

E-Newsletter

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BHSFU'S DIGITAL LEAP

By: Ernie Howe – Fisheries Officer

The Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit (BHSFU) has launched its **Digital Certificate Program** effective 1st September, marking a significant advancement in the governance and sustainability of Belize's high seas fishing operations. This initiative enhances efficiency, transparency, and traceability, aligning Belize with global best practices.

Key Features of the Program

- Improves efficiency and reduces processing time.
- The program introduces digital certificates with embedded QR codes, enabling quick verification by stakeholders.

In the fishing industry, where “time is money”, delays in verification can create significant economic burdens for vessel owners. The move to digital certification reduces this risk while improving transparency.

Digital certificates and trade documents are now a cornerstone of global fisheries management, particularly as the sector becomes increasingly regulated and digitized. These tools enhance traceability, strengthen the fight against IUU fishing, and align Belize with best practices in sustainable fisheries governance. By adopting paperless certification, the BHSFU also contributes directly to the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 12: Responsible for Consumption and Production**.



Digital
Certificates



Easy
Verification



Enhanced
Security

Scan. Verify. Trust

Looking ahead, BHSFU's vision is to continue leading in sustainable fisheries management. Future enhancements will allow direct access to the portal for requesting services, further simplifying operations. As the digital transformation of the industry accelerates, BHSFU's innovative approach ensures that Belize remains at the forefront of efficiency, competitiveness and environmental stewardship.



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Belize's Commitment to Sustainable Tuna Fisheries

By: Delice Pinkard – Compliance & Enforcement Manager

The 103rd Ordinary Meeting of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), along with its subsidiary bodies was hosted by the Government of Panama, in Panama City, August 25 to September 5, 2025.

Established in 1950 through a convention between the United States and Costa Rica, the IATTC is a regional fisheries management organization responsible for managing tuna and associated species in the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO). This includes sharks, billfishes, dolphins, rays, seabird and sea turtles. The IATTC's mission is crucial for maintaining the health and sustainability of these vital marine population.

Key Discussions and Outcomes

The 103rd meeting features 19 proposals aimed at:

- Strengthening conservation
- Climate Change Mitigation
- Advancing Management Strategies

- Ecosystem Based Approach
- High Seas Boarding and Inspection

The IATTC Staff presented an encouraging report on the status of tropical tunas.

- **Bigeye Tuna** had strong catches in 2024 attributed to favourable El Nino conditions.
- **Yellowfin Tuna** had consistently high catches with robust recruitment post El Nino
- **Skipjack** had increased catches near the Galapagos Islands and Peru totalling 320 tonnes from 2022-2024



Belize's Role and Future Prospects

Our membership in the IATTC keeps the door open for future opportunities. Belize flagged long-liners and reefer carriers have the potential to engage in fishing and transporting marine resources within the convention area, reinforcing our presence in the global tuna market.

By participating in international forums like the IATTC and adopting best practices, Belize is dedicated to contributing to the long-term health and sustainability of global tuna stocks, aligning our national interests with global environmental stewardship.



Embracing Electronic Monitoring: A Strategic Advantage for Belize's Distant Water Fisheries

By: Robert Robinson – Deputy Director



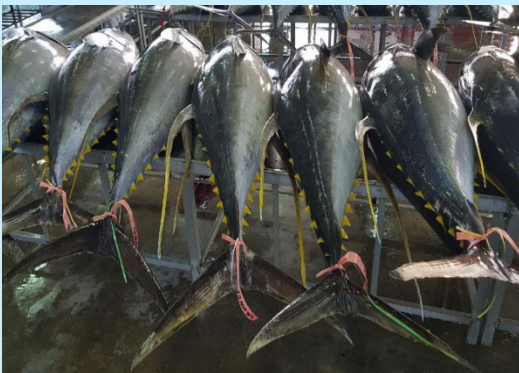
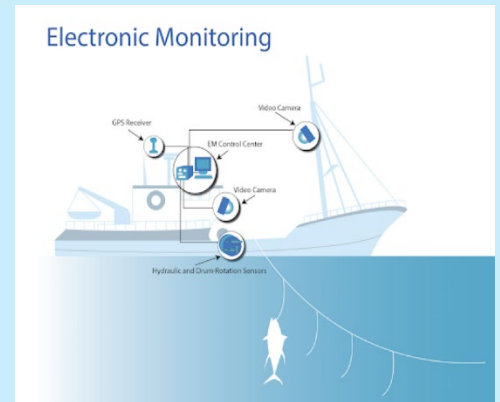
As global demand for sustainably harvested seafood continues to grow, Belize remains at the forefront of efforts to enhance transparency, traceability, and accountability in the tuna fishing industry. In alignment with this vision, Belize joined the Tuna Transparency Pledge (TTP) in April 2024, committing to achieve 100% on-the-water monitoring of fishing activities in its distant water fleet by 2027.

For the purpose of TTP, on-the-water monitoring can be achieved through human observer coverage or the use of electronic monitoring (EM) systems

onboard industrial tuna vessels. While EM has been recognized as a key tool for advancing fisheries transparency, it also offers a variety of strategic and operational benefits for vessel owners which can serve to strengthen both compliance and competitiveness in the global market.

Among its benefits, EM provide a cost-effective alternative to deploying human observers, particularly on long-duration or distant-water fishing trips. These systems, typically consist of onboard cameras, gear sensors, and data storage units which continuously capture verifiable evidence of fishing activity. This data allows for more efficient and accurate reporting, while also reducing the logistical and financial burden of observer placement.

From a regulatory standpoint, EM enhances a vessel's ability to demonstrate compliance with international and national fisheries rules, thereby reducing the risk of sanctions or market access barriers. This is especially critical as major import markets such as the European Union and the United States which has increased scrutiny on IUU fishing and demand for traceable seafood products.



Vessel owners who adopt EM technology also position themselves as leaders in responsible fishing. The presence of a secure, tamper-proof monitoring system on board deters illegal or unethical practices and offers a layer of protection in the event of disputes, accidents, or allegations of misconduct. Moreover, EM data can be used to support third-party audits or certifications, further enhancing market credibility.

In terms of economic benefits, vessels utilizing EM may gain preferential treatment or pricing from seafood buyers seeking demonstrably sustainable products. As more companies align with environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles, transparent operations are increasingly viewed not just as a regulatory requirement but as a business advantage.

Belize's commitment to the Tuna Transparency Pledge is a signal to the international community that our fleet is ready to meet the highest standards of accountability. The Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit (BHSFU) continues to work closely with our partners to build the policy framework and technical support needed to scale up the use of EM systems across our fleet.

We encourage vessel owners and operators to explore the operational and commercial advantages of integrating EM into their fishing activities as Belize prepares to expand EM to an additional 50% of its fleet. The path to sustainability is not only about meeting requirements, it includes embracing innovation, protecting our marine resources, and ensuring long-term access to valuable global markets.

Together, through transparency and technology, we can secure a thriving future for Belize's high seas fisheries.

BHSFU Attends FSC's Inaugural Open Day Event

On Friday August 8, the Belize financial community witnessed a historic event as the Financial Services Commission (FSC) hosted its first Open Day. It was a remarkable day filled with enthusiasm, collaboration and a shared vision for a stronger financial sector in Belize.



Oscar Fuentes – Technical Associate Officer (IMMARBE), Janelle Requena Administrative Assistant (BHSFU)

We at the BHSFU were especially honoured to be a part of this significant occasion. The presence of esteemed guest, including our Prime Minister Honourable John Briceno and Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance Honourable Christopher Coye, underscored the national importance of the FSC mission. Their continued support is a testament of the pivotal role the FSC plays in shaping a robust financial landscape for our nation.

The event was a true gathering of minds and spirit, bringing together industry stakeholders, member of the public, fellow regulators, community partners and

university representatives. We were delighted to see the Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Tracey Panton and the Mayor of Belmopan, His Worship Pablo Cawich, among the distinguished attendees who contributed to the day's success.



Prime Minister Hon. John Briceno, Director General (FSC) Claude Haylock and Minister of State Hon. Christopher Coye

As we reflect on this successful Open Day, the BHSFU is more committed to working alongside the FSC and other partners to build a more inclusive and prosperous financial future for Belize. We look forward to continuing our journey together, united in our efforts to achieve these important goals.



SCIENCE CORNER

Belize's Role in Global Ocean Conservation: The Salas y Gomez and Nazca Ridge

By Charles Coc – Fisheries Scientist and Data Officer

Stretching across the Southeastern Pacific Ocean, the Salas y Gómez and Nazca ridges are a chain of undersea mounts that form one of the most unique and biodiverse marine regions on the planet. These ridges, located off the coasts of Chile and Peru, rise thousands of meters from the ocean floor and provide vital habitat for countless species, including migratory tuna, sharks, seabirds, and deep-sea corals. Scientists have identified them as a critical “blue corridor” for ocean life, connecting ecosystems across vast areas of the high seas (Wagner et al., 2021). Because of their ecological importance, there is growing international attention on conserving these ridges as part of global efforts to protect biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction (Chavez-Molina et al., 2023).



Figure 1. The Salas y Gomez and Nazca Ridges were designated as an Ecologically and Biologically Significant Area (EBSA) (outlined in purple) by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (Chavez-Molina et al., 2023).



The importance of the Salas y Gómez and Nazca ridges may not seem immediately clear for Belize. However, as a member of Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) such as the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization (SPRFMO), Belize plays a role in the governance of fisheries within the area where these ridges are found. Although no Belizean-flagged vessels are currently active in this region, membership ensures that the country aligns with conservation and management measures for highly migratory species. Participation allows Belize to contribute to the protection of shared global resources while keeping the option open to responsibly engage in future fisheries.

Belize, through the Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit (BHSFU) plays a key role in this process. **The Unit oversees the operations of Belize's distant water fishing vessels, ensuring that they comply with international conservation measures, submit accurate catch data, and report on fishing effort.** By doing so, Belize contributes to the broader data pool that helps scientists and RFMOs understand fishing impacts on tuna stocks and associated species. This science-based management is vital to balancing sustainable fishing opportunities with conservation goals. Thus, protecting these ridges is certainly not about closing off opportunities for fishing nations but about ensuring the long-term health of marine ecosystems. By supporting data-driven decision-making, Belize demonstrates that small states can play a meaningful role in the stewardship of international waters. The country's involvement through

its High Seas Fisheries Unit provides an example of how compliance, monitoring, and international cooperation are essential to sustaining fisheries and protecting biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction.

As global discussions advance, areas like the Salas y Gómez and Nazca Ridges are likely to receive greater recognition as priorities for conservation. Belize, through its strong regulatory framework and active participation in RFMOs, is well positioned to contribute to these emerging efforts. **The work of the BHSFU ensures that Belize's high seas fleet operates responsibly while reinforcing the country's reputation as a committed partner in safeguarding ocean resources for future generations.**

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Safeguarding Belize's High Seas Fisheries from Financial Crime

By: Janelle Requena – Administrative Assistant

Belize's high seas fisheries are a cornerstone of its economy and international reputation, yet they face significant threat from financial crime, including money laundering, terrorism financing, and weapons proliferation. These risks, often tied to shell companies, dubious seafood transactions, and illegal unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing can erode the industry's integrity and Belize's standing on the international stage.

To counter these challenges, the BHSFU has undertaken continuous training led by the Central Bank of Belize on Anti-Money Laundering (AML), Combating the Financing of Terrorism (CFT), and Countering Proliferation Financing (CPF). While traditionally linked to finance, these measures are essential for the maritime sector, equipping officers to spot red flags, conduct due diligence and enforce robust safeguards.

Key actions include rigorous verification of vessel ownership, continuous monitoring of financial transactions and the use of advanced vessel monitoring systems such as AIS. Collaboration among the BHSFU, IMMARBE, Belize Customs Department, the Financial Intelligence Unit and the Central Bank of Belize ensure a coordinated response to potential threats. Awareness and compliance are crucial, with targeted training helping officers identify irregularities and industry outreach promoting transparency in supply chains.

By implementing these safeguards, Belize is reinforcing its commitment to responsible fisheries management and global efforts against financial crime. These measures protect livelihoods, preserve international credibility and promote sustainable growth. Clear and effective safeguards create a resilient, transparent and trustworthy industry, solidifying Belize's leadership in responsible high seas fisheries and its dedication to combating financial crime.



IMMARBE & BHSFU staff attending AML training at Central Bank Belize



FROM THE EDITOR:

Dear Readers,

This issue of the Quarterly Catch reflects our unwavering commitment to innovation, transparency, and sustainability in Belize's high seas fisheries. As we continue to modernize our operations, the introduction of our Digital Certificate Program marks a significant leap forward, enhancing efficiency and trust among our stakeholders.

In parallel with our digital transformation, we are embracing Electronic Monitoring Systems (EMS) as a cornerstone of our commitment to responsible fishing. EMS provides real-time monitoring and documentation of fishing activities, ensuring that our operations are transparent and fully compliant with international regulations. This technology not only strengthens our ability to manage fisheries sustainably but also reinforces Belize's position as a leader in environmental stewardship.

Our journey is about more than just adopting new technologies; it is about fostering a culture of responsibility and integrity. By participating in international forums such as IATTC, ICCAT and SPRFMO and implementing robust financial safeguards, we are protecting our industry from threats such as money laundering and terrorism financing. These efforts are crucial in preserving Belize's reputation as a trusted and responsible partner in global fisheries.

Together, through innovation, transparency and a steadfast commitment to sustainability, we are building a future for Belize's high seas fisheries that is both prosperous and principled.

Warm regards,
Editor, *The Quarterly Catch*

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