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Jan 20, 2015

OCEANA Says UNESCO Visit Opens Opportunity to Dialogue



Over the past five years, there has been continuous degradation of the reef. Concessions have been granted for offshore oil exploration and mega tourism developments within the reef system are raising concern for environmental groups. According to the Communications Officer of OCEANA, Alyssa Carnegie, the visit by UNESCO will start the dialogue between the environmental organization and the government.

Alyssa Carnegie, Communications Officer, OCEANA

“We are very excited to see UNESCO here. We are also very excited for the dialogue, for the conversation to happen. Aside from the environmental reasons, the barrier reef holds and protects Belizeans so much from so many different elements as well as it provides the livelihoods for lots of fishermen and tourism in particular...it is a tremendous driver for tourism and we are very big champions of tourism and we want to make sure that we maintain that status; that we maintain the integrity of the reef system.”



Alyssa Carnegie

Duane Moody

“Now I know OCEANA has been in Belize for some time and really you guys have been pushing a lot about the importance of the ocean, of the waters. Now talk to us about what are some of the recommendations and the issues that you guys will be discussing with these persons particularly when it comes to policy. Trying to get government to understand that certain management policies need to be in place to ensure that you preserve the barrier reef which of course we see offshore drilling that is being pushed by the government as well as these mega tourism projects that can have adverse effects on the barrier reef.”



Alyssa Carnegie

“That’s a really good question. Actually one of the primary threats that we see and that we believe UNESCO has been interested and is interested in looking at is the actual idea of offshore oil exploration because you know the potential ramifications from offshore exploration—whether or not they do find oil—is a very risky, it is very dirty business and so can have potentially huge impact on the barrier reef system and other industries because of it. Obviously seeing the opportunity to provide feedback to the oil exploration, the zoning plan that they’ve share is an opportunity to engage and to provide dialogue and to provide feedback. Obviously we want to make that known. But I do think that it is a good opportunity to start the conversation and to make sure because as UNESCO is looking towards the step that government or the country is taking in terms of making sure that we maintain Belize as a world heritage site...that we get it removed from the list of sites that are endangered is a primary concern for us. I think that’s something that is going to be shared by a lot of other government departments including the Ministry of Tourism, the tourism sector, as well as fisheries. A lot of our fishing stock and livelihoods depend on the barrier reef system.”

The Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System encompasses seven protected areas; the Bacalar Chico National Park and Marine Reserve, the Blue Hole Natural Monument, the Half Moon Caye Natural Monument, the South Water Caye Marine Reserve, the Glover’s Reef Marine Reserve, the Laughing Bird Caye National Park and the Sapodilla Cayes Marine Reserve.

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