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**Oceana Belize**  
Annual Report 2025





## Annual Report 2025

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# Letter from the VP



## *My fellow Belizeans,*

Take a deep breath. In. Out. Take one more. In. Out. I'm hoping you're like me...that those two breaths were welcomed respite from the chaos that seems all too present, all.the.time. Bad actors are counting on us to give up. But nature doesn't give up, and neither do we.

From unpredictable climate shifts to the mounting pressure on our local ecosystems, the challenges have felt heavier and more urgent than ever

before. There are moments when the scale of the task seems overwhelming, and the path forward unclear. Our story is not defined by those obstacles—it is defined by how we rise to meet them.

Both our campaigns continue to highlight that to close gaps in governance is to respect the social justice rights of the tens of thousands of Belizeans who depend on natural resources for nutritional security, livelihood stability and cultural identity.

Fisheries management is not marginal. It is at the center of the lives of more than 15,000 beneficiaries. Ecosystem-based tourism is not on the periphery. It is a core economic pillar of Belize's Gross Domestic Product. Our work to amplify the voices of informing and empowering Belizeans enhances and increases the kind of "people power" that has been a critical factor in necessary changes.

***That's you. You are "people". You are the difference. You make a difference. You matter.***

We have seen that while a single voice can sound an alarm, it is our collective action that creates a movement. We all "ketch cold seed" watching unity on the Belize River. Do they show up when you find out Ambergris Caye residents are pooling money to buy back cayes? Do they show up when you see residents in Hopkins, Placencia, and Dangriga team up to fight plastic and sargassum? Do they show up when fishers take time out of their boats to speak out in defense of their livelihoods? Do they show up when indigenous pride shines bright in our music, our food, our flags?

Whether it was restoring a critical habitat, protecting a vulnerable species, or advocating for smarter policy, every success we celebrate is a direct result of us working together. Our acts of

collaboration are our greatest conservation tool. It proves that when we pool our resources, our passion, and our expertise, we are more resilient than any crisis we face. We have demonstrated that conservation isn't a solo mission; it is a shared responsibility that thrives on many acting as one.

As we look ahead, we do so always with optimism. Because together we thrive. Together we build a more resilient world for the generations to follow. Together we are Belize.

**With gratitude, determination and always yours,**

*Janelle*

**Janelle Chanona**  
VP, Oceana in Belize



# Oceana's Approach

Oceana campaigns to win policy victories that restore abundance and biodiversity in the world's oceans, which cover two-thirds of our planet and play a key role in mitigating climate change. Healthy marine ecosystems full of life support fisheries that can feed more than a billion people a healthy seafood meal every day, forever. We can preserve the oceans for future generations while protecting a critical food source — wild seafood — that requires no fresh water or arable land to produce, yields minimal greenhouse gas emissions, and provides an affordable, healthy protein to people who depend on it around the world. Just 29 countries and the European Union are responsible for nearly 90% of the global fish catch. We can — on a country-by-country basis — win policy victories that help protect and restore the oceans worldwide. Oceana campaigns alongside coastal communities for policies that are based in science and rely on five proven strategies that help restore healthy oceans.



Stop  
Overfishing



Protect  
Habitat



Curb  
Pollution



Increase  
Transparency



Protect  
Species

# How we work

The good news is that we can restore the oceans to their former abundance. For more than 20 years, Oceana and our allies have won more than 325 policy victories, and we have the tools to continue winning on behalf of our oceans and the hundreds of millions of people who rely on them. **We are:**

## ✔ CAMPAIGN-DRIVEN

We strategically create policy campaigns that make measurable progress toward our mission of protecting and restoring the world's oceans. Our campaigns are specific, targeted, and designed to be won in a three- to five year timeframe.

## ✔ FACT-BASED

Our advocacy relies on science to help us understand the ocean's threats and identify practical, effective solutions. We conduct research on a variety of issues that affect marine environments and species, from illegal and destructive fishing to plastic pollution and offshore drilling.

## ✔ EXPEDITION-POWERED

We recognize that getting on the water — alongside scientists, divers, photographers, campaigners, and artisanal fisher allies — helps us bring these important marine places to life and make a stronger case for their protection. Oceana's expeditions have powered our campaigns and resulted in victories across the globe.

## ✔ MULTI-DISCIPLINARY

Oceana's campaign teams consist of scientists, lawyers, advocates, communicators, and grassroots organizers, who develop innovative strategies and achieve tangible results for the oceans.

## ✔ PEOPLE-FOCUSED

Oceana's work is supported by our allies, including artisanal fishers around the world who power our campaigns to increase ocean abundance and support coastal livelihoods. Oceana has a global base of nearly nine million supporters, including 1.5 million Wavemakers, who use their voices to protect and restore the oceans.



A man wearing a cap and a tank top is fishing from a boat on the ocean. The background is a vast blue sea under a clear sky with a few birds flying. The overall tone is serene and focused on nature.

# Campaigns and Victories

Oceana leverages law, science, grassroots activism, advocacy, and strategic communications to win policy changes that add up to global impact. With the help of our allies, Oceana has won more than 325 victories that restore ocean abundance globally. Here is what we accomplished over the last year.



# Constitutional Reform

In 2025, 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 May 2025, progress was made in achieving the right to consultation on the issue of offshore oil when the People's Constitution Commission (PCC) included a recommendation that the Constitution be amended to require a binding referendum on proposed offshore oil activities. The National Assembly, thereafter, approved a 12-month extension for the introduction of the PCC's report to the House of Representatives until May 2026.

The final report and the summary of recommendations produced by the People's Constitution Commission (PCC) are now with the Government's retained Constitutional expert, a regional judge and former university professor. Justice Eddy Ventose will present his report to the Government in May 2026. The PCC law then requires that the Prime Minister table both reports in parliament.

**Status:** *In Progress*





# Fisheries Management

In 2025, we continued to support the formalization of fisher associations by providing guidance and technical assistance to groups working toward legal recognition, both directly and through partnerships with national fisher networks.

We also focused on strengthening awareness and public support for fisher representation in governance processes, through targeted outreach efforts and advocacy initiatives led by fishers themselves.

**Status:** *In Progress*





# 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

In 2025, we took our messages beyond borders, participating in various national and regional events that spotlighted the connection between people, policy, and marine conservation.



## Sharing Belize's Story Regionally

Ryan Rivera, Outreach Manager, represented Oceana on two regional stages: at the Mesoamerican Exchange in Honduras, where he shared the story of Belize's offshore oil campaign, including the landmark People's Referendum and the push for a Constitutional amendment; and at the 3rd Regional Dialogue for the Right to a Healthy Environment, hosted by COREDAM, where he spoke to the power of civil society in shaping meaningful environmental policy.



## Storytelling for Action

Miriam Longworth, Communications Specialist, took Oceana's storytelling experiences to MARFund's Liderazgo SAM event in Cancún, presenting on how authentic, people-driven communication moves citizens to action, spotlighting Oceana's Field Representatives program and multi-platform outreach strategy as tools for genuine community dialogue.



## Advocating for Science-Based Policy

In Belize, Jacinta Usher, Campaign and Policy Director, represented Oceana at the World Maritime Day Symposium on a panel titled "Our Ocean, Our Future: Safeguarding Blue Resources through Maritime Action." She shared on how Oceana advocated for science-based policy and regional cooperation to protect Belize's marine ecosystems.

Woven throughout the year was a sustained commitment to fisher engagement, deepening relationships with fishing communities, championing participatory governance, and supporting fishers as advocates for the sustainable management of Belize's marine resources.

# Partnerships & Collaborations



## Tiburon Rum

Since 2019, Tiburon Rum has pledged \$1 from every bottle sold to Oceana in support of marine conservation in Belize. In 2025, that commitment was translated into \$13,684.00 in direct support of our work. As the company celebrated the launch of its new FIN tequila line, Tiburon reaffirmed its dedication to Oceana's mission, a gesture that speaks to the depth of this partnership. We remain grateful for their continued generosity and look forward to growing this collaboration in 2026.

Throughout the year, our Outreach team connected with communities across the country, empowering Belizeans to use their voices to advocate for our sea, our livelihoods, and our future.

We were proud to collaborate with educational institutions – including Escuela Secundaria Técnica México, Corozal Community College, Independence High School, the University of Belize, and Stann Creek Ecumenical Junior College – through career days, youth forums, and environmental club activities, empowering the next generation of ocean advocates.

Our ongoing collaboration with Sea of Life continued to make strides in supporting their trash audits and encouraging students to move away from single-use plastics. Cleanups and other community outreach activities brought us together with municipal councils in Belmopan, Dangriga Town, and Hopkins Village, Department of Youth Services, Global Ocean Literacy Initiative, the BTIA Dangriga Chapter, HECOPAB, the Scout Association of Belize, public libraries, and our amazing Wavemakers from St. Catherine's Academy and SJCJC. All our collaborative opportunities were reminders that protecting Belize's marine environment is a collective effort, powered by people.





# Events

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



## Reef Week 2025

Oceana kicked off Reef Week with its annual Ride to Reef. The ride brought together more than 60 riders from across Belize in a united show of love and support for our vibrant reef and marine ecosystems. We also participated in the Reef Fair, held in San Ignacio Town, where we engaged with Belizeans passionate about protecting our marine ecosystems, shared our ongoing efforts to advocate for stronger constitutional protections for the reef, and welcomed new Wavemakers. We were especially excited to spotlight the 2025 theme, “Building Resilience from Reef to Ridge,” emphasizing that every Belizean, whether inland or coastal, plays a crucial role in safeguarding our marine environment.

## World Oceans Day

In honor of World Oceans Day, Oceana took action against plastic pollution, coordinating community cleanups in Belize, Corozal, and Stann Creek districts. Community members turned out in force alongside a dedicated network of partners, including the Belize City Council, Central Health Region, Diamond International, Customer HD, Corozal Town Council, Rotaract Club of Corozal, TIDE, Trio Environmentalist Strikers, Big Falls Eco Warriors, Clean Land Air & Water, and our Wavemakers from St. Catherine’s Academy, Muffles High School and Orange Walk.

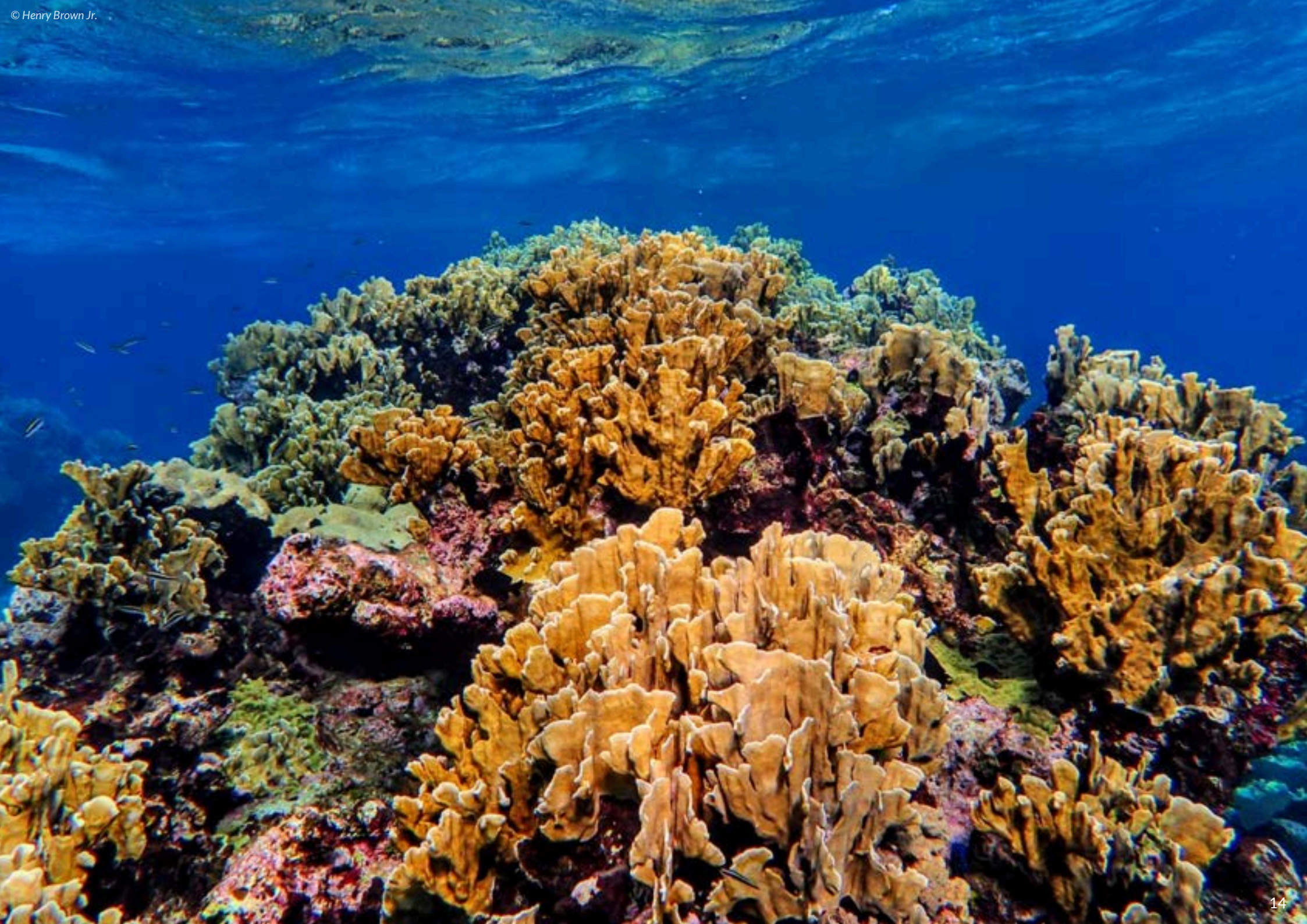


## IWIC 2025

In November, Alyssa Noble, Senior Communications Director for Oceana in Belize; along with Lara Levinson, Senior Director of Federal Policy for Oceana; and Kim Elmslie, Senior Director for Oceana Canada, hosted a panel entitled “Bringing Policy to Life” at the 2025 International Women in Conservation (IWIC) Summit in Belize City. The panel discussion focused on how Oceana campaigns for conservation laws and policies, and how they’re implemented and come to life through the accountability of governing bodies. The platform created a valuable space for panelists and attendees to discuss the challenges and victories of Oceana’s teams around the world. A central theme was the importance and impact of people power in driving Oceana’s campaigns. We were also proud to celebrate our very own Jacinta Usher as the recipient of the first-ever IWIC award.

## Belize Connect Expo

Oceana had a booth at the Belize Connect Expo during the Grand Caribe Deep Sea Classic on August 4<sup>th</sup>, in San Pedro. While the fishing tournament attracts anglers from around the world, the expo focuses on promoting Belizean products and services as well as provides a networking platform for local NGOs, like Oceana. We had conversations with attendees about protecting our marine resources and shared on the importance of people-powered governance in Belize.



# ONLINE AND IN THE NEWS

## OCEANA KICKS OFF REEF WEEK WITH 12TH ANNUAL RIDE TO THE REEF



On Saturday, March 15, Oceana hosted its 12th annual Ride to the Reef, marking the official start of Reef Week 2025. This year's theme, "Building Resilience from Ridge to Reef," was brought to life as riders from across the country came together to show their support for Belize's vital reefs and marine ecosystems.

Over 60 amateur and professional cyclists braved the heat to complete the 50-mile journey from the National Assembly Building in the City of Belmopan to the Memorial

Park in Belize City. Their dedication reflects a shared passion for marine conservation — riding not just for sport, but with purpose: to raise awareness and advocate for the protection of Belize's reefs.

*"The Ride to Reef is really a testament to the unwavering commitment of Belizeans to show up, stand up and ride to champion the invaluable marine ecosystems that make our lives possible," shared Janelle Chanona, Vice President of Oceana Belize. "The reality that tens of thousands of Belizeans depend on the integrity of these habitats daily demands informed and inclusive decision-making, decisive and timely action, and innovative and effective adaptation measures. Our hope for a bountiful and beautiful future where Belizeans can always depend on these resources, and why we will always proudly stand alongside our fellow Belizeans, is because when we act as one, sensational things happen!"*

Belize's reefs provide more than just beauty — they are a source of food, livelihoods, recreation, and the backbone of our thriving tourism industry. Yet, our marine resources

face increasing threats from pollution, climate change, and human activities like offshore oil and gas exploration and drilling. The connection Belizeans have to the reef extends far beyond the coastline and so does the impact of our actions. It is critical to recognize that every decision we make, from the ridges of the mountains to the islands, affects the health of our reefs.

During Reef Week and beyond, Oceana reminds all Belizeans that the future of our reef depends on our collective responsibility, awareness, and action.

Oceana expresses its sincere gratitude to all the passionate participants, the Belize Police Department and the Traffic Departments of Belmopan and Belize City for ensuring our safety along the George Price Highway, Ordonez Bike Shop for providing valued support, and the Belize Emergency Services for their standby assistance and care.

To view photos, click [here](#).

## OCEANA HONORS WAVEMAKERS AT 2025 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Oceana in Belize held its 2025 Annual General Meeting on Saturday, October 4th, 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 2025 Wavemakers of the Year are:

- *Alfonso Alcalá, Corozal District*
- *Jamir Muñoz, Orange Walk District*
- *Yolanda Magana, Belize District*
- *Damris Blades, Cayo District*
- *Rudy Villanueva, Stann Creek District*
- *Federico Caal, Toledo District*

During the event, **Brianna Boyd** was named National Wavemaker of the Year, and **Hamanasi Adventure and Dive Resort** was given the Partner of the Year award.



*Jacinta Usher, Outreach and Project Director and Isabella Zabaneh, Miss Universe Belize with Brianna Boyd, our 2025 Wavemaker of the Year*

**Brianna Boyd**, is a 24-year-old third-generation tourism professional. Raised on South Water Caye – a small island just outside of Dangriga Town – Brianna's passion for conservation stems from her early connection to the reef. Her work spans national and international platforms, from cleanups and climate education, to youth and entrepreneur initiatives. As Secretary of the Belize Tourism Industry Association's Dangriga Chapter and an active Oceana Wavemaker, she bridges conservation, tourism, and youth empowerment, promoting authenticity, cultural pride, and community building to protect Belize's people and special places.

Hamanasi Adventure and Dive Resort, located in Hopkins Village, has long championed responsible tourism and marine conservation, leading by example in protecting Belize's natural resources while empowering local communities. Hamanasi continues to support Oceana's work in Belize through collaborative efforts in community engagement activities and the passion of their management and staff in lending their voices to advocate for stronger constitutional protections of Belize's marine resources. Their commitment to sustainability, from reef-safe diving practices to community engagement, reflects the shared vision that when we safeguard our environment together, we secure a thriving future for all.



*All smiles from some of our dedicated Wavemakers*

This year's guest speaker, **Mr. Jamal Galves**, also known locally as The Manatee Man, is no stranger to the conservation community in Belize. He has made waves both locally and internationally due to his passion for protecting manatees and, by extension, Belize's precious marine ecosystems. He has received numerous awards and honors, including being named an Oceana Ocean Hero, a Belizean National Hero by the Government of Belize, a National Geographic Explorer, and a NatGeo Photo Ark EDGE Fellow, among others. Jamal is currently the Program Coordinator and Research Biologist for Clearwater Marine Aquarium Research Institute in Belize, where he shares his knowledge of manatees with researchers, students, and community members from all over the world.



Jamal Galves, Guest Speaker

The theme of Jamal's address, "An Ocean Between Us," emphasized the interconnectedness of people around the world through the oceans that sustain all our lives. He shared how the inspiration for his life's work began when he was just a young boy, drawn to learning more about manatees and how he can help to protect them and the ecosystems they call home. Jamal encouraged the Wavemakers to begin where they are, reminding them that even small actions can create waves of change.



Janelle Chanona, Vice President, Oceana Belize

In her remarks, Oceana's Vice President for Belize Janelle Chanona encouraged the Wavemakers to remain empowered and hopeful in their shared mission to protect the future of Belize's treasured sea.

*"You have the audacity not just to know that*

*we have a treasure worth protection, worth your time, worth your blood sweat and tears, you know that you make a difference," Chanona said. "You know that when we get together, unity is strength. When we get together, big things happen. When we get together, we change the world for the better. Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has. And that's power, my friends."*

Oceana in Belize's Wavemakers are part of a global community of over a million Oceana Wavemakers. Each year, we are inspired by the commitment of Belizeans who speak up and take action to protect our marine environment. Oceana is dedicated to continuing this partnership, working hand in hand with Belizeans to safeguard our ocean resources and the communities whose livelihoods depend on them.

Find photos of the event [here](#).



The Oceana Belize team

## OCEANA ANNOUNCES BELIZE'S 2025 OCEAN HERO AWARDS RECIPIENTS



Janelle Chanona, Vice President, alongside our 2025 Ocean Heroes, Elito Arceo (L) and Dennis Garbutt (R)

On December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025, Oceana formally recognized two more Belizeans as Ocean Heroes. They are Jose “Elito” Arceo of San Pedro, Ambergris Caye, and Dennis Garbutt from Punta Gorda Town. The awardees were honored during the 15<sup>th</sup> Ocean Hero Awards ceremony, broadcast on The National Channel.

Jose “Elito” Arceo’s vibrant personality and passion for protecting the environment has made him a constant in conservation issues for decades. As a co-owner of SEAduced, this

tour operator has been a persistent and vocal advocate against destructive coastal development, mangrove deforestation, playing a key role in expanding the Hol Chan Marine Reserve. Elito and his family were also leading community voices in the campaign against any moves towards offshore oil exploration. *“I’m just doing something that I have loved for many years, and I will keep doing it. My love for the sea, my love for the ocean, and of course, my love for my island and country,”* shared Elito.



Jose “Elito” Arceo, 2025 Ocean Hero



Dennis Garbutt, 2025 Ocean Hero

Dennis Garbutt was instrumental in lobbying for the 2008 legislation that gave full protection to bonefish, tarpon and permit, the establishment of Port Honduras Marine Reserve, and the prohibition of gillnets in Belize’s waters. Fly fishermen agree that “the Garbutt brothers are so popular and well-respected globally that it’s not just fly fishing in Belize that’s on anglers’ bucket lists, it’s fly fishing with one of the Garbutt brothers.” As Dennis puts it, conservation work and advocacy for sustainability come naturally. *“The journey that led me to my*

*passion and work today is life. I love the sea. I love what it takes being out there and advocating for it. We live in a great place, and if we can take care of each other, then take care of the environment, this is a win-win for all."*

Since 2009, Oceana Ocean Hero Awards has honored Belizeans for their exceptional contributions to ocean conservation, advocacy, and education. *"It is a privilege to honor the character and moral courage of our fellow Belizeans,"* shared Oceana's Vice President for Belize, Janelle Chanona. *"Even in the face of personal risk or potential backlash, our Oceana Heroes choose to act. Actions, which in turn, inspire all of us to do more for Belizean's precious marine ecosystems and everyone who depends on them."*



Past award recipients include Lionel "Chocolate" Heredia, Dr. Melanie McField, Cho-Ricketts, Chef Sean Kuylen, Philip former Fisheries Minister Rene Montero,

Lisa Carne, Jamal Galves, Miguel Alamilla, Captain Romauldo "Romi" Badillo Sr., Janet Gibson, Wil Maheia, Luz Hunter, Madison Edwards, Michael Heusner, Captain Earl David Jr, Guadalupe Lampella, Dale Fairweather, Neville Smith, the late Lowell 'Japs' Godfrey, Kevin Andrewin, Chef Jennie Staines, Dr. Rachel Graham, Dr. Leandra "Billy" Leslie, Khadija Assales, and Linda Searle.

The Ocean Hero Awards nomination period opens in July each year. This award celebrates individuals across Belize who are passionate about marine conservation, including:

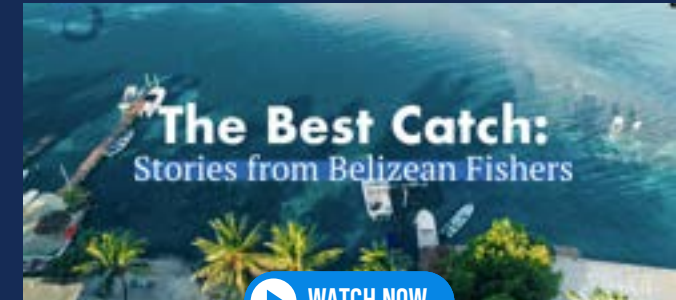
- *Teaching and education*
- *On-ground conservation, restoration, and rehabilitation work*
- *Project work*
- *Private or individual research*

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

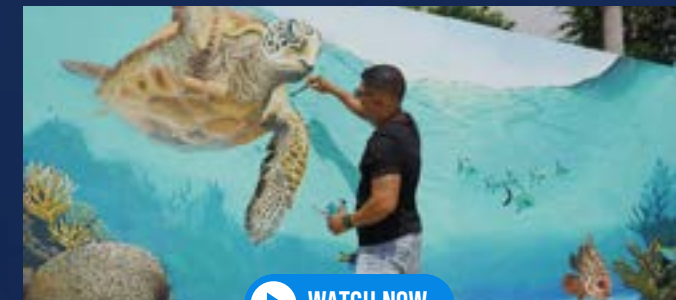
To see Elito Arceo's video, click [here](#).

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

## PSAs



**Belizean fishers** recall their best hauls and speak honestly about the changes that threaten those memories and the future they still believe in.



On **World Oceans Day**, we celebrated the power of Belizean voices in protecting our marine environment and the role we play in the decisions that shape our nation. *It's our sea, so we should have our say.*

# Support Oceana

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## Donate to Oceana

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, safeguard 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 will advocate for safer fishing gear to protect marine life from entanglements and stopping ocean plastic pollution at the source to prevent harm to marine life.

With you by our side, we can fight these and other important threats. Every day, more irreplaceable ocean habitats are threatened by destructive fishing and pollution.

## Follow Oceana

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



@OceanainBelize



@oceanabelize



@oceana\_bze



@oceana\_bze



@oceanabelize



Oceana Belize

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# Supporters by the Numbers

Facebook:

31.2K+

Instagram:

26.1K+

X:

1.9K+

Threads:

5.6K+

TikTok:

1K+

Bluesky:

197

Wavemakers

3.8K+

# Staff

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Senior Field Representative

**MARIA VARELA**

Custodian

**JACINTA USHER**

Campaign & Policy Director

**RYAN RIVERA**

Outreach Manager

**KELSIE CUEVAS**

Senior Finance & Administrative Analyst



"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

- Margaret Mead

## Contact Oceana

BELMOPAN, BELIZE  
2358 Hibiscus Street  
P.O. Box 731  
City of Belmopan,  
Belize, Central America  
Phone: +501-822-2792  
Fax: +501-822-2797  
Email: [info@oceana.org](mailto:info@oceana.org)



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.