

## **BELIZE TAKES CENTER STAGE AS REGIONAL LEADER AT KEY INTERNATIONAL TUNA COMMISSION MEETING (ICCAT)**



**SEVILLE, Spain-November 2025** - Belize has been prominently recognized as a proactive leader and skilled negotiator at the 29th Regular Meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), held from November 15-24. The nation earned significant praise for its domestic enforcement actions and successfully spearheaded a critical regional initiative to support developing coastal states.

The European Union publicly commended Belize for its robust national efforts to combat Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. The EU explicitly stated that Belize's course of action represents the exact model that all ICCAT Contracting Parties should follow in the global fight against IUU fishing activities.

Belize's most substantial accomplishment was the negotiation and adoption of a crucial proposal for provisional relief measures for developing coastal ICCAT CPCs. The initiative, originally co-sponsored by Barbados, Belize, Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and later Costa Rica, addressed extenuating circumstances arising from a prior ICCAT measure (Recommendation 19-05).



Aura Building, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
4.5 Miles Philip Goldson Hwy,  
Belize City



[Info@bhsfu.gov.bz](mailto:Info@bhsfu.gov.bz)



[www.bhsfu.gov.bz](http://www.bhsfu.gov.bz)



Tel: 501-223-4918



Facing initial difficulties in gaining acceptance from major CPCs including the EU, USA, Japan, Korea, and Venezuela, Belize took a leading diplomatic role. Belize's delegate conducted intensive bilateral consultations to broker a compromise. This negotiated outcome provides immediate relief for Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and establishes a formal pathway to address the underlying regulatory issue, a major win for regional solidarity and sustainable fisheries management.



The 10-day ICCAT meeting in Seville covered a comprehensive agenda involving scientific advice, fisheries management, compliance reviews, and institutional governance. The Commission reviewed the latest scientific assessments and adopted new conservation measures for tunas, billfishes, and sharks.

Extensive work was done on compliance, including port State measures, electronic monitoring, and actions against IUU fishing. The meeting also addressed cross-cutting issues like climate change,

cooperation with other organizations, and the implications of the new BBNJ (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction) Agreement.

In total, the Commission adopted **12 new Recommendations and 3 Resolutions** on Atlantic tuna and tuna-like species conservation. The meeting concluded with the election of new officers: Mrs. Zakia Driouich (Morocco) as Chair, Mr. Ramon Chong (Curaçao) as First Vice Chair, and outgoing Chair Mr. Ernesto Peñas Lado (EU-Spain) as Second Vice Chair.

By securing international recognition for its enforcement standards and delivering tangible results through skilled diplomacy for its regional partners, Belize solidified its role as an influential and respected voice within the vital international forum of ICCAT.



## From Shark Pups to Data Analysis: A Week of Immersive learning at Bimini Biological Field Station

By: Charles Coc – Fisheries Scientist and Data Officer

I had the privilege of participating in the inaugural Early Career Scientist Workshop alongside 12 other early career scientists at the **Bimini Biological Field Station** in **South Bimini, The Bahamas**. Held from December 6-12, the workshop provided practical, hands-on experience in fieldwork and data analysis, while also fostering critical discussions on fisheries management.



From the first day, the experience was fully immersive. Upon arrival at the field station, participants shared their professional backgrounds and the work they are engaged in across a wide range of fisheries and marine science disciplines. The day concluded with a visit to observe lemon shark pups inhabiting shallow coastal and mangrove habitats. For me, this was a first encounter with sharks, and a powerful reminder of the critical role nursery habitats play in sustaining shark

populations. Field activities continued throughout the week, including stingray interactions, and a beach clean-up at Gun Island, as well as snorkelling excursions that allowed us to observe a wide range of marine species, from turtles and rays to multiple shark species. These experiences reinforced the link between ecosystem health and fisheries sustainability.

Additionally, classroom sessions complemented the fieldwork through lectures on telemetry, high seas fisheries, and their implications for fisheries management. Using mock datasets, we also strengthened our RStudio skills by generating maps, visualisations, and interpreting analytical outputs. One of the most impactful lessons emerged from discussions on scientific objectivity. While a passion for conservation often draws us into this field, the workshop emphasised the importance of compartmentalising personal emotions to ensure that research remains rigorous, transparent and defensible.



A recurring theme across participant discussion was the similarity of challenges face globally, including limited baseline data, funding constraints, and the often-reactive nature of research support. These shared experiences

reinforced the need for sustained investment in data collection and capacity building, principles that strongly resonate with my work in Belize's high seas fisheries. Overall, the workshop was both professionally enriching and personally motivating, equipping me with practical tools and renewed perspective to apply directly in my ongoing fisheries science and management work.

## **How Monitoring and Surveillance are Transforming the Fight Against Illegal Fishing on the High Seas**

**By: Ian Constantino – Monitoring Officer**

The high seas as many of us know are areas of the ocean beyond any country's national jurisdiction, covering nearly half of the planet's surface. These waters are abundant in marine life and vital to global food security but remains among the hardest places on Earth to monitor and conduct surveillance. For many years, fishing vessels operating at great distance from shore could act with little oversight and do as they please. Today, however, advances in monitoring and surveillance are transforming how the world watches high seas fishing vessels and combats illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. This evolution is not just about technology; it is about ensuring the continuous protection of these ecosystems, supporting honest fishers, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the ocean.

In 2025, the BHSFU committed to several strategically planned initiatives. This required many hours of effort and dedication to evolve our administration by

strengthening policies and developing new ideas to assist in the global fight against IUU. As the officer in charge of the FMC, I can say we are fortunate to have a very cooperative and compliant relationship with most of our vessels and their fleet representatives, from the crew onboard to the personnel ashore. Notwithstanding several instances of non-compliance, some of which have required disciplinary actions such as fines or Prohibition to Sail notices, we run a tight ship on this side.

We are currently transitioning between VMS service providers. We made the necessary decision to subscribe to a more modern, user-friendly, and advanced platform. This will enable our Fisheries Monitoring Centre to conduct top-tier monitoring and surveillance of our vessels. The platform's exciting features will provide a clearer picture of what these vessels are doing while at sea. This is only one of our ongoing projects. We have also embarked on implementing an Electronic Monitoring System, which is currently concluding its pilot phase. For this purpose, a handful of vessels were randomly selected from our fleet. We anticipate this system, along with our new VMS platform, will go live in 2026. The results from our pilot phase, while not without significant logistical and financial challenges, have provided us with the crucial operational insights needed to ensure a robust and effective full-scale rollout.

Change is inevitable, and we must learn to adapt as we go, especially in the fishing industry, which has proven to be extremely dynamic. The end goal for all



stakeholders is the overall sustainability of marine resources and combating the highly successful illegal activities that occur daily on the high seas.

## A Year-End Reflection: Leading with Love, at Home and at Seas

**By: Delice Pinkard – Compliance & Enforcement Manager**

As I write my final article of the year, I am reflecting on a period of profound personal transition. Last Christmas was marked by deep loss with the passing of my mother and sister. The season, once defined by my mother's magical touch as our family matriarch, felt irrevocably changed. As someone whose birthday falls on Christmas Day, this shift has been especially poignant.

Yet, in the wake of this change, clarity emerges. My role as a leader, so central to my work in fisheries management has taken on a new, deeply personal dimension. I have lifted the baton to help lead my family, finding immense gratitude in my young daughter, my two younger siblings, and the beloved nieces my sister left behind. Their presence is a constant reminder that love is the most enduring legacy.

This year, that realization inspired a new purpose for the holidays. The true magic of Christmas, for me, lies not in material gifts but in celebrating faith, creating lasting memories, and giving selflessly, just as my mother did. I wanted to translate this belief into action, both as a mother and as a leader.

With my daughter, we visited the Liberty Children's Home to donate supplies and share some holiday cheer, establishing what will become our new family tradition. The team at work assembled and delivered a Christmas basket for a single mother in need. These acts, though simple, are powerful reminders of our shared humanity and purpose.

Like the timeless lesson from Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, this season calls us to embrace our loved ones, offer forgiveness, practice selflessness, and express profound gratitude for the time we have together. Let's treasure each moment, for these are the threads that weave our collective memories into a tapestry of love.

From my family to yours, I wish you all a Happy Christmas and a peaceful, prosperous New Year.



## Building a Safer, Stronger Future: Embracing the Four Pillars for Belize's High Seas Fisheries

By: Delice Pinkard – Compliance & Enforcement Manager

Belize's recent success on the international maritime stage, culminating in our positive IMSAS audit, fills us with great pride. It reflects our national commitment to excellence and safety at sea. This achievement has also prompted us to look forward to the next important horizon: **the safety and well-being of our high seas fishing fleet.**

Currently, our hardworking fishing vessels and crews operate in a challenging regulatory gap, as key international safety and labour conventions were not designed with them in mind. This is a global issue, with heartbreaking human costs. But a powerful solution is on the horizon, and Belize is poised to lead the way.



A brighter, safer future for our fishing industry is being built on four key international agreements, known as the **'Four Pillars' of fishing vessel safety:**

1. **The Cape Town Agreement (2012):** This is the cornerstone for vessel safety, setting robust, mandatory standards for construction, stability, and seaworthiness to ensure our ships are built to withstand the sea.
2. **The STCW-F Convention (1995):** This ensures our greatest asset, our people, are properly trained, certified, and prepared for their vital roles onboard.
3. **The ILO Work in Fishing Convention (2007):** This affirms our commitment to the dignity, rights, and decent working conditions of every fisher, recognizing their invaluable contribution.
4. **The FAO Port State Measures Agreement (2009):** This strengthens our hand in protecting our marine resources by combating illegal fishing, ensuring that responsible operators like ours thrive.

Adopting these pillars is more than a compliance exercise; it's an investment in our people, our reputation, and our marine environment. The benefits will touch every part of our industry:

- **Safer Seas:** Dramatically reduced risks for our crews, giving families peace of mind.
- **Empowered Crews:** Better-trained fishers working under clear, fair conditions.
- **A Protected Ocean:** Stronger tools to safeguard the fisheries that sustain our communities.
- **Enhanced Leadership:** Solidifying Belize's role as a respected, responsible flag state, opening doors for our vessels worldwide.

We recognize that this journey involves real challenges, including investment and adaptation. Belize is not alone; the global community is moving steadily toward this new standard, with the Cape Town Agreement gaining momentum toward full activation.

Here at the Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit, our vision is clear: **“To become a leader in high seas fisheries management.”** We are already taking steps toward this future. Our enhanced licensing criteria, including preliminary vessel inspections, are the first building blocks in ensuring we register only quality, seaworthy vessels.

The full implementation of these safety standards will be a carefully managed process in the coming years. We are committed to working **alongside you, our vessel owners, operators, and crews** every step of the way. We will ensure clear communication, provide guidance, and champion a transition that strengthens the entire Belizean fishing industry.

By embracing these Four Pillars, we are not just meeting international standards; we are building a legacy of safety, sustainability, and pride for Belize at sea. Let’s build this stronger future, together.

## Something New to our Publication

**Introducing a new feature to our newsletter: POETRY. We’re thrilled to share this inaugural piece, submitted by a member of our staff. It highlights the wonderful creativity that exists across our team, and we welcome other submissions in the future.**

## A Belizean Maritime Christmas

**By: Janelle Requena – Administrative Assistant**

Where the reef glows blue like stained-glass light,  
And the waves breathe slow through a velvet night,  
Christmas comes not with frost or pine,  
But with salt-kissed wind and coconut wine.

Boats rock soft like cradled dreams,  
Under starry skies and silver beams,  
Fishermen home from a year at sea,  
Lay nets aside, awaiting the catch for their family.

No snow falls here yet spirit gleams,  
In lanterns hung like firefly dreams,  
Palm leaves glitter with tinsel bright,  
A tropic Christmas, warm and right.

We gather where the tide rolls near,  
Where laughter tastes like cassava and cheer,  
Where lobster grills in festive flame,  
And children sing the sea’s name.

For Santa wears flip-flops along this shore,  
His sack filled with conch shells, laughter, more

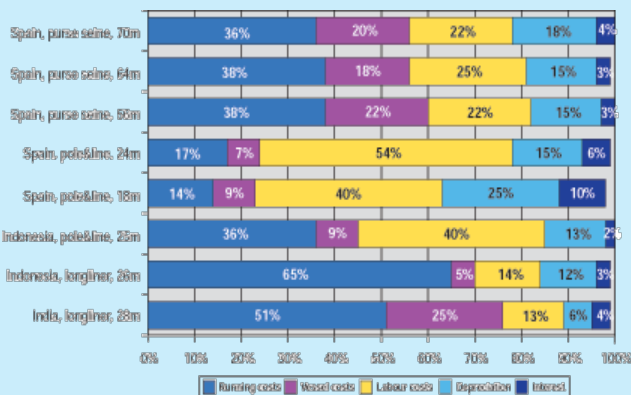


Table 1: Approx. Cost Structure of Tuna vessels

Crabs tap claws like jingle bells,  
And sea-spray whispers holiday spells.

In Belize the waves tell ancient lore,  
Of sailors, ships, and sea floor,  
Of lobster and red snapper silver flight,  
Carried in currents through day and night.

We pray the sea gives safe return,  
For every soul who tides must earn,  
And bless our waters deep and wide,  
For reef and river, moon and tide.

Christmas here is ocean-born,  
A sunrise wrapped in coral dawn,  
Where hearts are warm and salt is sweet,  
And every wave returns like heartbeat.

So, raise a toast to sea and sand,  
To the starry sky and the fisherman's hand,  
Belize at Christmas bright and free,  
A gift of maritime, wind, and sea.

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## Merry Christmas and a Prosperous 2026



From  
Management &  
Staff of the  
BHSFU



## **A Guardian of the Sea: Belize's Very Own, Beverly Wade Awarded Prestigious OBE**

*From Fisheries Administrator to Global Blue Economy Architect, Her Work Protects Oceans and Pioneers Finance*

**By: Robert Robinson – Deputy Managing Director**

The oceans have a steadfast champion in Ms. Beverly Wade, OBE. Recently, her decades of pioneering work were crowned with a prestigious honour: she was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the 2024 King's Birthday Honours. The award was formally presented in a special ceremony by Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Edinburgh in November 2025, marking a royal endorsement of a career dedicated to saving our seas. But this isn't just a story about an award; it's a story about revolutionizing how we protect our oceans.



As the current **CEO of Belize's Ministry of Blue Economy and Marine Conservation, Ms. Wade** provides the strategic vision. Yet, her legacy was forged in the trenches of innovation. Imagine transforming national debt into a force for marine life. That's exactly what she did. In her previous role leading Belize's Blue Bonds and Finance Permanence Unit, Ms. Wade was a key architect of the nation's groundbreaking "Blue Bond." This ingenious debt-for-nature swap didn't just refinance debt, it created a permanent, multi-million-dollar funding stream for marine conservation, making Belize a global poster child for sustainable finance.

She didn't just manage fisheries; she redefined what was possible. Ms. Wade's journey began at the Belize Fisheries Department, where she broke barriers as the first female and longest-serving Fisheries Administrator. There, she wasn't just a regulator; she was a reformer, strengthening enforcement, championing sustainable practices, and fiercely representing Belize on the world stage to protect shared ocean resources.

What sets Ms. Wade apart is her rare ability to bridge worlds, translating complex marine science into actionable policy, and policy into tangible financial deals. She has navigated the intricate halls of international bodies, from fisheries organizations to climate funds, always with one goal: securing a future where the ocean thrives.

The BHSFU extends its heartfelt congratulations to Ms. Beverly Wade, OBE. This honour is a well-deserved recognition of a visionary leader whose commitment has not only shaped Belize's blue economy but has offered a replicable blueprint for the world. We thank her for her exceptional service; the waves and the wildlife are better for it.



## 2025: The Year Belize Made Waves

### How a Small Nation Became a Powerhouse in Ocean Stewardship

The story of 2025 wasn't just about meetings and reports; it was the year Belize firmly planted its flag as a global leader in ocean governance. Through bold diplomacy, digital leaps, and unwavering commitment, we proved that size is no match for vision and principled action.

The year opened and closed with Belize in the international spotlight. At the ICCAT meeting in Seville, our delegation didn't just attend, we **set the standard**. The European Union publicly hailed Belize's model approach to combating Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, a monumental endorsement on the world stage. But we didn't stop at praise. Belize then **spearheaded a critical proposal**, navigating complex geopolitical currents to secure provisional relief measures for fellow Caribbean Small Island Developing States. This wasn't just policy; it was powerful advocacy, showcasing Belize as the region's steadfast champion.



## Driving Innovation and Modernization

In 2025, we didn't just modernize; we transformed.

- **The Digital Leap:** In September, we consigned paper certificates to history with the launch of our Digital Certificate Program. Secure, QR-coded documents now streamline trade, enhance security, and mark a quantum leap toward our UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Eyes on the Water:** Our commitment to the Tuna Transparency Pledge moved from promise to practice. We championed the real, strategic benefits of Electronic Monitoring (EM) systems directly to vessel owners, building trust in technology. Meanwhile, our own EM pilot program surged forward, and we laid the groundwork for a next-generation Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) platform, poised for a full 2026 rollout.

Leadership is built on strong foundations and stronger teams.

- **Voice on the World Stage:** Our presence was felt from Chile to Panama to Spain at key RFMO meetings (SPRFMO, IATTC, ICCAT), where we engaged on frontline issues: climate resilience, shark conservation, and sustainable quotas.
- **Investing in Our Greatest Asset:** Our team's capacity grew through immersive experiences like the Early Career Scientist Workshop in Bimini, which armed our staff with cutting-edge skills and fresh scientific perspectives.
- **Community & Inclusion:** We opened our doors at the Financial Services Commission Open Day



and proudly celebrated the first anniversary of the WIMAC Belize Chapter, driving gender inclusion and building a more diverse maritime future.



With the Cape Town Agreement nearing reality, we are already ahead of the curve. By enhancing our licensing criteria, we are proactively integrating higher maritime safety standards into our national framework. This forward-looking move solidifies our trajectory toward becoming a true leader in high seas fisheries management.

2025 proved a powerful truth: through collaboration, innovation, and courage, a small nation can create a tidal wave of positive change. We carry this unstoppable momentum into 2026, ready to navigate new challenges and continue our vital pursuit of sustainable, responsible oceans for all.

## FROM THE EDITOR



Dear Readers,

**Welcome to our first issue of 2026!**

As we turn the page on a remarkable year, this edition marks a special milestone for *The Quarterly Catch*.

For the first time, we are featuring a poem submitted by one of our talented officers. This creative addition highlights the diverse passions and depth of talent within our BHSFU team, reminding us that our strength lies not only in our technical expertise but also in the rich, multifaceted individuals who drive our mission forward.

Looking back at 2025, it was a year defined by leadership, innovation, and steadfast commitment on the international stage. From the halls of global commissions to the decks of our vessels and the code of our new digital systems, **Team BHSFU** demonstrated what it means to be a proactive flag state and a trusted partner in sustainable fisheries.

As always, we extend our sincere thanks to every contributor, reader, and stakeholder. Here's to building on last year's momentum and navigating the opportunities of 2026 together.

**Warm regards,**

**Editor, *The Quarterly Catch***



## CONTACT US

Valarie Lanza – Director of High Seas Fisheries  
[Valarie.lanza@bhsfu.gov.bz](mailto:Valarie.lanza@bhsfu.gov.bz)

Robert Robinson-Deputy Director of High Seas Fisheries  
[Robert.robinson@bhsfu.gov.bz](mailto:Robert.robinson@bhsfu.gov.bz)

Delice Pinkard – Compliance and Enforcement Manager  
[Delice.pinkard@bhsfu.gov.bz](mailto:Delice.pinkard@bhsfu.gov.bz)

Ernie Howe – Fisheries Officer  
[Ernie.howe@bhsfu.gov.bz](mailto:Ernie.howe@bhsfu.gov.bz)

Ian Constantino – Monitoring Officer \_ FMC  
[ian.constantino@bhsfu.gov.bz](mailto:ian.constantino@bhsfu.gov.bz)

Charles Coc – Fisheries Scientist & Data Officer  
[Charles.coc@bhsfu.gov.bz](mailto:Charles.coc@bhsfu.gov.bz)

Janelle Requena – Administrative Assistant  
[Janelle.requena@bhsfu.gov.bz](mailto:Janelle.requena@bhsfu.gov.bz)

