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## **Belize's Annual Report of Internal Action Review IATTC - Res. C-11-05 Paragraph 5**

As of December 2024, Belize had no fleet actively operating in the IATTC Convention Area, and this remained unchanged through the end of December 2025.

The oversight and management of fishing vessels registered under the Belize flag is jointly undertaken by two primary entities: the International Merchant Marine Registry of Belize (IMMARBE) and the Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit (BHSFU). IMMARBE is responsible for the registration and safety certification of all fishing vessels, ensuring they meet the required standards. The BHSFU oversees monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) of all fishing activities and serves as Belize's focal point for all RFMO matters. Their shared objective is to ensure compliance with national and international regulations, vessel safety, conservation measures, and all relevant monitoring and control requirements.

### **❖ Domestic and High Seas Fleets**

Belize's domestic fishing fleet, which operates exclusively within the country's territorial waters, is regulated by the Belize Fisheries Department under the Ministry of Blue Economy. The distant water fleet operating on the high seas falls under the jurisdiction of the BHSFU (Ministry of Finance). While ownership of distant water vessels is not restricted to Belizean nationals, applicants for fishing licenses must disclose beneficial ownership information and appoint a local legal representative. These requirements strengthen oversight, accountability, and enforcement in alignment with both national and international standards.

### **❖ Vessel Registration and Authorization Requirements**

Vessels seeking registration and authorization to operate in the IATTC Convention Area now go through a thorough vetting and compliance process and must meet specific criteria established by IMMARBE and the BHSFU. These include but not limited to:

- Verification that the vessel has no history of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing activities.
- Verification that vessel owners have no affiliation with IUU-listed operators or sanctioned countries/entities.
- Submission of a photo report or a recent survey inspection report demonstrating the vessel's structural seaworthiness. This requirement helps ensure vessel safety and mitigates pollution risks.

To obtain a high seas fishing license, vessels must also comply with technical conditions, including installation of a Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) that meets RFMO and national

specifications. Failure to comply may result in sanctions, denial of authorization, or revocation of fishing permits. These measures ensure that only compliant vessels operate within the IATTC area and help prevent IUU fishing activities.

#### ❖ **Vessel Monitoring System Requirements**

All Belize flagged fishing vessels must always maintain a fully functional VMS. In cases of force majeure or unforeseen technical failure at sea, the operator must:

- Begin manual position reporting after 24 hours
- Immediately return to port if attempts to restore VMS functionally are unsuccessful after 48 hours.

#### ❖ **Licensing Process and Information Sharing**

During the licensing process, vessel owners and operators receive all applicable conservation and management measures relevant to their fishing area. These obligations are communicated through legally binding circulars and specified directly within their fishing authorizations.

#### ❖ **Catch Reporting and Electronic Reporting Development**

Belize currently uses one primary system for catch reporting and that is the provision of monthly catch data through Excel supported by landing verification.

A real-time electronic catch reporting portal is currently being developed in collaboration with our new VMS provider. The new reporting platform will eliminate the need for physical logbooks and improve Belize's ability to consolidate and analyze data efficiently. Completion of the platform is anticipated by the end of 2026.

#### ❖ **Required Vessel Documentation**

All vessels must carry valid, original, or electronic copies of registration documents and fishing authorizations while at sea. BHSFU's new Certification and Licensing System allows owners to receive authorizations quickly, now approved and validated electronically via a QR code.

#### ❖ **Sanctions and Compliance**

Pursuant to the High Seas Fisheries Act (HSFA) of 2013, Belize enforces sanctions through its Sanction Regulations. These regulations provide a clear and consistent framework for ensuring accountability and effective enforcement.

Belize consistently reports to the IATTC in accordance with all data and vessel reporting requirements, demonstrating its commitment to transparency and responsible fisheries management.

#### ❖ **Legislative Review and Modernization**

Since the adoption of the revised HSFA in 2013, no amendments have been made. Belize follows a ten-year legislative review cycle to ensure ongoing relevance and effectiveness. A review and

possible amendment of the Act and its subsidiary regulations is scheduled for 2025-2026 to align with technological advancements and new industry requirements.

#### ❖ **Upgrades to the Vessel Monitoring System (VMS)**

Belize's VMS requirements align with RFMO standards. To enhance monitoring capabilities, Belize is transitioning to a new VMS provider using the CLS Themis platform. New features include but not limited to:

- 24-hour reporting
- Pre-defined and customizable geo-fencing
- Restricted fishing zones (e.g. MPAs, closed areas, EEZ territorial boundaries)
- Statistical area sorting to match VMS data with catch and effort records
- Fishing activity estimation based on vessel movement
- Port-to-port trip tracking
- Effort management and fish stock traceability
- A new-real time electronic catch and FAD reporting system

Belize has also incorporated Global Fishing Watch (GFW) into its monitoring efforts, enabling AIS-based public tracking of Belize's fleet and enhancing transparency and deterrence against illegal fishing.

#### ❖ **National Plans of Action and Species-Specific Measures**

Belize has adopted several National Plans of Action (NPOAs) such as:

- NPOA-IUU (High Seas Fleet) – adopted May 20, 2014
- NPOA- SHARKS (High Seas Fleet) – adopted March 12, 2015
- NPOA-SEABIRDS (Longline Fleet) – adopted in 2016; updated December 7, 2023

Belize has also issued legally binding circulars for:

- Sea turtle mitigation - adopted 2016; updated February 24, 2021
- Incidental catch of Mobulid Rays by purse seiners – updated December 8, 2023

These measures reflect Belize's proactive approach to protecting vulnerable species and meeting international conservation obligations.

#### ❖ **Belize's National Observer Program (High Seas Fleet)**

Belize established its observer program through a partnership with Capricorn Fishing Monitoring Company (CAPFISH), signed March 14, 2014. A national observer policy guides deployment and operational standards.

Observer deployments to the IATTC fleet occurred in:

- 2015 (two deployments)
- 2016 (one)

- 2017 (one)

No deployments occurred between 2018-2021. Belize had no active high seas fleet 2022 to 2025.

❖ **Transshipment Regulations**

Belize's legislation prohibits transshipment at sea. All transshipment must occur at designated ports unless specifically authorized by the Director or conducted under a regional observer program. This ensures traceability and reduces opportunities for IUU fishing.

❖ **Fleet Capacity Management**

Belize has developed a comprehensive fleet policy that guides decisions on fleet size and composition, considering sustainability, resource availability, market demand, and operational efficiency.

❖ **Electronic Monitoring System (EMS) Implementation**

Belize is actively pursuing the implementation of Electronic Monitoring Systems (EMS) on board its vessels to complement its existing MCS tools. This initiative supports improved transparency, real-time data collection, and enhanced compliance oversight. Belize also participates in the EMS Working Group to ensure alignment between RFMO standards and domestic requirements.

❖ **Domesticating RFMO Measures**

Belize's regulatory system ensures the full and effective implementation of RFMO conservation measures translating them into legally binding domestic directives through official fishing vessel circulars. This mechanism not only guarantees compliance with international obligations but also strengthens national Belize's capacity for responsible fisheries management and fleet oversight.



