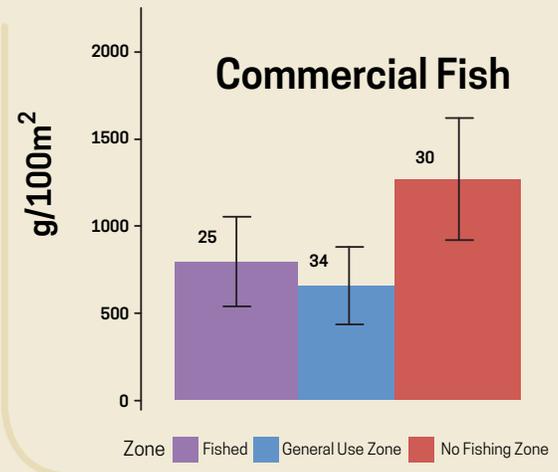


Belize

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE HOPEFUL

Belize has higher commercial fish biomass in the no-take zones, although the general use zones of MPAs show no benefit of management. Belize has several long-standing well-enforced no-take zones, in addition to several newer and non-enforced no-take zones, which has likely reduced the overall impact of the fully protected zones.

Examining subregions, there is also good news for the Southern Barrier reef which improved in health to achieve an overall 'good' health rating - one of only three in the MAR. This subregion contains three well-managed MPAs including the large fully protected Laughing Bird Caye NM. This subregion has also benefitted from having implemented managed access since 2013.



The Central Belize Barrier reef is the only subregion in the MAR in critical condition (1.8). There is extremely low abundance of herbivorous fish in Central Belize (978 g/100m²) compared to neighboring Northern (3104g/100m²) and Southern (4194 g/100m²) zones. The biomass of commercial fish is similarly low (139g/100m²) vs the Northern (1194g/100m²) and Southern (2002 g/100m²) barrier reef zones.

This Central Belize area is known to have a undetermined number of both legal and illegal fish traps in use, with exports of whole fish directly from Big Creek to Jamaica. National whole fish exports normally range from 400-450,000lbs/year but escalated to over 1.1 million pounds in 2015. Fish traps such as those commonly used in Jamaica, first came to Belize in 2010 and have

proven particularly effective for decimating fisheries in Jamaica and indiscriminately catching protected parrotfish, juvenile fish and many other non-target species. This region also has less fully protected zone and less overall enforcement than other sub-regions in Belize.

Gillnets, sometimes set near coral reefs, are another fisheries challenge in this subregion. Belize also had both the lowest (Turneffe) and highest (Northern Barrier) amounts of fleshy macroalgae in the MAR, potentially linked to varying nutrient pollution and herbivory levels.



Offshore Oil Off-limits at last!

Belize unanimously passed the Petroleum Operations (Offshore Zone Moratorium) Bill, 2017 which places an indefinite moratorium on offshore oil development in Belize's marine territory. Belizeans have remained steadfast in their opposition to offshore oil since the issue arose in 2010. This represents a national consciousness of Belize's dependence on its marine assets, especially via tourism and fisheries. The law is also an important step towards removing the Belize Barrier Reef World Heritage Site from the 'in danger' list; progress on other necessary steps are underway.

2018 Fisheries Act Includes Stronger Protections

Belize's cabinet approved the new Fisheries Resources Bill in October 2017 and the House of Representatives should ratify it in early 2018. The act is one of the most modern and comprehensive for small-scale fisheries in the world, containing measures that provide a much stronger legal foundation for a comprehensive ecosystems-based approach to sustainable fisheries management.

Green sea turtle found entangled in fishing traps another deadly bycatch.

Photo: N. Requena

