

# Belize Fishing Regulations

Article Number: 236 | Rating: 3.4/5 from 5 votes | Last Updated: Mon, Jan 15, 2018 4:11 AM

**Why you should Care** . Fisheries Stocks are declining globally the ocean is not the unlimited resource we once thought it was. Many Scientists are predicting a complete collapse in the next 50 years. While Belize is better off than some countries, catches have declined in recent decades and most of the large (>40cm) fishes are gone.

The Belize Fisheries Department is doing their best by implementing seasons and size limits for many commercial species but data collection and enforcement are often difficult obstacles.

We need greater protection of our wild fisheries stocks and better ways to rebuild dwindling stocks not only for continued seafood production for future generations, but also to preserve the marine eco-system which in turn will help protect the planet.

**You are what you eat** . Pollution in our oceans has a real trickle down effect. Mercury has been found in many large fish and shark species and warnings exist especially for pregnant women on just how much fish they should eat. There are currently no regulations on shark fishing in Belize and it is often substituted for fish in local treats like panades.

**Lionfish** are an invasive species to the Caribbean that eat up our commercial fish and have no natural predators here; the best eradication methods are to kill them and they are good to eat too. But take care as their fins are poisonous (not the fillet though) See [lionfish Hunter](#) website for catching and cooking advice.

**You can make a difference.** Supply and Demand. If the consumer knows the proper seasons for seafood in Belize they are better equipped to make decisions at the restaurant or on their fishing trip. BY ensuring your local guides and restaurants comply with Belize's Fishery Laws you are helping to protect commercial seafood species for generations to come. While we are making strides in mariculture options they can never replace natural stocks which still need more protection now and forever.

**Complete Ban** – Coral – All Parrotfish – Blue Tang – Surgeon Fish – Permit – Tarpon – Bone Fish – Marine Turtle (all species) -Whale Shark – All Marine Mammals – Diced Conch – Diced Lobster

**Closed Seasons** – Conch July 1st to Sept 30th – Lobster February 15th to June 14th – Nassau Grouper – December 1st to March 31 Wild Shrimp (trawler sources; farm shrimp is legal all year around) July 14 – March 14th – Hickatee May 1st to May 31st

**Catch & size limits** – Conch Shell Length > 7 inches Market Clean > 2.5oz – Lobster Cape Length > 3 inches Tail Weight 2.75 oz – Nassau Grouper Must be 20 – 30 inches only. Must be landed whole (no fillet)

**Special Laws and Permits** – All fishermen must have a valid license. You must be a Belizean Citizen or permanent resident in order to obtain a fisheries permit. Sea Cucumber requires a special permit. Fish Fillet must have skin patch left on 2inch by 1 inch. No fishing while using artificial breathing devices (scuba gear or hookah)In Marine Protected areas several restrictions on fishing gear apply: no nets, no longlines, no traps. [Belizelaw.org](http://Belizelaw.org) Chapter 2105

**Links worth checking** – [Healthy Reefs](#) for healthy people – [Science to ActionMarket Clean](#) turning marine science to policy – [agriculture.gov.bz](http://agriculture.gov.bz) ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries – [Monterey Bay Aquarium](#) conservation of the oceans for more than 25 years – [research.calacademy](http://research.calacademy) California Academy of Sciences.



Blue Tang at Hol Chan Marine Reserve

[Click here](#) for a poster covering Belize Fishing Regulations

Catch and release is not nonsense, it's essential to protect a very lucrative sport fishing industry that provides a very good living to many Belizeans – and not just guides, but also people in the hotel, restaurant, transportation, agriculture, communications and other industries.

Nor are fishing licenses or the rewriting of the Fisheries Act nonsense. Our fisheries are being seriously depleted and we have to do something about that or we won't have any fish – just like Jamaica and Japan, and much of the rest of the world.

Our Fisheries Act was originally written in 1948, with one minor revision in 1989. It doesn't address the many complex issues that have arisen in the last 63 years, which, if not addressed, will leave us unable to protect our fisheries. Some of those issues are international ones, such as restrictions on fishing in our

economic zone, which stretches 200 miles beyond the Reef, and which is being eyed by many countries as a potential source of food for them, not us. Other issues include straddling stocks (relevant in the Belize/Honduras/Guatemala area), harvesting of marine resources such as sea slugs/cucumbers (which was certainly never thought of 1948), protection of mangroves, seagrass and other marine habitat, etc.

Some people in Belize still have a romantic image of the caye boys in their dories fishing for food for their families and making a little extra money for clothing, housing and education. That was great when life was much simpler and fish were much more plentiful. (I've seen a HUGE drop in fish size and quantity in just the 13 years I've been here.) That romantic image is great if we honor it, but don't try to still live by it. Because if we do, it won't be an image much longer, it – and us – and the Sea – will be ghosts.

Get a fishing license here:

<https://apps.coastalzonebelize.org>

Posted : Marty Casado - Thu, Mar 10, 2011 4:27 PM. This article has been viewed 45070 times.

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