The Quarterly Catch
E-Newsletter

Issue: 31 | October 2026

Beyond Compliance: Why Sensitization and Stakeholder Engagement Matter in Belize's High Seas Fisheries

A licence, a conservation measure or a reporting obligation is only as effective as the understanding of the people expected to apply it. Regulation sets the standard; sensitization and stakeholder engagement turn that standard into everyday practice on the deck, in the wheelhouse and in meeting rooms.

> **"Compliance is not something done to the industry; it is something we achieve together."**
>
> BELIZE HIGH SEAS FISHERIES UNIT

Belize's domestic fisheries are managed by the Belize Fisheries Department. The BHSFU's remit is international: the Belize-flagged fleet fishing on the high seas, and Belize's obligations as a flag State within the regional fisheries management organisations.

Belize-flagged fishing vessels operate under the measures of three Regional Fisheries Management Organisations: **ICCAT**, **IATTC** and **SPRFMO**. Each adopts new or revised rules every year on catch limits, transhipment, observer coverage, bycatch, monitoring and reporting, inter alia.

A single missed report, an unauthorised transhipment or an unrecorded bycatch event can expose a vessel to sanctions and expose Belize as a flag State to international scrutiny.

Sensitization closes the gap between what the rules say and what people actually do. It is preventive by design: the cheapest non-compliance to deal with is the one that never happens.

Sensitization is not a single workshop or an annual circular. It is a continuing, two-way conversation with owners, operators, masters, crews, agents and service providers: plain-language guidance on what must be done and by when, and genuine listening when requirements prove unclear or unworkable.

The ongoing rollout of Electronic Monitoring Systems on longline and purse seine vessels shows why this matters. Operators and crews need to understand why electronic monitoring is being introduced, how the data will be used and what it means for daily operations.

Aura Building, 2nd Floor
4.5 Miles Philip Goldson Hwy,
Belize City

Info@bhsfu.gov.bz

www.bhsfu.gov.bz

Tel: 501-223-4918

With the high seas fleet, the BHSFU works with owners, operators and crews to promote responsible fishing, accurate reporting, and healthy and sustainable stocks. Internationally, it advocates for Belize's fishing opportunities at RFMO meetings, and that case is only as strong as the fleet's compliance record. Engagement with the fleet and advocacy internationally are, in that sense, two sides of the same effort.

Review of the High Seas Fishing Act and its regulations is among the 2027 legislative priorities, and electronic monitoring will continue to expand across the fleet. Both will be shaped through continued consultation with industry.

The BHSFU encourages owners, operators, agents and all fisheries partners to raise questions early and share operational concerns. Compliance is not something done to the industry; it is something we achieve together, for Belize's fisheries, its flag and the ocean resources we all depend on.

Belize at the Table: Highlights from the 104th IATTC Meeting in Lisbon

By: Delice S. Pinkard – Acting Director of High Seas Fisheries

From 24 August to 4 September 2026, the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) met in Lisbon, and Belize took its place among the delegations. Delice Pinkard, Acting Director of the BHSFU, led our team through the Commission's working groups and plenary sessions.



Figure 1: The 104th Annual Meetings of the IATTC and the AIDCP, Lisbon, Portugal

The outcome for Belize was a good one. **No compliance concerns were raised against us**, and we remain fully up to date on our financial obligations to the Commission. Our 2027 contribution is only a modest increase, though members should expect assessments to rise in the years ahead.

The science was encouraging as well. **Bigeye, yellowfin and skipjack tuna** were all reported to be in healthy condition, and the Individual Vessel Threshold (IVT) system, which has worked so well for bigeye, may now be considered for the other two species. Of the **36 proposals** put before the Commission, **12 were adopted**, including new measures on sharks and seabirds and a requirement for observer coverage on longline vessels.



Figure 2: Belize's seat at the plenary in Lisbon

Belize also presented a proposal on our regional progress with the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management and renewed our request to have our historical purse seine capacity of **2,638 cubic metres** reinstated. Several larger members opposed any expansion, and no increases were approved. A session devoted to capacity is planned for early 2027, and we intend to keep making our case.



Figure 3: Delegates during a working group session

Closer to home, the work goes on. Next year, our licensed longline vessel operating in the area will use Electronic Monitoring to supplement human observer coverage in the Eastern Pacific, and we hope to secure IATTC accreditation for our EM programme within the next few years.

We would also like to see more vessels fly the Belize flag in the region, which will take sustained outreach by our Deputy Registrars and possibly a regional representative. Growth of that kind needs the right people, funding and institutional support behind it, so that the Unit can continue to meet its monitoring and reporting responsibilities with confidence.

Managing Fisheries in an Uncertain Ocean

By: Charles O. Coc – Fisheries Data & Statistics Officer

The world's oceans are dynamic and interconnected ecosystems that support fisheries essential to food security, economic development, and international trade. However, managing these resources presents challenges as fish populations fluctuate, environmental conditions change, and fishing activities interact with complex ecological and institutional systems.

Fisheries management relies on scientific indicators such as stock biomass, fishing mortality, recruitment, and maximum sustainable yield (MSY) to assess stock status and guide conservation measures. Yet fisheries operate as interconnected systems in which ecological processes, fishing activities, and management arrangements influence one another. Garcia and Charles (2007) highlight how these interactions introduce uncertainty and complicate the predictions of fisheries outcomes.



Figure 4: A longline-caught yellowfin tuna (Thunnus albacares) in Puntarenas, Costa Rica

Uncertainty is inherent in fisheries management. Incomplete catch records limited biological sampling, environmental variability, and differences among assessment models can influence estimates of stock abundance and productivity. These challenges are particularly relevant to highly migratory species, such as tropical tunas (Figure 4), whose distributions extend across vast oceanic regions. Rather than eliminating uncertainty, effective fisheries management seeks to account for it through approaches such as **harvest strategies**, which establish predefined objectives and decision rules to guide management responses as stock conditions change.

The effectiveness of conservation measures depends not only on their scientific foundations but also on their implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Hilborn et al. (2005) highlight the importance of institutional arrangements and incentives in achieving sustainable fisheries outcomes, while Degnbol and McCay (2007) demonstrate how overlooking interactions within fisheries systems can produce unintended consequences. These findings reinforce the importance of clearly defined objectives, reliable monitoring systems, and adaptive management approaches that allow measures to be evaluated and adjusted as new information becomes available.

Through participation in Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs), including **ICCAT**, **IATTC** and **SPRFMO**, Belize contributes to international scientific cooperation and the sustainable management of shared marine resources. Strengthening fisheries data collection, reporting, and monitoring supports reliable stock assessments and informed management decisions.

Ultimately, sustainable fisheries management requires recognizing ecological complexity, accounting for uncertainty, and continuously evaluating management performance to safeguard marine resources for future generations.

Vessel Monitoring at Sea: Why VMS Matters

By: Aurelie Leon – Monitoring Officer

In August 2026, the Supreme Court of the Philippines upheld a decision declaring a regulation requiring continuous monitoring and electronic reporting by commercial fishing vessels unconstitutional. The court raised concerns about the regulation's legal basis, the protection of confidential fishing information, and whether the monitoring requirements were adequately justified (Supreme Court of the Philippines, 2026). However, the case also highlights an important issue: how can fisheries authorities effectively monitor fishing

activities while ensuring that monitoring systems are appropriately regulated?

Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) play a critical role in fostering compliance, identifying violations, and ensuring sustainable fisheries management. Instead of treating the technology itself as the problem, the emphasis should be on the correct use of technology, backed up by sound regulations and appropriate monitoring systems.

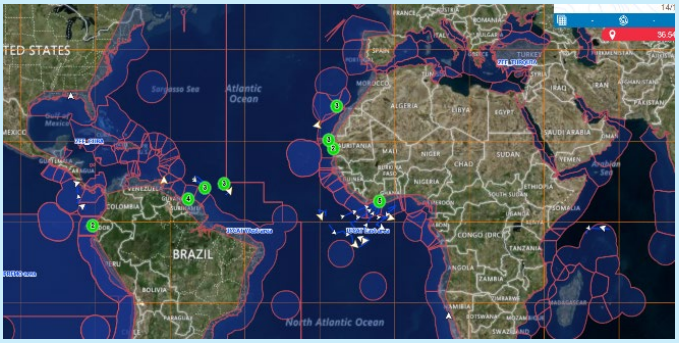


Figure 5: Vessel Tracking Through VMS

Vessel Monitoring Systems give fisheries administrations a way to monitor the positions and movements of vessels and obtain data on fishing operations at sea. Monitoring becomes especially crucial for vessels which fish far out at sea, where inspection becomes costly and complicated.

Data from the VMS may serve to discover vessels entering restricted areas, working in an area where they were not supposed to be, or not transmitting their positions according to the regulations. It does not mean, however, that there has been a violation in each case.

While the VMS is a valuable tool, the location of the vessel does not tell the whole story. Monitoring officers must compare tracking information with other sources, including catch reports, logbooks, and observer reports, where applicable.

For instance, unusual vessel movements can be reviewed alongside reported fishing activity to identify inconsistencies; where one is found, it can be investigated. As highlighted by WCPFC (2026), monitoring and evaluation involve more than information gathering; they also require analysis to determine compliance and the effectiveness of management measures.

For the BHSFU, this approach supports the monitoring of Belize-flagged vessels operating on the high seas and within international fisheries frameworks.

The Philippine case demonstrates that monitoring requirements need clear legal authority, specific purposes, and proper protection of confidential information. All of these play an important role in the monitoring process, but they cannot replace the need for monitoring itself. VMS is best regarded as a tool that works properly in combination with the other elements of monitoring.

Navigating New Horizons: IMMARBE and BHSFU Expand Youth Outreach in the Maritime Sector

By: Emelda Herrera – Operations Officer (IMMARBE)

Awareness of the International Merchant Marine Registry of Belize (IMMARBE) and the Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit (BHSFU) continues to grow across the country. As part of this effort, both organizations remain committed to educating Belize's young people about their work and the

career opportunities available in the maritime sector, primarily through the Internship Programme and school outreach initiatives.

In summer 2026, the BHSFU welcomed two interns through the Internship Programme: one from **Itz'at STEAM Academy** and one from the **University of Belize**. Over the course of their placement, the students gained practical insight into the Unit's operations and made meaningful contributions to its day-to-day work. The programme concluded in August, and following its completion one of the interns secured permanent employment with the BHSFU, a testament to the programme's role in developing local talent for the maritime sector.



BHSFU's summer 2026 interns

IMMARBE and the BHSFU also joined fellow maritime entities in commemorating **World Maritime Day** under this year's theme, *"From Policy to Practice: Powering Maritime Excellence."* The occasion was marked by a Maritime Week of events and activities in which IMMARBE and the BHSFU hosted a joint booth at the Maritime Expo. Staff engaged with students and members of the public, explaining the role each organization plays and highlighting the range of careers available in the maritime industry. For many attendees, it was their first introduction to IMMARBE and the BHSFU, underscoring the value of continued public engagement.



Students visit the joint IMMARBE–BHSFU booth at the Maritime Expo

Through initiatives such as these, IMMARBE and the BHSFU are investing in the next generation of maritime professionals and demonstrating that a wide range of career opportunities exists for Belize's youth, both on land and at sea.

A New Chapter: From Monitoring to Licensing and Certification

By: Ian Constantino – Licensing and Certification Officer

After five years as Monitoring Officer, one of our team members reflects on an unexpected career and the next step within the Unit.

When I joined the BHSFU as a Monitoring Officer five years ago, I came from a background in computer repairs and fibre-optic

telecommunications. My technical skills carried over, but the industry did not. Vessel monitoring, satellite tracking, fisheries operations and the regulatory obligations of Belize's high seas fleet were all new to me, and I had a great deal to learn.

What began as unfamiliar territory has become work I genuinely enjoy. Monitoring taught me adaptability, patience, attention to detail and, above all, a willingness to keep learning. It also took me to places I might never otherwise have visited, including and gave me a real appreciation for the international nature of our work.

In August 2026, I took up the role of Licensing and Certification Officer. My years in monitoring gave me a practical grounding in vessel operations, reporting requirements and the importance of accurate information, timely communication and sound record-keeping. These are equally central to licensing and certification, where accuracy, coordination and compliance matter most.

There will be new processes to master and new challenges to navigate, and I welcome them. For me, this move is more than a change in title. It reflects the experience and confidence I have built within the Unit.

I am pleased to welcome **Ms. Aurelie Leon** as our new Monitoring Officer. Having done the job myself, I know the consistency and sound judgement it requires, and I am confident in her ability to carry it forward. I look forward to sharing what I have learned and supporting the transition wherever I can, because continuity in our operations depends on that kind of teamwork.

Five years ago, I could not have imagined this career for myself. I am grateful to the colleagues who have guided me along the way, and I begin this next chapter with confidence in what I have learned and optimism for what lies ahead.

In This Issue

Beyond Compliance: Why Sensitization and Stakeholder Engagement Matter
LEAD STORY

Belize at the Table: Highlights from the 104th IATTC Meeting
DELICE S. PINKARD

Managing Fisheries in an Uncertain Ocean
CHARLES O. COC

Vessel Monitoring at Sea: Why VMS Matters
AURELIE LEON

Navigating New Horizons: Youth Outreach in the Maritime Sector
EMELDA HERRERA

A New Chapter: From Monitoring to Licensing and Certification
IAN CONSTANTINO

From the Editor
EDITOR'S NOTE

The Quarterly Catch

BHSFU E-Newsletter

FROM THE EDITOR



Dear Readers,

Welcome to the 31st Edition of **The Quarterly Catch!**

As we close out the third quarter of 2026, compliance, monitoring and the people who make them work have been at the centre of our efforts. Our lead story, *Beyond Compliance*, explores why sensitization and stakeholder engagement matter for Belize's high seas fleet, and why a strong compliance record is built through ongoing conversation with owners, operators, masters and crews, not regulation alone. With electronic monitoring expanding across the fleet and the review of the High Seas Fishing Act on the 2027 legislative agenda, that conversation has never been more important.

From Lisbon, Acting Director Delice Pinkard brings us highlights from the 104th IATTC Meeting, where Belize maintained a clean compliance record and renewed its case for the reinstatement of its historical purse seine capacity. Charles Coc reflects on managing fisheries in an uncertain ocean and the role reliable data plays in Belize's work within the RFMOs. Our new Monitoring Officer, Aurelie Leon, explains why Vessel Monitoring Systems matter, drawing lessons from a recent ruling by the Supreme Court of the Philippines.

This issue also celebrates the people behind the Unit. Emelda Herrera shares how IMMARBE and the BHSFU are reaching Belize's young people through the Internship Programme and Maritime Week, and Ian Constantino looks back on five years as Monitoring Officer as he steps into his new role as Licensing and Certification Officer. Congratulations, Ian, and welcome, Aurelie!

As always, we hope this issue keeps you informed and engaged with the ongoing work of the Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit. Thank you for your continued readership and support.

Until next time,

Warm regards,
Editor, *The Quarterly Catch*

CONTACT US

Valarie Lanza – Deputy Managing Director (IMMARBE)
deputymd@immarbe.com

Delice Pinkard – Acting Director of High Seas Fisheries
Delice.pinkard@bhsfu.gov.bz

Ernie Howe – Compliance and Enforcement Officer
Ernie.howe@bhsfu.gov.bz

Charles Coc – Fisheries Data and Statistics Officer
Charles.coc@bhsfu.gov.bz

Ian Constantino – Licensing and Certification Officer
Ian.constantino@bhsfu.gov.bz

Aurelie Leon – Monitoring Officer
Aurelie.leon@bhsfu.gov.bz