Oceana Belize Calls Petroleum Dept. Proposed Policy on Offshore Drilling Weak on Data

- Press Release - Oceana Belize calls on the Government of Belize to create policies which protect Belizean livelihoods - In response to a document circulated to the NGO community on Monday, January 19, 2015, as the draft Petroleum Exploration Zones and Exploration Guidelines, Oceana Belize maintains that before any steps are taken to allow offshore exploration, the Government of Belize must ensure that tourism and fishing related jobs are protected; that an effective emergency response capacity is in place; that special places are safe from hazards and that it has provided a full, fair and public accounting, including the inherent risks involved with the oil industry, to the Belizean people.

Oceana Belize adds that it is also noteworthy that this document was shared during the opening sessions of a delegation from the World Heritage Centre to determine the Desired State of Conservation of the World Heritage Site that is the Belize Barrier Reef. The Belize reef is one of only 47 such natural marine sites in the entire world. For the last five years, the World Heritage Centre has listed oil as a direct threat to this universally important designation.
6.0 Exploration Zones

**Proposed Oil Exploration in Belize, both inland and offshore**

Janelle Chanona, Oceana’s vice president, Belize, issued the following statement about the significance of the Belize Barrier Reef System:

“The Belize Barrier Reef system provides hundreds of millions of dollars in direct and guaranteed economic benefits via tourism, fishing and storm surge protection. Those hundreds of millions of dollars cannot be dismissed in favor of the mere "potential" of anything else—especially something as dangerous and dirty as offshore oil.

History from around the globe has taught us that every country that has attempted to merge tourism, the sustainable development of the environment, fishing and offshore oil has met with disaster. How can we begin to think of compromising the country’s most important industry when one in every four Belizeans depends directly on tourism? There are approximately three thousand licensed fishermen accessing Belizean waters. When the spill happens, who will those people turn to in order to live? Why are we rushing to risk the known benefits for the mere potential of the unknown - and one that will undoubtedly include destructive spills and negatively impact national economics, cultural identity and quality of life?

It is our collective responsibility to ensure that Belizean jobs in tourism and fishing will never be compromised; that the guaranteed economic benefits of the protection the reef gives us every year from tropical storms and hurricanes is preserved; that our beautiful horizons will never be scarred by oil rigs; that our crystal clear water will never run black with oil. The situation we confront today is as simple and dire as just that. That this draft policy seeks to initiate “consultation” by declaring open season on Belize’s entire offshore area relying on antiquated data, unreferenced national numbers and vague international standards is unacceptable.”
In response to Oceana’s press release the Government of Belize’s Ministry of Energy, Science and Technology and Public Utilities released the following information:

Ministry Clarifies Press Release on Petroleum Exploration Zones and Guidelines


Oceana incorrectly asserted that the zonation plan and framework were shared with the NGO community on January 19th, 2015, when in fact this was the Ministry’s second attempt to solicit feedback from the NGO community on the revised zonation plan and exploration guidelines. In September 2014, the Geology and Petroleum Department (GPD) shared the zonation plan and framework with 13 stakeholder groups, inclusive of Belize Coalition to Save Our Natural Heritage, APAMO and other public and private sector entities. Subsequently, the GPD received feedback only from AFAMO, the CZMAI, the Belize Coalition to Save Our Natural Heritage and one petroleum company.

In response to the limited feedback and being cognizant of the national importance of the exploration and planning framework, the Ministry re-sent the draft document in January 2015 to a wider stakeholder group so as to allow greater participation and input in an effort to improve and strengthen the framework, where necessary. Despite these efforts, it is important to note that the GPD has been conducting consultation regarding the draft zonation plan and exploration guidelines with both public and private sector groups and civil society groups since August of 2011.

The Ministry wishes to reiterate that the document shared with stakeholders is a draft document. It is for this very reason that the document was re-circulated to NGOs to solicit their feedback, inputs and further recommendations by February 2, 2015. Subsequently, the GPD will host a consultation workshop with stakeholders to fully discuss the proposed zonation plan and exploration guidelines in an effort to improve the robustness of the plan.

The Ministry continues to avail itself to meaningful and constructive dialogue on the issue of oil petroleum exploration onshore and offshore, rather than engage in unhelpful sensationalizing of an issue that is still undergoing stakeholder consultations.

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Belizean - 7 days ago

This is HORRIBLE! I still can't believe GOVERNMENT wants to go ahead with Oil Drilling! The ENTIRE BARRIER REEF is highlighted! All of San Pedro, the marine reserves, the Maya Mountains that have reserves?????????? Wow! They must be getting LOTS of MONEY in their pockets because even a blind man can see the damage it can and will cause! Shame on them for not loving Belize and their people! SHAME!

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Sustain Belize → Belizean - 7 days ago

What is needed is an concerted communication campaign inclusive of the NGO community and potential funding sources and a political intervention in Belmopan by all key stakeholders to educate them and the NGOs that Belize's barrier reef is the most important resource Belize has and any benefit from short term oil leases pale by comparison to protecting this resource.

Top of the list to take immediate action should be the resort owners/investors on Ambergris and down to Placencia. This high risk proposition places every resort up and down the coast of Belize at risk. There is no chance a single hotel or new development would be built if this plan were to go forward and investors and tourist's alike will simple take their money and business elsewhere. Mexico clearly understands this and would never allow oil exploration along their Riviera Maya. The real pressure Belmopan will understand is financial and existing developers and investors can apply this pressure.

For the residents and those who make a living from all direct and indirect businesses related to the barrier reef and fishing the clean and productive waters of Belize for generations, the Oceana statement is dead on. It simply comes down to priorities and long term benefit. Oil exploration is a high risk short-term proposition that will only benefit a few in Belmopan in any one time deals struck while a sustainable barrier reef benefits everyone and provides long term economic opportunities for Belize.

I can not think of a single threat to the barrier reef that would compare to oil exploration. Its time to let everyone's voices be heard locally and in Belmopan and kill this ill conceived half baked plan before it gets moving.

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Cho - 2 days ago

Is the above not a shareholder in an oil exploration company?

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Sustain Belize → Cho - 2 days ago

No, not a shareholder. Owner of property, diver, fisherman and lover of all things Belize and passionate about protection of the coral reef habitat.

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