High Seas Fisheries

Fleet Policy

BELIZE HIGH SEAS FISHERIES UNIT
Ministry of Finance
Government of Belize

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1.0 GENERAL

1.1 Executive Summary
The effective management and control of our fleet is paramount to any future expansion in an effort to maintain Belize’s integrity. As at May 2014, the Belize high seas fishing fleet consisted of 76 active vessels, signifying a 25% reduction in fleet size when compared to previous years. The fleet which engages in fishing and related activities on the high seas has and continues to undergo a comprehensive transformation. This is as a result of the adoption of a revised High Seas Fishing Act in 2013 complemented by several new and important subsidiary regulations.

This Fleet Policy now provides the framework to strategically develop, manage and maintain the fleet which operates on the high seas. Since the adoption of new legislation, Belize has undertaken a fleet reduction and development campaign to ensure that fleet size is aligned with current and future institutional capacity. Our fleet has undergone a significant reduction and is likely to continue in that trajectory during the next few months.

This Administration shall also undertake to ensure that only those RFMO areas to which we can sustain a viable presence will be maintained. This initiative will also allow us to marginalize our current fleet composition in the effort to ensure effective management and control.

1.2 Citation

This Policy shall be cited as the HIGH SEAS FISHERIES FLEET POLICY, hereinafter referred to as the Policy.

1.3 Objective

The fundamental objective of this Policy is to provide a framework of established procedures and guidelines for a more robust accountability and enhanced vessel management of the Belize fisheries fleet which operates in the high seas and in third country waters.

The policy provides an environment for greater flexibility to:

- Manage the fleet in accordance with approved guidelines and standards adopted pursuant to this Policy.
 Ensure effective implementation of applicable conservation and management measures relating to fleet expansion.

 Ensure that any fleet development will be consistent with its ability to manage such fleet.

1.4 Scope

The Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit (BHSFU) has autonomy for the implementation of this Policy. This Policy applies to all Belize registered vessels engaged in fishing or fishing related activities on the high seas, and shall be applied consistently with the requirements of all relevant legislation, policies and regulations as may be determined.

1.5 Institutional Framework

The management and control of the fleet which operates on the high seas is primarily administered by national government through the Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit (BHSFU) under the Ministry of Finance and the Prime Minister’s Officer. The BHSFU is responsible for the following:

- The overall management and control of the fleet which is licensed to operate on the high seas;
- Adopting effective monitoring, control and surveillance measures to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing;
- Exercise effective jurisdiction over Belize flagged vessels operating in areas under the jurisdiction of other States and on the high seas areas managed by Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs);
- Ensure that the policy is current and aligned with relevant local and international legislations and government strategies;
- Upgrade the Policy as new issues develop;
- Advise the Ministry on fleet issues;
- Review capacity to manage fleet in line with fleet expansion;
- Develop applicable plans and guidelines consistent with this Policy;
- Advise other intergovernmental agencies on matters relating to this Policy;
In addition to the BHSFU, there are other government agencies that have a direct or indirect function relating to the management of the high seas fishing fleet. These agencies include the International Merchant Marine Registry of Belize (IMMARBE), the Belize Agriculture Health Authority (BAHA), the Belize Customs and Excise Department, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the International Financial Services Commission. The functions of these agencies include, vessel registration, sanitary inspections, regulation of fish trade, and foreign negotiations.

Belize is committed to strengthening its instruments to encourage the efficient management and control of its high seas fishing fleet and in so doing has adopted a revised and robust High Seas Fishing Act and effective licensing, sanctions and monitoring control and surveillance regulations.

1.6 Legal and Policy Framework for the Management of Belize High Seas Fishing Fleet

The legal and policy framework for the management of the fleet which operates in the high seas comprises a number of domestic and international laws, primarily the High Seas Fisheries Act 2013, the Sanctions Regulation, the Licensing Regulation and the Regulation for Monitoring, Control and Surveillance, The Registration of Merchant Ships Act, 2010 and other implementing regulations.

Aside from the basic fisheries laws, regulations and conventions, a number of other laws and policies relating to the environment, trade, sanitary and phytosanitary conditions and safety of fishing vessels also form part of the general framework for the effective management and control of our fleet.

The international legal bases for the management of the fleet are the various agreements that Belize has adopted, ratified, or acceded to. These international agreements include:

(a) the United National Convention on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS),
(b) the FAO Compliance Agreement; and
(c) the UN Fish Stocks Agreement.

It is also a party to a number of environmental treaties that have an impact on fisheries such as
the Convention on Biological Diversity and Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES). Belize is also committed to implementing non-binding international instruments such as the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IPOA IUU) and the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Flag State Performance. In so doing Belize adopted its National Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU Fishing for the High Seas on 20\textsuperscript{th} May 2014.

As members of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) and a Cooperating non-Member of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), Belize implements its responsibilities under the respective regional conventions and conservation and management measures adopted by these regional bodies. Belize is also conscious of its obligation to cooperate within the framework of other regional organizations and bodies which may have an impact on fisheries management policies.

We are also mindful of various international rules that affect other aspects of fisheries management such as trade, particularly World Trade Organization (WTO) rules on tariff and non-tariff barriers, sanitary and phytosanitary measures. Other trade related measures implemented under regional fisheries management organizations also apply, such as catch documentation schemes, the EU IUU Catch Documentation Scheme and other such trade related measures.
STRATEGIC FLEET MANAGEMENT

2.0 FLEET COMPOSITION AND DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Target and Current Composition of Fleet

Belize intends to maintain a total fleet size of 75 vessels. Our current operational fleet size is 76 vessels and areas of operation are outlined in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size in GT</th>
<th>Tuna and Sharks</th>
<th>Non-Tuna</th>
<th>Transport</th>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ICCAT</td>
<td>IATTC</td>
<td>IOTC</td>
<td>WCPFC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 gt or less</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101-200 gt</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201-300 gt</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>301-500 gt</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>501-1000 gt</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1001-2000 gt</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-5000 gt</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5001gt or more</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2 Fleet Development

This Administration envisages maintaining the fleet composition outlined above over a three year period. A margin of variance will be utilized to allow for an increase of a maximum of 15% above the target of 75 vessels. The fluctuation of the fleet size within this margin of variance shall be considered at the time of review of this Policy to determine the target fleet size.

Institutional capacity and the ability to monitor the fleet shall be the primary consideration in the development of our fleet. New vessels shall not be added simply to increase fleet composition; therefore, this Policy will allow only for the application of an entry and exit system to ensure fleet maintenance once the margin of variance has been fully utilized. The fleet size shall remain at the level as outlined above.
2.3 Types of Vessels and Activities

Only vessels engaged in fishing and fishing related activities in accordance with the High Seas Fishing Act, 2013 shall be considered under this Policy, these include, but are not limited to the following:

- Vessels targeting tuna and tuna like species
- Vessels targeting sharks
- Vessels targeting non-tuna species
- Vessels engaged in support activities
- Vessels engaged in the transport of marine resources

Other vessels may be considered at the discretion of the BHSFU and in accordance with the High Seas Fishing Act 2013.

2.4 Types of gears

Only gears that are compatible with the aforementioned type of vessels shall be considered under this Policy. These include but are not limited to the following:

- Long-liners
- Purse-seiners
- Mid-water trawlers
- Jiggers
- Traps
- Crab pots

Other gears may be considered at the discretion of the BHSFU and in accordance with the High Seas Fishing Act 2013.

2.5 Areas of operation

Areas of operation shall include, for the vessels engaged in tuna fisheries, only those areas which are regulated by a Regional Fisheries Management Organization to which Belize is a Member. These include:
The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT),
The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), and
The Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC).

Participation in the above RFMO areas shall be reviewed on a yearly basis.
For non-tuna vessels, transport and auxiliary/support vessels, the area of operation shall be approved on a case by case basis in accordance with the High Seas Fishing Act 2013 and any applicable international regulations and measures.
3.0 OPERATIONAL FLEET MANAGEMENT

3.1 Registration

Only vessels that have been registered by the International Merchant Marine Registry of Belize (IMMARBE) and licensed by the BHSFU shall be considered under this Policy.

3.2 Licenses and Authorizations

Allocation of licenses shall be in accordance with the High Seas Fisheries Act, 2013 and the High Seas Fishing License Regulations S.I. 33 of 2014

3.3 Records Management

Only a record of vessels licensed by the BHSFU shall be maintained in accordance with this Policy. Records shall include but not limited to the following information:

- Specification of the vessel;
- License authorization period;
- Conditions of the license issued;
- Areas, species, gears authorized

All vessels licensed by the BHSFU shall be reported to the relevant RFMO and the FAO in accordance with the RFMO reporting requirements and the Compliance Agreement, respectively. Only vessels in the regional record of vessels are entitled to fish in areas under the competence of a regional fisheries management organization. The list of authorized vessels shall be updated and submitted to the Secretariats of relevant fisheries management organizations as required by such organizations. A list of all licensed vessels shall be uploaded to our website for public access.

3.4 Monitoring and Reporting

Monitoring, Control and Surveillance shall be carried out in accordance with the Regulations for Monitoring, Control and Surveillance, S.I. 39 of 2014
3.5 Charter Arrangements

Charter arrangements are mostly confidential arrangements under domestic regulations. However, to ensure that such arrangements do not support IUU fishing activities or undermine conservation and management measures, no vessel shall be registered with Belize for the purpose of charter to another flag. The charter arrangements for existing vessels will not be renewed and at the expiration of current charter contracts, vessel will be required to operate exclusively under the Belize flag or make alternate arrangements.

3.6 Transshipment Activities

Only authorized transshipment at ports are allowed. Transshipment requested under the scope of the Regional Observer Programme of an RFMO may also be considered provided that there is observer coverage on board both donor and receiving vessels. Any and all transshipment activities are governed by the Regulations for Monitoring, Control and Surveillance.

3.7 Belize High Seas Inspection Program (BHSIP)

Belize is currently developing its port inspection program to facilitate the appointment of authorized inspectors, inspection of discharge and transshipment operations as well as standard vessel inspections. This will be carried out pursuant to the Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Regulation, S.I. 39 of 2014.

3.8 At-Sea Observer Program

Belize participates in the regional observer programs established by regional fisheries management organizations for transhipments at sea. Vessels on the high seas and those fishing in areas under the jurisdiction of other states are required to accept observers on board vessels in accordance with the procedures established in relevant regional fisheries management organizations. Belize’s national observer program shall cover all commercial fishing and transport/transhipment vessels that target and/or transport tuna, tuna like species, sharks and non-tuna species on the
high seas and vessels fishing in the EEZ of other States. The level of observer coverage shall be in compliance with the requirements of relevant RFMOs’ requirements as well as all applicable domestic legislation and/or regulations relating thereto. Details on the observer program are contained in Regulations for Monitoring, Control and Surveillance, S. I. 39 of 2014.

3.9 Laid Up Vessels

No fishing vessel shall be registered where its operational status is undetermined. A vessel may be considered for registration under laid up status for up to three months once an operational plan is submitted and accepted by the BHSFU. A vessel under this status, where its three month period has expired, will be required to request deletion or shall be cancelled ex-officio.

3.10 Infringements and Sanctions

Pursuant to the adoption of the High Seas Fisheries Act 2013, Belize has adopted a holistic sanction regulation S.I. 32 or 2014 to be applied to all vessels, owners, operators, charters who commit an offense against any fisheries laws and regulations applicable to Belize flagged vessels.

3.11 Control of Fishing Capacity

The number of Belize licensed fishing vessels has seen a declining trend. This is largely due to measures being implemented and/or adopted to limit not only fishing efforts but capacity as well. Policies have also been established for the allocation of fishing rights as well as new requirements for the obtainment of a fishing license. An electronic catch reporting system is being implemented for the efficient reporting of fishing activities and catch data reporting. Our vessel monitoring system has also been modified to ensure hourly reporting and geo-fencing with alert notification.

3.12 Annual General Inspection

All licensed vessels shall be subject to an annual general inspection to ensure not only compliance with safety regulations, but with applicable compliance measures such as gear
specifications, mitigation measures, marking of vessel. This will be done in close collaboration with IMMARBE.

3.13 Implementation Mechanism

The effective execution of this Policy dictates the adoption of new regulations and updates to existing regulations. These will give legal effect to the strategies and proposed actions contained in this policy.

3.14 Review of Policy

This Policy shall be reviewed and revised as deemed necessary by the Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit based on changes within our management capacity as well as any amendments in domestic laws and regulations or relevant conservation and management measures which may have an impact on our fleet development. The review and expansion will be undertaken in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, as appropriate.