REEF CURRENTS

NEWSLETTER FOR THE NORTHERN MARINE RESERVE MANAGEMENT UNIT

Volume 1, Issue 1 June 2009

Introduction of Newsletter

This is a new initiative spearheaded by the Northern Marine Reserve Management Unit which includes Bacalar Chico, Hol Chan and Caye Caulker Marine Reserve.

The main purpose of this initiative is to provide an effective means of communicating activities and accomplishments of our northern Marine Reserves. We invite readers to submit comments to the editor and hopefully in the next issue we can include a section with readers' comments. We also welcome contributor to provide positive article to this newsletter.

We hope that this newsletter will become an important communication tool between management of our Marine Reserves and stakeholders. Therefore, we encourage you to read the information within and provide feedback.

Individuals involved in production of this newsletter include:

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Reef Week 2009

Environmental Education

***Picture 1**: 1st place winner on Trivia competition*

The goal of the education program is to create awareness of the Reserve and its associated ecosystem, therefore as a part of this program Hol Chan has been celebrating Reef Week for the past four years.

Reef Week encompasses an entire week filled with different fun and educational activities for students as well as the community. This year's program was celebrated under the theme "**Save the reef; don't leave us in grief**" which was Contributed by the students of Island Academy. In addition, several activities were conducted such as, the Hol Chan Open Day; the Trivia competition which Javier Williams claimed first place, Kelsie Luna second and Zack Matte third place. Other activities included the skit competition where students designed their own skits based on conservation of marine & coastal resources. ACES claimed first place while Island Academy took second place. Lastly, to close off Reef Week, Hol Chan took 10 teachers on a marine reserve tour of Bacalar Chico and Arrecife de Xcalak.

Other upcoming events will be the yearly 'Responsible Tour Guiding Sessions' where dive shops will be briefed on the new regulations of Hol Chan and as well as the new fisheries regulations.

Submit all comments, article, letters and other general correspondence to:

The Editor
Hol Chan Marine Reserve Office
Caribena Street
San Pedro Town
Phone: 226-2247 email: mikeobze@yahoo.com

HCMR New Boundaries

Cangrejo Shoals inclusion

The Hol Chan Marine Reserve (HCMR) was established in 1987 to conserve a small but complete sample of Belize's coastal and marine ecosystem. As other marine protected areas under Marine Reserve status, the HCMR is a multi-use area that allows for no-take marine conservation and controlled fishing activities. To accomplish this, the marine reserve has been divided into zones.

The Reserve is now recognized as an important tourism product for the country of Belize. In view of this Government has reinforced its commitment to conservation of our coastal ecosystems by extending the protected area to include a vast area of sea grass meadows, flats and mangrove locally known as the Cangrejo Shoals. This area has been identified as an important nursery for lobster and conch and is an important fishing ground for fishermen of San Pedro and Caye Caulker. Additionally, the mangrove flats and shallow lagoons provide excellent opportunities for catch and release fishing tourism.

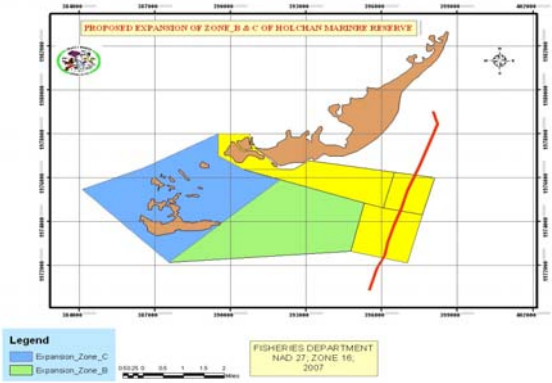


Fig 1: *Ambergris Caye Map with new boundaries of HCMR*

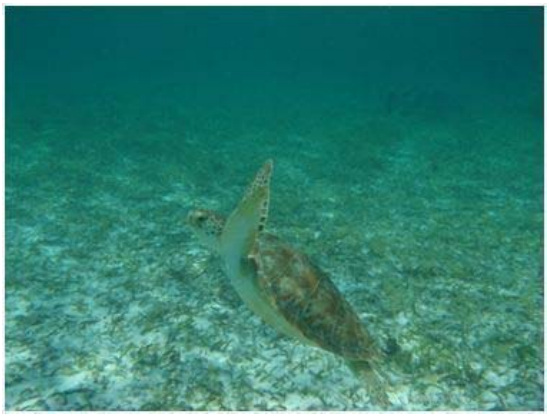
This new addition focuses on the protection of the mangrove islands and sea grass meadows. Traditional fishers are allowed to continue their fishing practice but spear fishing and the use of nets is prohibited. The HCMR has now more than tripled in size and covers an area of over 55 square kilometres of mangrove, sea grass and coral reefs.

Through sustainable fishery and tourism the HCMR has provide the communities of San Pedro and Caye Caulker an important economic incentive to support conservation. Stakeholders' participation has been vital to the success of this marine protected area. This was proven in the recent extension of the HCMR where fishermen and tour guides played a vital role in lobbying government for the inclusion of the Cangrejo Shoals into the Marine Reserve.

Sea Turtle Monitoring

Endangered Species

Sea turtles have captured the attention of humans each time they come into contact with them. In Belize sea turtles are fully protected under law. It is illegal to have in your possession any marine turtles, their eggs, or articles made from their shell. There are three species of sea turtles found in Belize: Hawksbill Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricate*); Loggerhead Turtle (*Caretta caretta*); and Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*).



Picture 2: *Green Turtle At Hol Chan*

The northern beaches of Ambergris Caye inside the Bacalar Chico Marine Reserve have been known for nesting of sea turtles. They visit this nesting beach between May to August to lay their eggs. Eggs take around 56 days to hatch from the time they were laid. The nesting beach is currently being monitored by the Hol Chan and Bacalar Chico staff. They keep track of the number of nests that are laid and monitor hatching success after the eggs have hatched.

Stranded sea turtles sometimes wash up on the beaches. A stranding is an animal that is helpless, usually because it is injured, weak, or cannot cope in its present situation. What to do if you find a stranded marine turtle:

- Keep people away from the stranding
- Take photos if possible
- Observe the animal and be able to provide the following information:
  - The number of stranded animals
  - The approximate size of the stranded animals
  - The condition of the stranding (dead or alive; trapped in a structure or material)
  - Know the precise location of the stranding
- Do not feed a live stranding.
- Do not have domestic animals near the stranding

Marine Mammal and Turtle Stranding Network Contact Information

Any stranding found alive or dead should be reported to:

San Pedro	**Caye Caulker**	**Belize City**
Hol Chan Marine Reserve	Caye Caulker Marine Reserve	Fisheries Department
Caribeña Street	Beach Side	Princess Margaret Drive
San Pedro Town	Caye Caulker Village	Belize City
Phone: 226-2247	Phone: 226-0300	223-2623/224-4552

Caye Caulker Marine Reserve

Conservation and Recreational use

Caye Caulker Marine Reserve (CCMR) was declared in April 1998 under S.I #35 of 1998. The reserve comprises of over 9,000 acres of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System which runs parallel to the entire Island. It encompasses five habitats; mangrove and littoral forests, lagoon marsh-lands, seagrass beds and coral reef. Its rules and regulations were recently declared for management of three zone; General Use, Conservation and Preservation zone under S.I No. 127 of 2008.

Picture 3: *Recreational site at CCMR*

- **General Use Zone:** Commercial and extractive Sport Fishing by license from the Fisheries Department is permitted as well as tourism activities.
- **Conservation Zone:** in this zone no extraction or fishing of any type is allowed. Recreational activities such as snorkeling and diving are permitted. Every diver in the Conservation Zone shall register with the Reserve Manager prior to entering.
- **Preservation Zone:** In this zone, no entry is permitted except in emergency or with a permit. Research is allowed under a special permit from the Administrator.

Before visiting the Marine Reserve please be properly informed of the Rules and Regulations and abide by them. More information can be obtained at our offices in San Pedro or Caye Caulker.

Lobster Fest Information Booth

Community Outreach and Education

This year the Caye Caulker Marine Reserve along with World Wildlife Fund participated in the Lobster Festival 2009 by having a booth with Lobster Fishery information geared to the general public especially the fishermen of Caye Caulker. Information provided to the public included current lobster legislation, resource management, research and conservation issues.

On Saturday June 27th 2009, the public began to arrive at 10:00 a.m and throughout the day they were informed on legal size lobsters using live lobsters in an aquarium as reference. There were also posters of lobster's temporal and spatial lifecycle. The fishermen were also given the new fisheries regulations for Nassau Grouper, parrot fish and ban of spear fishing in marine reserves.

Picture 4: *Lobster Fest Booth*

On Sunday June 28th 2009, the booth was visited by more people than on Saturday. The general recommendations by the visitors was to keep up the good work and continue to educate Caye Caulker Village with more information so that they can see the importance of the reef to their livelihood. This was a good exercise and the CCMR staff would like to thank the USAID and WWF for their support

New Spear Fishing Regulations

The Belize Fisheries Department has legislated a ban in spear fishing in all Marine Reserves. The new statutory instrument states that:

- No person shall engage or attempt to engage, or assist a person to engage in spearfishing, of any kind, within a Marine Reserve.
- A person within any Marine Reserve who possesses any of the following equipment on board a vessel, or on his person will be presumed to be engaging in or to be attempting to engage in spearfishing; a) speargun, b) polespear, c) hand spear, d) Hawaiian Sling e) iki jime or kill spike f) any other elastic, pneumatic powered, or mechanically powered speargun or sling.

Bacalar Chico National Park & Marine Reserve

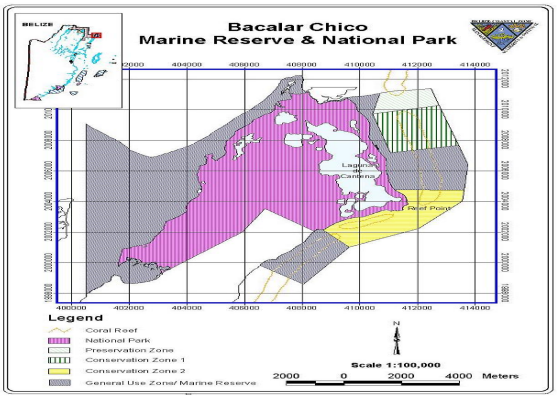


Fig 2: *North Ambergris Caye Map with Bacalar Chico Zones*

Bacalar Chico Marine Reserve and National Park is located on the northernmost portion of Ambergris Caye. The Marine Reserve's southernmost boundary starts from the cement pier next to Sueno del Mar and goes up to the Bacalar Chico channel at the Belize-Mexico border. On the leeward side the southernmost boundary starts from the Santa Cruz lagoon to the Bacalar Chico channal on the Belize-Mexico border.

The marine reserve comprises of four different zones. These are:

- **General Use Zone:** commercial fishing is allowed but fishers have to abide by the reserve and fisheries regulations. Non-commercial fishers are allowed to extract fin fish only.
- **Conservation Zone 1:** Only non- extractive activities are allowed.
- **Conservation Zone 2**: Only guided tours are allowed. Sport fishermen are allowed to keep two fish per person or ten per boat.
- **Preservation Zone:** No activities are allowed only Scientific Research.

The staff and management of Bacalar Chico are asking the public and fishermen to please abide by the reserve regulations and use the area in a sustainable and wise manner in order to preserve our marine resources for the future. .

Nassau Grouper and Species Protection

New fish Species Regulations

The Belize Fisheries Department has enacted new legislation to further strengthen Nassau Grouper conservation and to include important grazers such as those in the *Scaridae* (Parrot Fish) and A*canthuridae (*Surgeon Fish) family into legislative protection

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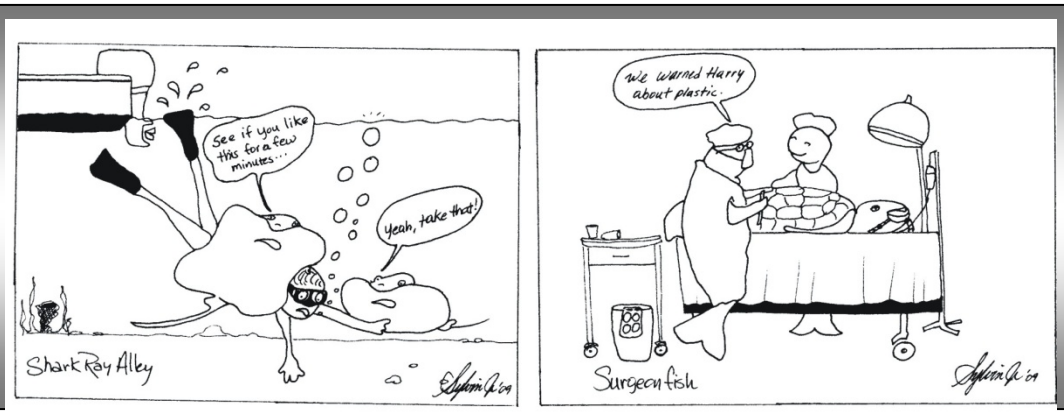
The legislation states that:

1. No person shall take in the waters of Belize, or buy, sell or have in his possession, any Nassau grouper form the 1st December and the 31st March inclusive in any year.
2. No person shall take in the waters of Belize, or buy, sell or have in his possession, any Nassau grouper which is less than 20 inches in total length or greater than 30 inches in total length.
3. Every Nassau grouper caught in the waters of Belize shall be landed whole.
4. Every fish, other than the Nassau Grouper and the grazers, caught in the waters of Belize landed as fillet fish shall have a skin patch of 2 inches by 1inch.
5. No person shall take in the waters of Belize, or buy, sell or have in possession any grazers.
6. A person who contravenes any of these regulations is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding five hundred dollars or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding six months, or to both a fine and imprisonment.
7. A person found guilty of taking or possessing any undersized fish during the closed season, or taking any prohibited fish, is liable, in addition to any other penalty that may be imposed, to a fine of thirty dollars in respect of each such fish.

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