




 **OCEANA** Protecting the
World's Oceans


Oceana Belize
Annual Report 2024

An aerial photograph of a coral reef system. The water transitions from a deep blue in the distance to a lighter turquoise near the reef. The reef itself is a complex of various coral structures, appearing as patches of brown and tan against the lighter water. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds.

“Knowledge alone does not move you to action. It is the desire, the will to serve.”

-George Price, 1965



Annual Report 2024

Letter from the VP	1
Oceana's Approach	3
Campaign & Victories	4
Community Outreach and Events	6
Presentations and Brown Bag Sessions	7
Partnerships and Collaborations	8
Events	9
Online and in the News	11
Oceana Celebrates 15 Years of Advocacy in Belize	11
15th Annual General Meeting	12
2024 Ocean Heroes Awards	14
PSAs	15
Support Oceana	16
Staff	17
Contact Us	19

Letter from the VP



My fellow Belizeans,

I was blessed to have the kind of childhood where we jumped off things—trees, riverbanks, boats. In many ways, each was a leap of faith within a comfort zone. After all, there was always water as a soft landing. I can vividly recall standing on those edges and knowing that the longer I stood there, the scarier the drop would feel. I knew I had to force myself to just be present in that moment. I'd have to best the fear of hurting myself with a slip,

that the branch would break, or that the ground itself would collapse. And I find myself wondering if this is what's happening to decision-makers. There on the edge, staring down for too long, hesitating instead of deciding?

But here's the thing. Did you associate the term "decision-maker" with yourself? Can we reconcile that as stewards of this "*wealth untold*" we bear the same responsibility as our elected officials to play a direct role in the decision-making processes that govern how our shared natural assets are treated? Because the truth is, decisions are being made, whether we're a part of them or not, and we all must live with the consequences of those decisions. You already know that our ecosystems put the "*eco*" in our economic wellbeing. But did you know that "*nomic*" was once used as an adjective relating to laws or rules, particularly in the context of a

system that allows for changing those rules?

In 2024, we've continued to campaign for the kinds of changes that will strengthen our collective ability to participate in decision-making processes in an effective, transparent and accountable way. By making referenda a Constitutionally protected right, we can collectively make the decisions that collectively impact us—and our future generations—to safeguard the assets that define who we are as Belizeans.

Tens of thousands of Belizeans are already on the right side of history. Together we can make sure we will always act as if we are rooted to both the mahogany and the mangrove, simultaneously connected to the turtle grass and the savannah, and that fisher and tour guide share the same fate as

the mountain cow and the manatee. I'm an advocate for our sensational people and our special places because I can feel all those lives **calling**. There's no place like our home and no other place I will ever call home. My talents will always be in service of these pressing national needs no matter how many bad actors work to weaken the strength of our unity.

All the political we will ever need resides in all of us. We've been the sleeping giant all this time. We either stand up when it matters, or we don't. We either embrace our role as constructive citizens, or we don't. We either change the rules of engagement, or we don't. Because we don't get to keep doing the same thing and expect a different result. There is a cost to inaction. The cost of knowing is to decide to do different. The climate crisis is changing every. single. thing. all.

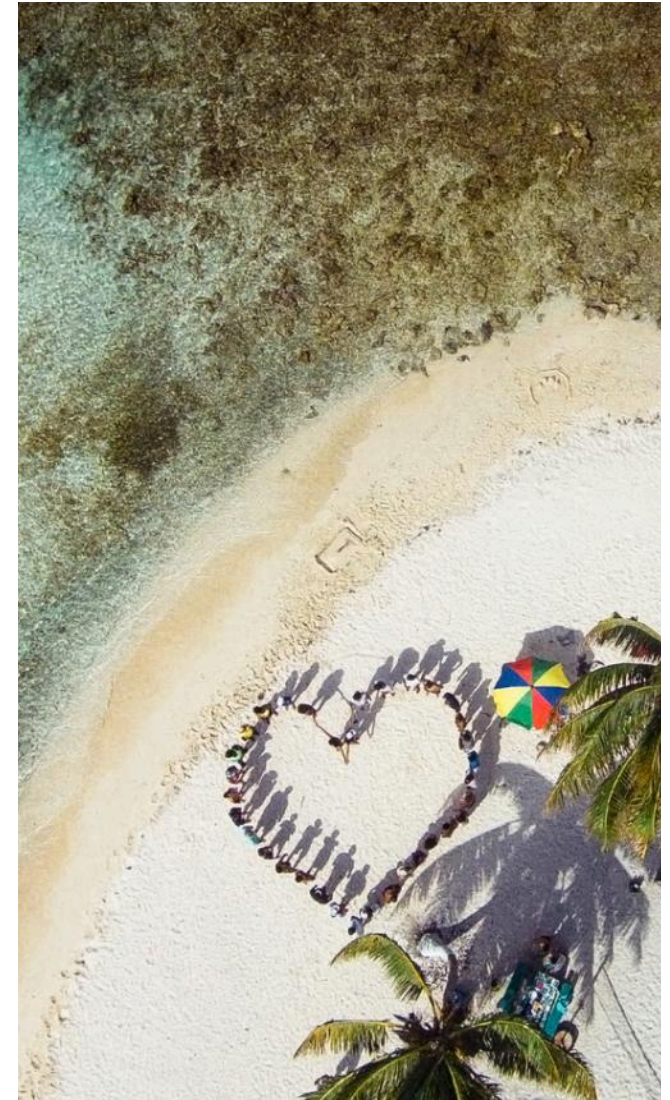
around. us. We need to change just as radically, and just as quickly, if we want a chance to not just survive but to thrive. And we can thrive together if we decide what happens next together.

We just need to take that leap of faith, to act now, before the edge collapses.

With hope and determination always,

Janelle

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 we can restore the oceans to their former abundance. For more than 20 years, Oceana and our allies around the world have won more than 300 policy victories, and we have the tools to continue winning on behalf of our oceans. **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

In 2024, we continued our campaign to achieve Constitutional reform to secure the right to binding referenda results in the decision-making process should any future administration want to repeal the moratorium on offshore oil development. In 2023, the Government of Belize had insisted that “the best place to be able to address” was the People’s Constitution Commission led review exercise. Throughout the PCC’s public consultation process, Oceana amplified the demand of our fellow Belizeans that the right to being included in a transparent and accountable decision-making process should be enshrined in the Constitution.

Status: *In Progress*





Constitutional Reform

The PCC's report of recommendations was scheduled for 2024 but the timeline has been adjusted to May 2025. That report must reflect the call of the citizenry for decision-makers to be held accountable to the Belizean people on this critical issue by the country's Supreme Law.

Pending the publication of the People's Constitution Commission's recommendations for reform, Oceana will maintain its commitment to standing alongside the tens of thousands of Belizeans to advocate for a Constitutional amendment that includes binding referenda on offshore oil and gas activities if any future administration wants to repeal the ban. We believe that the power to decide the future of Belize's sea belongs to the people!

With tens of thousands of livelihoods relying on our marine resources, the fate of the Caribbean Sea must be decided collectively, transparently and by an informed electorate. Our communications strategy has focused on the individual responsibility we must embrace as responsible stewards: Who can protect Belize better than you? And on Earth Day 2024, the answer was a resounding: "No one can protect Belize better than me!"

With the launch of our Thrive Together campaign, which highlights the personal and patriotic connection between Belizeans and our marine resources, we continue to emphasize that when our reef thrives, so do we—every fisher, every tour guide, every restaurateur, everybody.

In 2023, Belize's government amended the Referendum Act to require a referendum on offshore oil should any future administration want to repeal the moratorium. That amendment to the law was the direct result of the 22,090 sensational Belizeans who stood up to be counted, who signed the petition, who made history. That's more than one tenth of our electorate demanding a right to vote as a prerequisite to government approval of offshore oil development. That's a big deal.

The strength of an informed and motivated electorate, "people power", will continue to fuel our efforts to make it Caribbean Sea-clear to everyone that Belizeans deserve the right to vote as a prerequisite to government approval of offshore oil development.



OCEANA Protecting the
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Community Outreach & Events

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

PEOPLE POWERED PRESENTATIONS

Oceana continues to engage and educate young people and community members across Belize about marine conservation and constitutional reform. We conducted presentations to over 15 primary, secondary, and tertiary level schools as well as to over eight organizations across the country. These sessions allowed Oceana to reach a broad audience with information on marine conservation and sustainability.



PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATIONS

Oceana continues to strengthen partnerships to raise awareness of conservation efforts and garner support for Constitutional Reform. We joined community events with longstanding partners like NDACC, HECOPAB, and SACD, hosted educational booths at school and community fairs and expos, and led cleanups across Belize involving students, communities, and local groups. We also participated in Mercer University training sessions at the University of Belize and Corozal Junior College on bacteria and heavy metal analysis methodologies. Monthly Wavemaker meetings were also held to

update members on campaigns and brainstorm community initiatives. Community engagement and cleanup activities were carried out across the country with partners including Sea of Life, Diamond International, Interact Club of SISE, and the Scout Association of Belize. This includes the International



Coastal Cleanup, which involved a collaboration between Oceana, Wavemakers, residents and town councils of Corozal and Dangriga. Oceana continues to inspire positive environmental action and policy changes with the support from our partners, including Belize Audubon Society, JICA, Corozal Town Council, Corozal House of Culture, NEMO, BGFA, and our amazing Wavemakers at CEMJC, SJCJC, and St. Catherine's Academy.



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 BZ\$14K directly to our work in 2024. We're thankful for all Tiburon Rum does for Belize's marine resources and look forward to strengthening our partnership in 2025.

Belize Sailing Vacations

This year, Belize Sailing Vacations came onboard as an exciting new supporter of Oceana in Belize. Through their summer promotion of "Book 6 nights and get the 7th for \$500, your \$500 will be donated to Oceana", Belize Sailing Vacations collected BZ\$2,000 in charitable contributions, which was directly donated to support our work. We are

thrilled to have established this partnership with them and look forward to what lies on the horizon for us.

EVENTS

Oceana supported and organized several community-driven events to promote marine conservation.

Reef Week 2024

The theme for Reef Week 2024 was **“Unite in the Coral Reef Fight: Learn, Teach, and Do What’s Right!”** It was a call



to Belizeans to be actively involved in awareness and action to protect our barrier reef. Over 25 NGOs and government agencies hosted various classroom presentations, community cleanups, online competitions and trivia, and a debate to engage Belizeans of all ages and across the country. Oceana led its annual Ride to the Reef, where participants rode from Belmopan to Belize City in celebration of Belize's Barrier Reef. Reef Fair, which is the highlight event of Reef Week, was held in Corozal Town and saw over 300 students and residents at the educational booths.

Sarteneja Easter Regatta

At this event, Oceana highlighted the use of sustainable fishing practices while engaging with the local community.

World Oceans Day 2024

For World Oceans Day 2024, Oceana partnered with the Corozal Town Council, JICA, ROTARACT, and the Corozal House of Culture for a Sip and Paint family event, where families

painted reusable bags with marine-themed designs to promote plastic reduction.



Earth Day

Earth Day activities included cleanups in multiple districts, including a collaboration with Harvest Caye in Independence, a town-wide cleanup in Corozal, and a school-led cleanup in Toledo. Booths were set up at Earth Day fairs in Belize City, San Pedro, and Belmopan Methodist High School. Additional tree-planting initiatives took place with Belmopan Methodist High School's Environmental Club and Toledo Community College. Oceana also launched an Earth Day PSA with the message, “Who can protect Belize better than me?”, which was a call to Belizeans to use their voices to protect Belize's natural environment.



ONLINE AND IN THE NEWS

OCEANA CELEBRATES 15 YEARS OF ADVOCACY IN BELIZE

Oceana proudly celebrated its 15th anniversary in Belize on October 30, 2025. This is a significant milestone in support of empowered Belizean stewardship of our unique national assets and cultural identity. Since 2009, Oceana has amplified national calls for safeguarding livelihoods and bolstering marine conservation through habitat protection and best practices in fisheries management. The legislated results have benefited the environment and communities, with protections now in place for over 13,970 miles (618,200 hectares or 36,182 km²) of Belizean waters and tens of thousands of marine-based livelihoods.

We used the occasion to reflect on the achievements of our advocacy efforts alongside Belizeans:

1) Protected Belize's barrier reef and sovereign waters from harmful practices of trawling and gillnet use.

2) Established the Petroleum Operations (Maritime Zone Moratorium) Act in 2017, which placed an indefinite moratorium on the prospect of offshore oil activities.

3) Strengthened informed decision making, meaningful public consultation, transparency and accountability through the amendment of the Referendum Act, which empowers Belizeans to decide the future of our marine resources if there is any future proposal on offshore oil.

"Together we've witnessed the positive changes that happen every time we work together as Belizeans for Belize. The relationships we've built across the country carry the team and I into the next fifteen years full of optimism, despite the long list of challenges yet to be overcome," said Janelle Chanona, Vice President, Oceana in Belize. "If we face the future as one, we will achieve the Belize we deserve."

Oceana remains resolute in our commitment to empowering communities, safeguarding marine ecosystems, and creating a future

where people and special places thrive together.

Our commemorative anniversary video was produced as a tribute to the beauty of collective effort, the power of meaningful change, and the strength of unwavering support from our fellow Belizeans.



OCEANA'S 15TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Oceana in Belize held its 2024 Annual General Meeting on October 5th, at St. Catherine's Academy Mercy Center in Belize City. The event brought together over 300 passionate Wavemakers, allies and partners from across the country, highlighting Belize's collective commitment to marine conservation. As is tradition, Wavemakers were awarded for their leadership and commitment to improving the quality of life of their respective communities.

*The 2024 Wavemakers of the Year were: Glendy Chiquin, Corozal District; Astrid Cal, Orange Walk District; Liam Sanchez, Belize District; Georgia Belezair, Cayo District; Schylyr Logan, Stann Creek District; and Roxanna Shook, Toledo District. **Dassia Regalado was named National Wavemaker of the Year, and the Sea of Life organization received the Partner of the Year award.***

Dassia Regalado, is a dedicated conservationist and veterinary professional working in Seine Bight Village in the Stann



Jacinta Usher, Outreach and Project Director and Morgan Miles, Miss Earth Belize with Dassia Regalado, our 2024 Wavemaker of the Year

Creek District. She has made remarkable contributions to environmental sustainability. In 2020, she founded Evergreen Marketing, a platform that highlights eco-friendly entrepreneurs. Her innovative 3R's Plastic Initiative transforms waste into functional art, offering creative solutions to pressing environmental challenges. Currently, Dassia serves as the Project Officer for the Waste Recycling Environment Network (WREN), an international consultancy that connects global change-makers. Her significant contributions to Oceana include volunteering at numerous events and

advocating for a petition signed by 22,090 Belizeans, calling for Constitutional protection of the right to be consulted via a national referendum on offshore oil development. Dassia has also partnered with Oceana for various beach cleanups through Evergreen Marketing.

Sea of Life has been a steadfast champion in the fight against plastic pollution, leading initiatives that promote sustainable practices and hold companies accountable. Their impactful trash audits and partnerships, including Oceana, have



Kelsie Cuevas, Executive Assistant and Morgan Miles, Miss Earth Belize with representatives from Sea of Life

empowered local change-makers to gather essential data on plastic waste, significantly deepening understanding and action at the grassroots level. They have been instrumental in advocating for the reduction of single-use plastics in schools, specifically targeting water bottles and bags. By promoting reusable alternatives, Sea of Life is helping to reduce waste and lessen the environmental footprint in educational institutions across the country.



This year's guest speaker, Mr. Jules Vasquez, news editor and media executive at Tropical Vision Ltd., delivered an inspiring message to the Wavemakers. He emphasized the dual nature of water—not only as a free-flowing



All smiles from some of our dedicated Wavemakers

force but also as a powerful and transformative element. Mr. Vasquez encouraged the Wavemakers to embody this spirit, urging them not just to “catch the wave” but to be water in their advocacy efforts. He highlighted their collective strength, as demonstrated by the over 22,000 signatures gathered in 2023 in support of a referendum that empowers Belizeans to decide the future of offshore oil in Belize. He called upon them to continue their volunteerism, to speak out even when it challenges leaders, and to take decisive action now for a sustainable Belize in the future.

Oceana in Belize's Wavemakers are part of a global community of over a million Oceana Wavemakers. Year after year, we are inspired by the passion and dedication of Belizeans who advocate and act for our marine environment. Oceana remains committed to working alongside Belizeans to safeguard our marine resources and the livelihoods that depend on them.



2024 OCEANA HEROES



Janelle Chanona, Vice President, alongside 2024 Ocean Heroes, Khadija Assales (L) and Linda Searle (R)

Oceana proudly announced the winners of its 14th annual Ocean Hero Awards during a ceremony held on December 4, 2024. The recipients, Khadija 'Kaj' Assales, a jeweler who trailblazed lionfish jewelry in Belize, and Linda Searle, a dedicated marine biologist and conservationist, were honored for their outstanding contributions to preserving Belize's marine resources.

The award ceremony was broadcast on TV on The National Channel and streamed live on Oceana in Belize's Facebook page,

allowing the community to celebrate these remarkable women who have shown exceptional commitment to protecting the Belize Barrier Reef and its ecosystems. Oceana's Vice President for Belize, Janelle Chanona, expressed her pride in the awardees, stating, *"It's an absolute privilege to celebrate fellow Belizeans who are passionate advocates for our marine resources and the people that depend on them. Khadija and Linda have shown unwavering dedication to ocean conservation, and their inspiring work is a testament to the power of individuals making a difference. The Ocean Hero Awards is our way of publicly acknowledging their contributions and saying, 'thank you' on behalf of a grateful nation."*

Khadija Assales, known for her jewelry brand Kaj Expressions, has gained widespread recognition for her innovative lionfish jewelry. Her unique creations not only showcase her artistic talent but also play a crucial role in addressing the invasive lionfish species that threaten Belize's marine ecosystem. By using the fins of these invasive fish as materials for her jewelry, Khadija combines art with environmental advocacy to raise awareness about lionfish overpopulation.



Khadija Assales, 2024 Ocean Hero

In her acceptance speech, Khadija reflected on the importance of collaboration in her work: *"I would not have been able to do all the work that I'm doing without the collaborative efforts of all the hardworking fishermen of Sarteneja Village; the woman who gave me this idea over 10 years ago, Jen Chapman; and, of course, all the incredible people who support our mission of spreading lionfish awareness through creative works of art."*

Linda Searle has been a prominent figure in Belize's marine conservation community since the 1990s. As the founder of ECOMar and Sea Sports Belize, Linda's work spans research, education, scuba diving training, and the rescue of stranded marine life. Her tireless efforts, alongside her husband John, have transformed her deep love for the ocean into meaningful action that supports sustainable marine stewardship across Belize.

Linda expressed gratitude for the partnerships that have fueled her work, stating, *"The saying is true, 'You protect what you love and passion is the key to making it happen.' There are many ways to support marine conservation in Belize and around the globe, just follow your passion."*

The Oceana Ocean Hero Awards celebrate Belizeans who have made significant strides in ocean conservation, advocacy, and education. Past recipients have included Lionel "Chocolate" Heredia, Dr. Melanie McField, Lisa Carne, Jamal Galves, Captain Romauldo "Romi" Badillo Sr., Janet Gibson, and many more individuals whose dedication to the preservation of Belize's marine resources continues to inspire future generations.

Oceana is deeply honored to recognize Khadija Assales and Linda Searle, whose efforts embody the spirit of the Ocean Hero Award and contribute to the ongoing protection of the Belize Barrier Reef and its vital ecosystems.

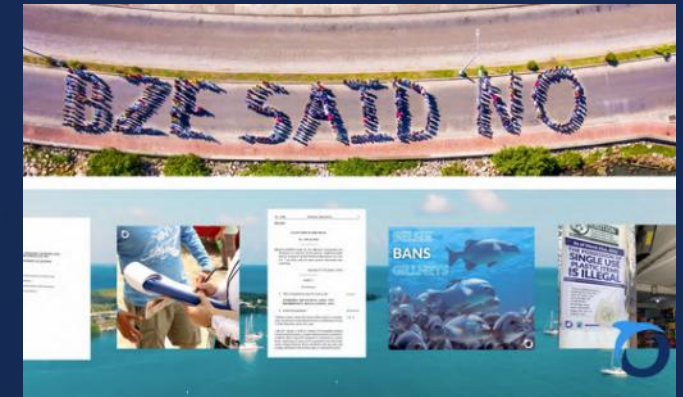
The stained-glass awards were designed and made by local artist, Leisa Carr-Caceres of [Belizean Craft and Colors](#).

The 2024 Oceana Ocean Hero award ceremony can be watched at this [link](#).

To see Khadija's video, click [here](#).

To see Linda's video, click [here](#).

PSAs



Oceana's work is fueled by the passion of Belizeans who envision a future for Belize where we all thrive together. View our most recent PSAs [here](#).



Linda Searle, 2024 Ocean Hero

Support Oceana

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.

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.



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Oceana Belize

Supporters by the Numbers

Facebook:

29.5K+

Instagram:

25.9K+

X:

1.9K+

Threads:

3.8K+

TikTok:

400+

Bluesky:

3.2K+

Wavemakers

3.5K+

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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 to learn more.