



**OCEANA** Protecting the  
World's Oceans

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Annual Report 2023









## Annual Report 2023

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# Letter from the VP



## ***My fellow Belizeans,***

I've been thinking a lot lately about sea turtles. It's been my honor and privilege to have witnessed females coming ashore to painstakingly carve nests deep in the sand

and then patiently lay her eggs one by one before using her last bit of energy to return to the "safety" of the sea. Only female sea turtles return to the same beaches they hatched. This time out of the water is also when they are most vulnerable to predators, including poachers. Or at least it used to be. I put the word "safety" in quotation marks because now sea turtles must contend with plastic pollution, destructive fishing practices and all sorts of challenges to survive and deliver the next generation of sea turtles.

Like sea turtles, as environmental stewards of our portion of the Caribbean Sea, every day we must find the promise of hope, an unwavering resilience and boundless perseverance to continue on our noble journey. I'll confess it would be easier to spiral into depression when faced with the realities of everything from insurmountable pollution and overfishing to climate change-induced coral bleaching. And yet, it is precisely in the face of these challenges that our resilience becomes paramount. Bad actors are counting on us to give up.

And this is where our commitment to our cause, to the ties that bind, makes all the difference because it makes us resilient. Resilience is not merely about weathering the storms; it's about bouncing back stronger, more determined than ever. It's about harnessing setbacks as opportunities for growth and innovation. When we encounter obstacles in our conservation efforts, we only need to remember that every setback is a chance to refine our strategies, to collaborate, and to advocate for change with renewed vigor.

And yes, while we'd like to be "done" with threats, the truth is it's been our presence, individual and collective, that has made the difference. The second we walk away, those threats will be back front and center. So, as we search for resilience, we also have to find perseverance, the drive that keeps us pushing forward, even when the way ahead seems long, arduous, and dangerous. In the fight for our human right to a healthy planet, there will be times when progress feels slow, when victories are hard-won and seemingly small. But trust me, when we reflect on



everything we've been through together, it's during these times that our perseverance has shone brightest.

I see the sea turtle tirelessly swimming against the current, through the tides of plastic and escaping entanglements in the nets just to get back to their beach and I can't help but take hope in that kind of resilience and perseverance.

And I see that time and time again Belizeans have shown that when we unite, we have the power to make a difference, whether through community initiatives, scientific research, policy advocacy, or simply spreading awareness. And I see how we've recognized that to truly effect change, we must all be prepared to embrace the challenges ahead with unwavering determination. Some will be long-standing issues; others will be new threats we can't even dare to imagine.

I see that we will cultivate the resilience we need in the face of the adversities ahead and that in our hearts, we will nurture

perseverance to fight the good fight. The way to a healthier, more vibrant Caribbean Sea may be long and challenging, but with our combined passion, dedication, and resilience, I see that we can help to create the future we deserve.

I can't tell you that sea turtles have these types of thoughts in their minds. But if you've ever experienced the joy of witnessing a hatching, you'll know that even though the odds are stacked against these tiny creatures, hope and perseverance drives them into the world to find their destiny.

**Always with determination and hope,**

**Janelle Chanona**  
*Vice President*  
*Oceana in Belize*



# Oceana's Approach

## How We Work

OCEANA WAS CREATED TO IDENTIFY PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS AND MAKE THEM HAPPEN.

Our oceans are in trouble. But the good news is that together we can restore the oceans to their former glory. Since it's founding, Oceana has won more than 100 victories around the globe and protected more than one million square miles of ocean. **Oceana has the tools to win.**

## We are -

### CAMPAIGN-DRIVEN:

We channel our resources towards strategic, directed campaigns to achieve measurable outcomes that will protect and restore our oceans to former levels of abundance.

### FACT-BASED:

We believe in the importance of science in identifying problems and solutions for the oceans.

### MULTI-DISCIPLINARY AND EXPERT:

Our scientists work closely with our teams of economists, lawyers, communicators and advocates to achieve tangible results for the oceans.

### SUPPORTED BY CITIZENS AND ALLIES:

Oceana has a base of close to one million supported, including 1.2 million Wavemakers globally. Our Ocean Council is a select group of academic, business, policy and philanthropic leaders who represent and support Oceana's efforts on the global stage. Locally, Oceana is supported by over 3,000 Belizean Wavemakers.



# Campaigns and Victories

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## **BELIZEAN GOVERNMENT PASSES NEW LAW GIVING BELIZEANS THE POWER TO PROTECT OFFSHORE OIL MORATORIUM**

On November 11th, 2023 the Belize Referendum Amendment ACT 2023 became law, requiring that any decision to open Belize's waters within its maritime zone to oil and gas drilling to first be voted on by the Belizean people, by way of a national referendum.

Belizeans overwhelmingly favor protecting their ocean from offshore drilling. The Mesoamerican Reef — the second-longest barrier reef in the world — stretches nearly 300 kilometers (185 miles) along Belize's coast. These waters support a rich marine ecosystem – plus Belize's tourism, fisheries, and economy. New offshore oil exploration and drilling poses a threat to Belizeans' way of life.

This new law ensures that the voices of Belizeans are heard through a national referendum before oil exploration takes place in the country's waters. This victory would not have been possible without campaigning by Oceana and its allies, who secured 22,090 signed petitions from Belizean voters to ensure that “people power” is at the center of decisions about the long-term future of the country's reef, ocean, and the livelihoods. In 2017, Oceana, the people of Belize, and the Belizean government made history by unanimously passing an indefinite moratorium on offshore oil in Belize.



# Community Outreach & Events

Across the country, Oceana continues to work with stakeholders, partners and the sensational Wavemaker community to protect Belize invaluable marine resources.



Ryan Rivera, Senior Field Representative



# PRESENTATIONS & BROWN BAG SESSIONS

In 2023, Oceana in Belize's dedicated field representatives continued to engage schools, businesses, organizations and Wavemakers countrywide, through presentations, consultations and brown bag sessions.





## PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATIONS

Oceana continues to collaborate and partner with different organizations. Through these collaborations, we have been able to give back to various communities and to strengthen our relationships with people and partners.



In addition to collaborative cleanups with the Scout Association of Belize, BGFA and the Coalition of NGOs, Oceana also partnered on a cleanup with the Department of Youth Services for their Youth Month and with the Corozal Town Council by judging floats and costumes for September Celebrations.



We strengthened our continued partnership with the Health Education and Community Participation Bureau (HECOPAB) on various cleanups, presentations and health fairs.



### Tiburon Rum

Since 2019, \$1 from every bottle of Tiburon Rum sold has been donated to Oceana in support of conservation efforts in Belize. Through this existing partnership, Tiburon Rum donated over \$13K BZ dollars directly to our work in 2023. We're thankful for all Tiburon Rum does for Belize's marine resources.

## EVENTS

### Reef Week 2023

This year's theme, **"For health, wealth and pleasure, our reef is a treasure!"**, highlighted the importance of celebrating the many ways the Belize Barrier Reef contributes to the national economy, and to the Belizean identity.



Partners, sponsors and the wider community showed their support and love for protecting Belize's marine resources with beach and local cleanups, classroom presentations, workshops, competitions and even online trivia.



Oceana led its annual **Ride to the Reef**, where participants rode from Belmopan to Belize City in celebration of Belize's Barrier Reef. Our team also assisted with the Reef Week Symposium held at the University of Belize and made

appearances on Love FM and KREM Television and Radio, before attending the **Reef Fair** in San Pedro Town on Mesoamerican Reef Day (March 10).

## Earth Hour

Recognized on March 25, 2023, Earth Hour was celebrated in Corozal. Spotlighting the environmental concerns, Oceana, in collaboration with the Corozal House of Culture, led the Earth Hour event, which featured dances and other presentations surrounding the same theme. During the lights-off period at the event, the over 60 participants then lit their candles in commemoration of Earth Hour.

## Earth Day

Oceana, alongside the Corozal Town Council and other partners, led the organizing of the Earth Day Youth Festival. Held at the Corozal Civic Center, we were present with an informational booth, where we engaged with the community to educate the public on our campaign and collect signatures for our petition drive.



*Earth Hour 2023 in Corozal Town*







# ONLINE AND IN THE NEWS

## OCEANA DELIVERS PETITIONS TO INITIATE REFERENDUM

On June 22, 2023, in accordance with Section 2(2) of the Referendum Act, Oceana delivered to the office of the Governor General, signed petitions from registered Belizean voters to trigger a referendum on the right to be consulted before the moratorium on offshore oil and natural gas exploration and petroleum operations is ever lifted. The number of petitions delivered exceeds the legally required ten percent of the electorate. Since November 2022, Oceana has diligently collected, vetted, and verified the accompanying personal information provided by more than 22,000 Belizeans.

Oceana's Vice President Janelle Chanona emphasized the significance of this petition: *"This signature drive reminds, respects and resoundingly reiterates that Belizeans want to be heard on this national issue. Today is all about the sensational resiliency of Belizeans to love and protect livelihoods,*

*identity and food security from an inherently dirty and dangerous industry. An official vote will finally ensure that if any future administration wants to lift the moratorium, that administration would be guided by the Belizean electorate and made collectively, transparently and after well-informed deliberation. As stewards of one of the most globally significant marine environments and leaders of innovative financial mechanisms, we have a clear responsibility to ensure that generations of Belizeans will always be able to enjoy the beauty and bounty of our precious Caribbean Sea."*

**The question to be put to a referendum for the approval or disapproval of the people of Belize is:**

*"Do you support a legislative ban by way of an amendment to the Belize Constitution, Chapter 4 of the Laws of Belize, which will prohibit offshore petroleum and natural gas exploration (including but not limited to seismic testing, seismic surveys, multibeam surveys), development, drilling, extraction, production, storage, and disposal within the internal waters, territorial sea, and the*

*exclusive economic zone of Belize ('petroleum operations'), unless a referendum is held in accordance with the Referendum Act, Chapter 10 of the Laws of Belize, which approves such petroleum operations?"*



Oceana is proud to stand alongside fellow Belizeans, our numerous organizational allies, patriotic supporters and dedicated Wavemakers to advocate for the protection of Belize's invaluable marine resources since 2009. By amplifying the voices of the Belizean people, Oceana reiterates its commitment to safeguard our precious marine resources from the detrimental and hazardous impacts of the offshore oil industry.



# OCEANA'S 14TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Oceana Wavemakers from across the country participated in Oceana's 2023 Annual General Meeting (AGM) held at the Saint Catherine Academy Multi-purpose Mercy Center on Saturday, October 21st in Belize City. Over 200 Wavemakers from the Corozal, Orange Walk, Belize, Cayo, Stann Creek and Toledo districts, as well as from Caye Caulker and Ambergris Caye, attended the annual event.

During the AGM, several Wavemakers were recognized for their sensational support for Oceana's campaigns and initiatives over the past year. The 2023 awardees are Marvin Monterroso from Corozal; Naomi Sylvania from Belize City; Jiselle Awe from Cayo; Seferina Miss from Stann Creek, and Rinelva Ico from Toledo. Oceana also proudly recognized the Sarteneja Alliance for Conservation and Development with its second annual Partner of the Year Award, and Limairi Pott as the 2023 National Wavemaker of the Year.

Born in Orange Walk, Limairi was recognized

for her exceptional dedication, organizational prowess, and resourcefulness in engaging persons in the field during Oceana's signature drive. Lima went above and beyond, not only raising awareness for Oceana's campaigns among the public but also effectively translating this awareness into concrete actions aimed at the protection of Belize's invaluable marine resources.



*Jacinta Usher and Limairi Pott, 2023 Wavemaker of the Year*

This year's guest speaker was Mr. Glenfield Dennison. Proud to be a born, raised, and resident son of Belize City's 'Southside', a public officer at the core and an attorney by profession, he shared his excitement to represent the National Trade Union Congress of Belize on the People's Constitution Commission where he also serves as vice chair. He emphasized the



*Glenfield Dennison, Guest Speaker*

critical importance of youth participation in the ongoing constitutional reform process, and encouraged participants to actively engage in the consultations that will determine how the constitution will shape the future of Belize.

Oceana in Belize's dedicated Wavemakers countrywide are an essential pillar of our advocacy. We are proud to stand alongside Belizeans who are always ready and willing to speak up for our precious marine environment. Belizean supporters are among the more than a million Oceana Wavemakers from across the globe who support the protection and restoration of the world's oceans.

The National Wavemaker Award was made by local artist, Aesha Garel of **Zest Handcrafted.**



## 2023 OCEAN HEROES



Philip 'Billy' Leslie (L.), Janelle Chanona, Sean Kuylen (R)

In November 2023, Oceana Belize proudly announced the recipients of the 13th annual Ocean Hero Awards, honoring individuals whose tireless dedication contributes significantly to the preservation of Belize's marine ecosystems. The 2023 awardees were Philip 'Billy' Leslie and Chef Sean Kuylen, both celebrated for their unwavering commitment to protecting our oceans.

Philip 'Billy' Leslie, an activist and tour guide hailing from San Pedro, Ambergris Caye, stands as a beacon of environmental advocacy in Belize. As President of the San Pedro Tour Guide Association, Leslie's efforts to safeguard marine ecosystems resonate deeply within his community. His vocal stance on sustainable development underscores his commitment to balancing

progress with the protection of Belize's natural wonders.

In accepting the Ocean Hero Award, Leslie emphasized the critical importance of sustainable practices, stressing that responsible stewardship is essential to preserving the rich biodiversity of Belize's barrier reef. *"If we continue destroying our environment for tourism or real estate projects, if we continue cutting down the mangroves, we will lose all the wealth and opportunities provided by the barrier reef,"* Leslie asserted.

Notably, Leslie's contributions extend beyond advocacy; he is also a founding member of the Kids in Action summer scuba diving camp, nurturing the next generation of ocean stewards. Additionally, his volunteer work with Rickilee Response and Rescue underscores his unwavering commitment to community safety and well-being.

Joining Leslie in the spotlight is celebrity chef Sean Kuylen, a native of Dangriga Town, Belize's 'Kulcha' capital. Kuylen's culinary journey is deeply rooted in his Belizean heritage, and his commitment to sustainable seafood sourcing reflects his profound connection to the sea. As a founding member of the Fish Right, Eat Right project, Kuylen

spearheads initiatives aimed at promoting responsible fishing practices and ethical consumption. Through his social media platforms, Kuylen champions the best of Belize.

Janelle Chanona, Oceana's Vice President in Belize, lauded the efforts of Leslie and Kuylen, emphasizing the profound impact of their work on Belizean society. *"Their unwavering commitment serves as an inspiration to us all,"* remarked Chanona. *"Through their advocacy and leadership, they are shaping a brighter future for Belize's marine ecosystems and the communities that depend on them."*

The Ocean Hero Awards serve as a testament to the power of individual action in safeguarding our oceans. As Belize continues to navigate the complex challenges of environmental conservation, the exemplary efforts of Philip 'Billy' Leslie and Chef Sean Kuylen serve as beacons of hope and inspiration for generations to come.

The stained-glass awards were made by local artist, Leisa Carr-Caceres of **Belizean Craft and Colors**.

To see the full event, please click [here](#).



# PEOPLE'S REFERENDUM ON OFFSHORE OIL IN BELIZE BECOMES LAW

Having passed through all stages of the National Assembly, the REFERENDUM (AMENDMENT) BILL 2023 was assented to by the Governor General of Belize, Her Excellency Dame Froyla Tzalam, on Thursday, November 9 and published in the Gazette on November 11, converting the bill into law.

This amendment to the Referendum Act Chapter 10 of the Substantive Laws of Belize 2020, expands the circumstances in which a referendum must be held to include any proposed amendment or repeal, whether express or implied, of the Petroleum Operations (Maritime Zone Moratorium) Act or to any proposed legislation affecting the carrying on of petroleum operations within the limits of the maritime zone of Belize.

This amendment is a direct response to the voices of 22,090 Belizean voters who called for legislative amendments that would require a referendum should government

contemplate lifting the moratorium on offshore oil exploration. The amendment has laid the foundation for a profound shift in people's participation in our Belizean democracy.

*"The consistent actions of the Belizean people have led to this pivotal achievement of people power. We commend the Briceno administration for exerting leadership on this national issue and recognizing the importance of the people's participation in decision making around a precious resource - our Caribbean Sea", stated Janelle Chanona, Belize Vice President, Oceana. "We look forward to promoting this exemplary achievement as an example for the rest of the world to follow."*

*"My administration and I remain resolute in our commitment to safeguarding our shared natural heritage. We emphasize that any change to the existing prohibition of offshore petroleum operations will only happen with the overwhelming support of Belizeans through a national referendum", stated Honourable John Briceño, Prime Minister of Belize. "The amendment is a testament to cooperation and collaboration in protecting our invaluable natural resources."*

The Government of Belize and Oceana in

Belize remain mutually committed to meaningful engagement to focus on the many marine conservation challenges that require immediate collaborative action.



## PSAs

Since 2010, Belizeans have been steadfastly opposed to offshore oil drilling and exploration.

This PSA was created to support the campaign that led to the People's Referendum on Offshore Oil in Belize becoming law.

To view the full video, click [here](#).



# Support Oceana

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## Please Give Today to Help Us Rebuild Ocean Abundance

Each of us has the power to help save the oceans and feed the world. Your support allows Oceana to carry out targeted campaigns to protect the climate, end overfishing, limit bycatch, protect habitats and species, curb ocean pollution, and increase transparency at sea.

Oceana wins victories that restore ocean abundance and biodiversity for generations to come. Become part of a growing base of ocean advocates by joining Oceana today.

Visit us at [Oceana.org/donate](https://Oceana.org/donate).

## Take Action

Become a Wavemaker and join supporters from around the world who have signed up with Oceana to protect our oceans.

Being a Wavemaker means you won't stand by while fishing nets drown sea turtles and airgun blasts deafen dolphins to enable offshore drilling. With you by our side, we can fight these and other threats.

## Follow Oceana

Follow Oceana on social media for breaking news from all over the world and insights into our research and campaigns.



**@OceanainBelize**



**@Oceana\_Bze**



**@OceanaBelize**

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# By the Numbers

**Facebook Followers:**

**28.9K+**

**Twitter Followers:**

**1K+**

**Instagram Followers:**

**25.5K+**

**Wavemakers**

**3.2K+**



# Staff

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## Executive Committee

### ANDREW SHARPLESS

Chief Executive Officer

### JIM SIMON

President

### JACQUELINE SAVITZ

Chief Policy Officer

### KATHRYN MATTHEWS, Ph.D.

Chief Scientist

### MATTHEW LITTLEJOHN

Senior Vice President, Strategic Initiatives

### JOSHUA LAUGHREN

Senior Vice President, Oceana Canada

### LIESBETH VAN DER MEER, DVM

Senior Vice President, Chile

### CHRISTOPHER SHARKEY

Chief Financial Officer

### JANELLE CHANONA

Vice President, Belize

### ADEMILSON ZAMBONI, Ph.D.

Vice President, Brazil

### PASCALE MOEHRLE

Executive Director and Vice President, Europe

### RENATA TERRAZAS

Vice President, Mexico

### DANIEL OLIVARES

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### GLORIA RAMOS, J.D.

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### BETH LOWELL

Vice President, United States

### NANCY GOLDEN

Vice President, Global Development

### HUGO TAGHOLM

Executive Director and Vice President, United Kingdom

### ABBIE GIBBS

Vice President, Institutional Giving

### SUSAN MURRAY

Deputy Vice President, U.S. Pacific

### VERA COELHO

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### DUSTIN CRANOR

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## Belize

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Vice President, Belize

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Office Administrator

### ALYSSA NOBLE

Communications Director

### JACINTA USHER

Outreach and Project Director

### KELSIE CUEVAS

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### KIRSTEN HALL

Administrative/Outreach Assistant

### RYAN RIVERA

Senior Field Representative, Corozal

### KLEON COLEMAN

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### SHANDA SAINSBURY

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Oceana is the largest international advocacy organization dedicated solely to ocean conservation. Oceana is rebuilding abundant and biodiverse oceans by winning science-based policies in countries that control one third of the world's wild fish catch. With more than 200 victories that stop overfishing, habitat destruction, pollution and the killing of threatened species like turtles and sharks, Oceana's campaigns are delivering results. A restored ocean means that one billion people can enjoy a healthy seafood meal, every day, forever. Together, we can save the oceans and help feed the world. Visit [www.oceana.org](http://www.oceana.org) to learn more.