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OAS Representative in Belize
Workshop
REEFIX Project (Coastal Zone Management)
OAS Department of Sustainable Development in collaboration with
Belize Audubon Society and Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, etc.
March 19 to 23, 2018
Audubon Main Office
Belize City, Belize

Protocol

On behalf of the OAS Secretary General, His Excellency Luis Almagro, the Assistant Secretary General, Ambassador Nestor Mendez, the Director of the Department of Sustainable Development, Mr. Cletus Springer, and on my own behalf, I am pleased to add my voice in welcoming everyone to this workshop, and to express appreciation to all of you for agreeing to participate.

A special welcome is reserved for my colleague and friend, Mr. Richard Huber, who is one of the OAS's Specialist, within the Department of Sustainable Development, on issues pertaining to the marine environment. Among other things, Richard is overseeing the implementation of this REEFFIX project in Belize and in the wider Caribbean as well. Richard, it is good to see you again in person, and I trust that your expertise will be felt at this event, and participants will learn from your wealth of experience.

The Organization of American States (OAS), through its Department of Sustainable Development, is pleased to sponsor this event. The OAS readily embraces the opportunity to partner with The Belize Audubon Society, the Ministry of

Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, Environment and Sustainable Development and other Stakeholders, in the implementation of this REEFFIX project. In this regard, the organization's gratitude is extended to the Audubon Society for agreeing to assume the stewardship of this project.

REEFFIX is known as an integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Ecosystem Services Valuation and Capacity Building project for the Caribbean. In the context of its implementation in Belize, one of its primary objectives is to assist the BAS in integrating its existing biophysical monitoring data on coral reef ecosystem health, into targeted communications for fishers, rangers, and participants of the Reef Protector program.

It is therefore the case that this workshop will, among other things, address the issue of capacity building and elaborate the requisite technical and other inputs that will be required to achieve this worthy objective. I am anticipating as well that there will be references to experiences, best practices, and outcomes in other countries, where the REEFFIX project is being implemented.

At the end of last week, the conservation community and other key stakeholders in Belize concluded a week's celebration of *Reef Week*. It was the 5th staging of the event that was initiated in 2013. The celebrations took place under the theme "Our Reef Rocks: Protect It; Don't Neglect It." Clearly, last year's imposition of an indefinite moratorium on offshore oil in Belize's marine areas was an achievement worth celebrating. And when one considers that work has continued on the Fisheries Act and cognizant of the efforts to formulate mangrove regulations and other related initiatives, it is right that all Belizeans should highlight and applaud what has been achieved to date. There is optimism in the air that additional achievements will certainly follow as Belize endeavors to build and sustain a thriving nature based economy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is worth emphasizing that this event today, among other things, creates the opportunity for us to recall and to highlight that our oceans, seas, reefs and mangrove areas are the cradle of life, and without doubt, they combine to be identified as an indispensable resource, given the essential role they play in our continued wellbeing and development.

Moreover, our gathering is a poignant reminder that there is a continuing dialogue and debate in many regions of the world on issues such as the state of the marine environment, the prevention of pollution and the degradation of marine ecosystems, and of course, the need for more concerted efforts to achieve the sustainable management of our marine resources. As the debate in multiple forums produces consensus on required action, the OAS continues to call for all stakeholders, State and Non State actors, to play their part in implementing the resulting recommendations in a timely manner.

Given these important issues and considering the challenges associated with addressing them, the OAS has chosen to highlight the value and importance of continuing our capacity building efforts. In this regard, building institutional capacity and strengthening human resources development are twin elements in capacity building that the OAS considers absolutely necessary in the quest to achieve the sustainable management of our marine resources. The OAS supports more training for those who are committed and energetic and who bring innovative ideas to the table. The organization wishes to see the engagement of local experts to assist in addressing the technical and legal issues that are integral to protecting the marine environment. And the OAS also supports the

strengthening of the relevant institutions with the requisite administrative and managerial capacity, complete with enforcement powers to carry out their rightful mandates in regards to the marine environment.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The OAS remains convinced that it is necessary in our discussions this week to emphasize the importance of the application of marine scientific knowledge and technology in addressing problems that stem from illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing.

This is an application that conservation groups in Belize are now promoting, and I wish to applaud their efforts in working with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, in using applicable scientific methods and appropriate technology to minimize existing problems, and to address, as necessary, prevailing challenges. With this in mind, I wish to also encourage conservation groups to remain vigilant and to always stay one step ahead of those engaged in illegal practices that negatively impact the marine environment, and by extension, Belize's emerging nature based economy.

The degradation of the marine environment both from land-based sources and the wanton pollution from ships, continue to haunt efforts to achieve the sustainable management of our marine resources. Notwithstanding existing International Treaties, conventions and protocols, many who traverse our seas, oceans and important waterways, continue to break the law and disregard the negative impact of their unwarranted actions on the marine environment. We are obligated to continue raising our voices against the perpetrators, and within the framework of our domestic laws and regulations, we also have a responsibility to make the violators fully accountable.

In conclusion, the OAS does not wish for REEFFIX to be just another technical cooperation project that promotes marine protected areas. In a broader sense, the organization desires that this technical cooperation activity will motivate all stakeholders to lobby and promote national, regional and global implementation of all related marine agreements, protocols, conventions and treaties. REEFFIX is designed to challenge us to give due attention to the potential and new uses of the oceans and to research and study their implications for the marine environment. And, ladies and gentlemen, the organization hopes that REEFFIX will make us better stewards of our seas and oceans and that it will renew our

commitment to pay special attention to our ecosystem-based integrated management of the marine environment. It is also the wish of the OAS that REEFFIX will inspire us to take the measures necessary to focus attention on the issues of food security and food insecurity, as well as to address the related matters such as availability, affordability, quality and safety of the foods we eat. Moreover, the organization is hopeful that REEFFIX will make us become more vigilant, with a view to carefully monitor and as needed regulate navigation in our ecologically sensitive areas; and finally, the OAS is desirous that REEFFIX will inspire us to promote the protection of coastal areas from the introduction of non-native species – an issue most worthy of unwavering attention.

Let us not be daunted by the work that remains to be done. Instead, let us be unwavering in our quest to save our marine environment, because in doing so, we will secure our very existence and that of generations to follow.

I wish all of you a meaningful and productive workshop during the next five days.

Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen.