vulnerable marine life such as sharks, sea turtles, rays, and seabirds. Bycatch data is essential for understanding the broader ecological impact of fishing and for guiding the development of mitigation strategies, including gear modification, spatial closures, and species-specific protections. In both the Caribbean and the wider Atlantic, consistent, and accurate bycatch reporting remains a challenge.

To end, while Belize has made meaningful progress in its logbook systems and observer efforts, further improvements are necessary to strengthen bycatch reporting and modernize data-sharing practices. High-quality data is more than a regulatory requirement, it is the foundation of responsible stewardship, economic resilience, and the long-term sustainability of high seas fisheries.

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From Heliport / Runways to High Seas: My Journey from Aviation to Maritime

by: Ms. Janelle Requena – Administrative Assistant



After six years in aviation, I made a surprising leap from helicopters to the high seas, transitioning from aircraft to fishing vessels.

My time in aviation, working with a helicopter company in partnership with BATSUB in Belize, was both challenging and rewarding. I gained specialized skills in first aid, survival, and critical thinking, while also learning the technical aspects of helicopter operations and safety protocols. This experience instilled in me a keen sense of discipline, structure, and safety awareness.

Today, I am fully immersed in the world of high seas operations and fisheries. Despite the different setting, the core principles from my aviation background have been instrumental in navigating this new role. I have delved into the intricacies of the high seas, learning about global fishing operations, vessel certification and the importance of maintaining legal and ethical

standards. This sector, driven by sustainability, compliance, and international cooperation, is one I am proud to contribute.

This journey has taught me that growth often begins where comfort ends. The skills and adaptability I developed in aviation now support my efforts in ensuring vessel legitimacy and sustainability. Transitioning between industries has shown me that change is not about starting over but about building on existing knowledge and expanding horizons. From runways to the high seas, my path has been one of reinvention, resilience, and renewed commitment to Belize's maritime heritage.

Empowering the Future: Women in Maritime

by: Valarie Lanza – Director of High Seas Fisheries

With almost three decades of experience in the maritime/fisheries sector, I have seen firsthand the remarkable progress women have made in this historically male-dominated industry. My career has only strengthened my conviction that greater female representation, especially in leadership is essential for the industry's growth and evolution.

The maritime industry thrives on innovation and adaptability, and women bring invaluable perspective that drive both. I firmly believe that fostering more opportunities for women in executive and decision-making roles enriches organizational strategies, enhances creativity, and cultivates a culture of

inclusivity. Diversity in leadership is not just about equality; it is about excellence.

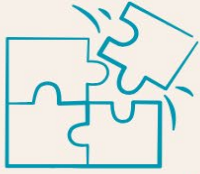
Throughout my journey, mentorship has been a cornerstone of my professional development. Today I am enthusiastic about paying it forward by guiding and empowering the next generation of women in maritime. Through knowledge-sharing advocacy and support, we can dismantle systemic barriers and open doors for more women to excel in this dynamic field.

While I may not be the loudest voice in the room, I am deeply committed to advancing gender equality in maritime. True progress demands collective action, industry leaders, organizations, and individuals must collaborate to create a fairer, more balanced sector where talent and potential are recognized, regardless of gender.

The future of maritime is one where women leaders play a pivotal role in shaping resilience, innovation, and sustainable growth, by championing gender diversity today, we lay the foundation for a stronger, more inclusive industry tomorrow. Together, let's continue to elevate women in maritime, because when women lead, we all move forward.



Puzzle Time!



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Nautical
Navigation

Oceanic
Offshore
Open
Purse
Sea
Seas
Seiner
Ship
Trawler
Vessel
Water
Waters
Zone



From the Editor

Dear Readers,

As we reflect on this latest issue of *The Quarterly Catch*, we are reminded of how much progress we have made and how much more lies ahead. The topic of sustainability and inclusivity highlighted in this issue are not just buzzwords for us; they are the foundation of everything we do. And while the road hasn't always been smooth, the dedication of the BHSFU team has been nothing short of inspiring.

These past few months have tested our adaptability and resilience. The industry never stands still, regulations shift, challenges emerge, and expectations grow. On top of that, we have navigated our own internal changes, reshaping how we work while staying true to our mission. Yet through it all one thing has remained constant, our unwavering commitment to compliance, sustainability and doing business the right way.

As you read through these articles, I hope you feel the same sense of pride I do. We are not just keeping up with change, we are helping to drive it, building an industry that is as sustainable and inclusive as it is strong.

Warm regards,

Editor, *The Quarterly Catch*

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