

THE BLUE FORUM: KNOWLEDGE, INNOVATION, AND ACTION FOR BELIZE'S OCEAN AND THRIVING BLUE ECONOMY

Proceedings Report



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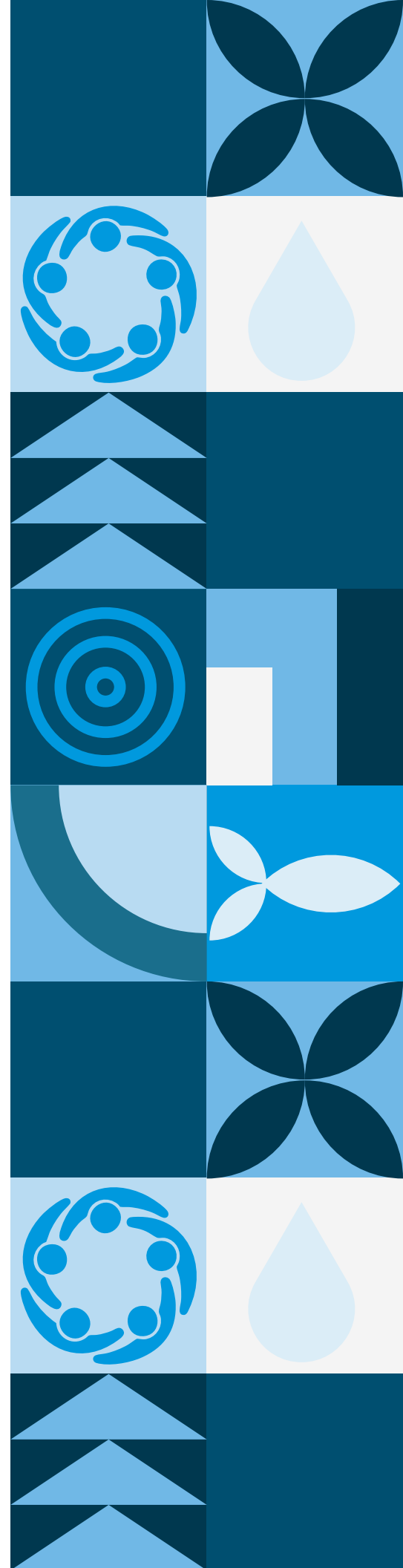
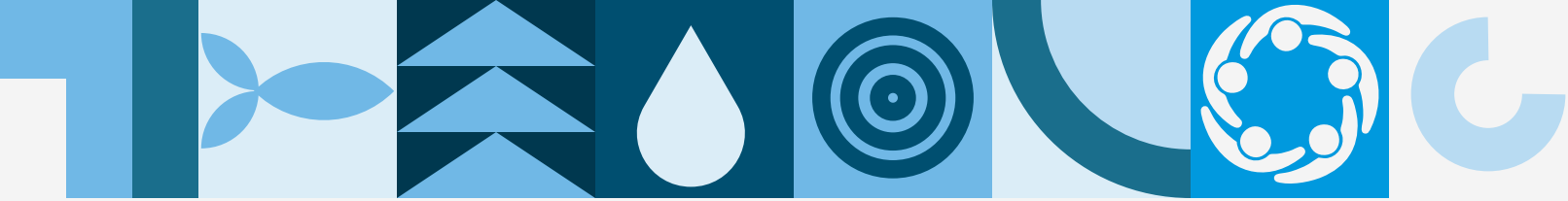




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Abbreviations and Acronyms

BBEDPS	Belize Blue Economy Development Policy and Strategy
BBFP	Blue Bonds and Finance Permanence Unit
BFSF	Belize Fund for a Sustainable Future
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CCCCC	Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre
CRFM	Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism
CROP	Caribbean Regional Oceanscape Project
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CZMAI	Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
GBF	Global Biodiversity Framework
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GOAP	Global Ocean Accounts Partnership
ICZMP	Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IAPB	International Advisory Panel on Biodiversity Credits
MAR Fund	Mesoamerican Reef Fund
MPA	Marine Protected Area
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MSP	Marine Spatial Planning
MTDS	Medium-Term Development Strategy
MRV	Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification
NbS	Nature-based Solutions
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NCRIP	National Climate Resilience Investment Plan
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization

OUS	Ocean Use Survey
PES	Payment for Ecosystem Services
SACD	Sarteneja Alliance for Conservation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEEA	System of Environmental-Economic Accounting
SMART	Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool
TASA	Turneffe Atoll Sustainability Association
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
UN	United Nations
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

Remarks from the CEO of the Ministry of the Blue Economy and Marine Conservation, Ms. Beverly Wade



Belize's journey to grow its Blue Economy is a testament to what can be achieved when policy, science, people, and finance align to secure the long-term health and productivity of our ocean spaces. Belize's marine and coastal resources support national biodiversity and provide essential economic value, contributing to GDP, food security, and sustaining livelihoods.

The Government of Belize has long recognized that the sustainable use of our marine and coastal assets must be anchored in strong governance, science, and inclusive stewardship. Through frameworks like our Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan, the Marine Spatial Planning process, and our innovative Blue Bond agreement, Belize continues to demonstrate that ambitious conservation can go hand in hand with economic resilience and growth.

The Blue Forum was more than an event; it was a necessary moment to reflect on what we have accomplished, share solutions, and agree on where we must focus next. It brought together government agencies, communities, and partners in open dialogue and knowledge exchange, which built the trust and collaboration needed to advance our shared blue economy vision.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to working with our national and regional partners to build on what we have accomplished, close remaining gaps, and serving as a hub of innovation to ensure that our blue economy continues to deliver meaningful benefits for our people and our ecosystems.



Executive Summary

Belize's Blue Economy continues to evolve as an integrated national development pathway, linking economic diversification, marine conservation, and climate resilience. As part of this trajectory, **The Blue Forum: Knowledge, Innovation, and Action for Belize's Ocean and Thriving Blue Economy**, held on April 1–2, 2025, in Belize City, Belize convened over 90 participants from more than 40 organizations, including government agencies, MPA co-managers, NGOs, academic institutions, regional partners, and strategic partners. The Blue Forum was designed to assess progress, strengthen coordination, share local best practices and lessons learned, and support alignment across ongoing initiatives in marine governance, science, and finance.

The two-day event was structured around five thematic pillars: science-based ocean management, adaptive enforcement and management, inclusive stewardship, sustainable finance, and coastal and marine resilience. Discussions underscored Belize's leadership in participatory marine spatial planning (MSP), ocean accounting, finance innovation, and co-management models. Presentations highlighted how initiatives such as the Ocean Use Survey, the Belize Fund for a Sustainable Future (BFSF), SMART¹ patrol technologies, and nature-based solutions (NbS) are contributing to national objectives and informing institutional mechanisms.

A cross-thematic synthesis revealed strong interconnectivity between planning, stewardship, finance, and enforcement. Tools that support MSP, like MARXAN, are informed by local ecological knowledge; valuation frameworks support both investment targeting and policy prioritization; and MPA co-management institutions play dual roles in enforcement and ecosystem monitoring. These synergies reflect Belize's prioritization of a more collaborative and forward-looking approach to marine governance.

Throughout both days, participants shared knowledge, discussed practical models, and explored how diverse efforts ranging from community-led monitoring to outcome-based finance can better align with Belize's policy frameworks and international commitments under the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14), Belize's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), and Sustainable Development Goal 13 (SDG 13) on climate action.

¹ In Belize, the SMART platform (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool) is primarily used for fisheries management, data collection, and enforcement. It enables rangers, fisheries officers, and partner organizations to record and analyze field observations, monitor fishing activities, track compliance, and generate reports that support evidence-based decision-making for marine resource management.



01 Introduction

The Blue Economy is a strategic development priority for Belize. As a coastal nation, the country derives significant value from its marine and coastal assets, which support national food security, small-scale fisheries, maritime trade, and a tourism sector that collectively accounts for more than 40% of GDP and employment². Belize's marine space, including coral reefs, seagrass meadows, and mangroves is part of the Mesoamerican Reef System, the largest barrier reef in the Western Hemisphere. This globally recognized biodiversity hotspot also holds UNESCO World Heritage Site status.

In recognition of the economic and ecological value of its marine resources, Belize has adopted a long-term vision to grow its Blue Economy through science-based, socially just, and environmentally sustainable approaches. The Government of Belize formalized this commitment in 2020 with the establishment of a dedicated Ministry of the Blue Economy and Disaster Risk Management, later renamed in 2025 to the Ministry of the Blue Economy and Marine Conservation, reflecting the integrated nature of economic development and biodiversity protection.

The Ministry's mission is:

“To increase Gross Domestic Product (GDP) through a thriving Blue Economy Development pathway that is harmonized, innovative, and socially just, supported by a robust, science-based management regime of our aquatic resources and space to improve the livelihood of all Belizeans.”

Belize defines the Blue Economy as the sustainable use of its blue space and resources to foster economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs while preserving the health of marine ecosystems for present and future generations, a definition that will be reflected in the forthcoming Blue Economy Bill

² World Bank (2020). Belize Blue Economy Policy Note.

In recent years, Belize has operationalized this vision through national reforms and multi-partner initiatives, including the launch of its Blue Bond Agreement, the expansion of marine protected areas³, participatory MSP, piloting of natural capital accounting⁴ and ocean accounts⁵, and the development of innovative instruments for conservation and livelihoods. These efforts reflect a growing momentum around marine governance and have generated new institutional capacities, knowledge systems, and funding mechanisms.

To advance progress, the Government of Belize, in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank, hosted the Blue Forum on April 1–2, 2025, in Belize City. The Forum was intentionally designed to create a space for knowledge exchange, learning, inspiration, and collaboration. As new projects, actors, and ideas enter the Blue Economy space, the Forum provided an opportunity to reflect on lessons learned, share best practices, identify shared priorities, and align efforts for greater impact across technical and investment initiatives.

The event convened over 90 participants representing more than 40 organizations, including ministries, statutory bodies, community-based and non-governmental organizations, regional institutions, private sector groups, and international partners.



3 A Marine Protected Area is a geographical space, recognized, demarcated & legally managed to achieve long term conservation of nature, ecosystem services and cultural values.

4 Natural capital accounting is the systematic measurement and reporting of natural assets and benefits to people in economic and environmental terms, integrating them into national accounts, policy frameworks, and financial decisions to support ecosystem-based development.

5 Ocean accounts are integrated records of regularly compiled and comparable data concerning ocean environment assets (e.g., extent/condition of mangroves), economic activity (e.g., sale of fish) and social conditions (e.g., coastal employment).

The Forum was organized around five thematic sessions:

- 1. Guiding Ocean Management Through Innovative Science-Based Planning** examined Belize's progress on MSP, Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), and ocean accounting. Presentations and discussions focused on data-driven planning tools, national target tracking, and the integration of natural capital into policy and planning frameworks.
- 2. Science to Action – Creating Strategies for Adaptive Management and Enforcement** highlighted approaches to strengthen fisheries management, including integrated monitoring systems, enforcement strategies, and adaptive co-management models. The session identified gaps in compliance systems and opportunities for multi-agency collaboration.
- 3. Inclusive Ocean Stewardship – Empowering Communities in Research and Management** featured community-based initiatives in marine conservation, including participatory mapping, ecological monitoring, and co-designed ecosystem resilience projects.
- 4. Financing for the Future – Unlocking Capital for Sustainable Ocean Management** explored existing and emerging financing instruments such as biodiversity credits, outcome-based finance, blended finance models, and debt conversion mechanisms.
- 5. Building Coastal and Marine Resilience for a Sustainable Future** focused on climate adaptation, coastal flood modeling, and nature-based solutions. Presenters shared tools and project models designed to reduce risk, strengthen resilience, and support national adaptation planning in coastal and marine ecosystems.

Each session contributed to a broader understanding of Belize's progress and highlighted opportunities to strengthen alignment among actors working toward common objectives, including the protection of 30% of Belize's ocean space by 2030, the scaling of sustainable marine livelihoods, and the integration of ecosystem services into national development planning.

This report presents a synthesis of the Blue Forum's key messages, thematic insights, and strategic take-aways. It is intended as a reference document for practitioners in Belize and across the region who are working to advance equitable and sustainable marine governance.



02 National Context

Belize continues to lead in advancing its blue economy initiatives through strategic, science-based, and inclusive approaches. Approximately 37% of Belize's jurisdictional area is marine space, including its territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The country's coastal population and national economy are deeply reliant on healthy ocean ecosystems.

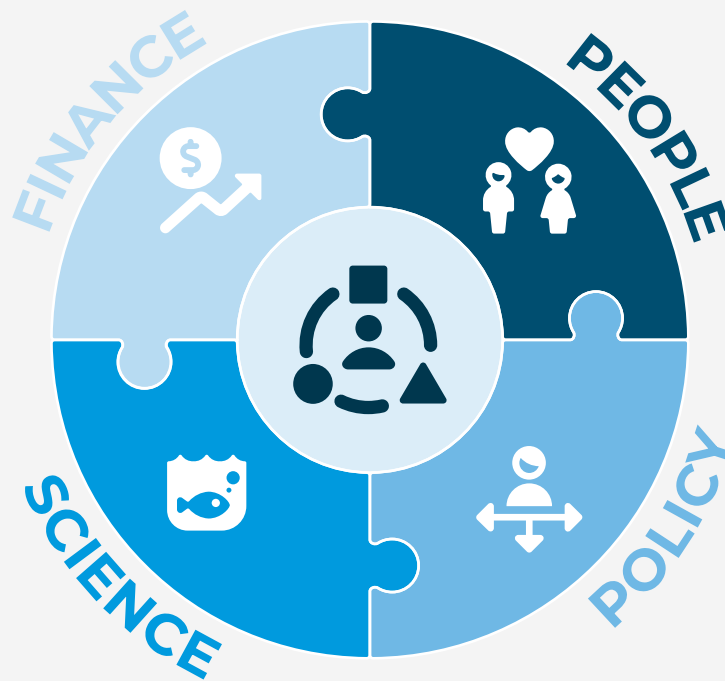
Central to Belize's success in growing its blue economy is the alignment of clear policy and legal frameworks that set the enabling conditions for sustainable ocean management. The Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan (ICZMP), adopted in 2016, combines ecosystem risk assessments, ecosystem-based management, and spatial planning to guide sustainable coastal development and conservation. A participatory update is underway and scheduled for completion in 2025 to reflect new priorities and input from stakeholders. This is complemented by the country's first national **Marine Spatial Plan (MSP)**, the **Belize Sustainable Ocean Plan**, which draws on extensive spatial data generated through the Ocean Use Survey and the use MARXAN ecological prioritization to balance conservation and sustainable use of marine space.

Institutional integration has further strengthened Belize's ability to operationalize its blue economy objectives. The creation of the **Ministry of the Blue Economy and Marine Conservation** and the establishment of the **Blue Bonds Finance and Permanence Unit** within the **Office of the Prime Minister**, ensure that ocean governance and blue finance are coordinated at the highest level of government. This structure improves cross-ministerial alignment, resource mobilization, and accountability for commitments under the Blue Bond Agreement, other innovative finance mechanisms, and related conservation targets.

Innovative finance has been a catalyst for sustained action. The **2021 Blue Bond Agreement**, negotiated in partnership with The Nature Conservancy and Credit Suisse, restructured US\$553 million of external debt and secured long-term funding for marine conservation, climate resilience, and community livelihoods. Through this mechanism, the **Belize Fund for a Sustainable Future** delivers an estimated US\$3.4 million annually in grants and aims to grow a US\$90 million endowment by 2041, providing durable financial resources for coastal and marine protection.

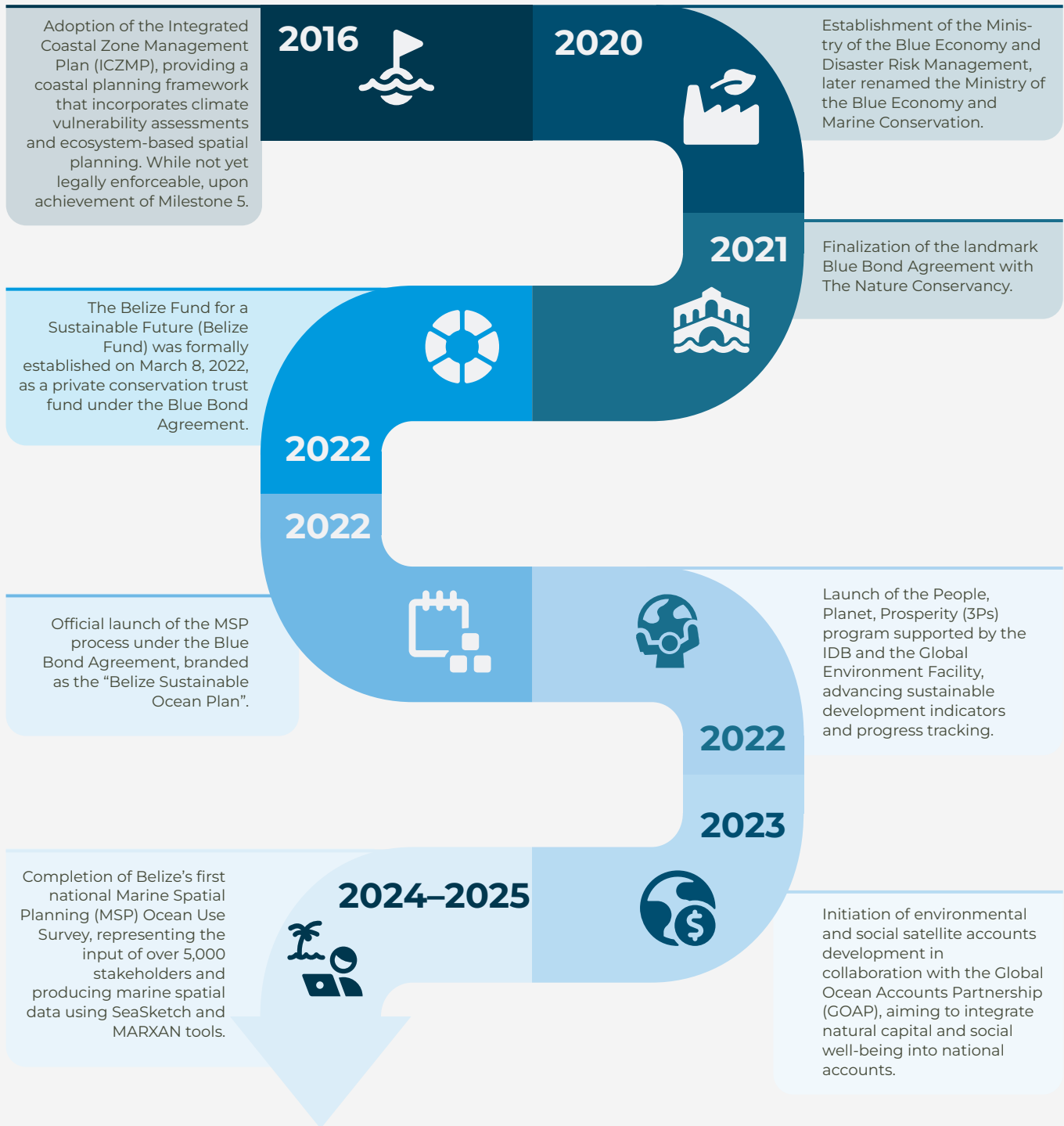
9 Government of Belize (2022); World Bank (2020), Belize Blue Economy Policy Note.

To support measurable progress, Belize is investing in integrated monitoring systems. The **People, Planet, Prosperity (3Ps) Program**, supported by the IDB and Global Environment Facility, is developing key performance indicators that track ecosystem health, social well-being, and economic performance together. In parallel, the development of environmental and social satellite accounts with the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership will embed the value of natural capital in national economic reporting. These initiatives will feed into a national **Blue Economy Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) System**, funded by IDB and providing decision-makers and partners with credible data to guide adaptive management and targeted investment.



Together, these policy frameworks, institutional arrangements, and finance mechanisms illustrate how Belize has strategically advanced and sustained its blue economy agenda. The country's integrated approach demonstrates that biodiversity protection, economic opportunity, and community resilience are mutually reinforcing when supported by clear processes, reliable finance, and inclusive governance. Belize's experience offers practical lessons for other coastal and island states seeking to align ocean conservation with sustainable development at scale.

2.2 Belize Blue Economy Milestones



2.3 What's Next for Belize's Blue Economy?

Building on its current policy frameworks and financing instruments, Belize is now focusing on the next generation of enabling conditions to sustain and scale its blue economy gains.

A priority action is the completion of the updated ICZMP by 2025. This revised framework will reflect current and emerging pressures such as sea level rise, coastal erosion, shifting ecosystem dynamics, and growing coastal development. It will also incorporate updated climate vulnerability data, natural capital assessments, and outputs from the MSP process.

The updated Plan will include revised zoning categories and management guidelines that address new ecological and socio-economic realities, while aligning with existing legislative and institutional frameworks. Its finalization is expected to support integration with Belize's MSP and improve coherence with national commitments under the Blue Economy Development Policy and Strategy (2021–2026), the Marine Spatial Planning Policy (draft 2024), the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), and Sustainable Development Goal 13.

Priority is also placed on advancing the development of Belize's **Blue Economy Bill**, which will formalize governance arrangements, clarify institutional responsibilities, and establish legal mechanisms to support sustainable ocean use and blue finance commitments. This will provide a clear legislative framework to guide ministries, communities, and private sector actors.

The Government is also advancing the Resilient Bold Belize (RBB) initiative, a Project Finance for Permanence (PFP) mechanism led by the Blue Bond and Finance Permanence Unit under the Office of the Prime Minister. This initiative aims to strengthen policy coherence, integrate the value of nature into key economic sectors such as tourism and fisheries, and secure long-term conservation financing through public–private partnerships. RBB will support improved management of 13 coastal protected areas and 21 marine protected areas, restoration of critical ecosystems including mangroves and degraded coastal zones and enhanced livelihood opportunities for coastal communities.

During the Forum, outcome-based finance was highlighted as a promising mechanism to support long-term blue economy investments. Belize, in partnership with the IDB, will undertake a feasibility study to explore the use of outcome-based payment models for marine conservation. This approach links financial disbursements to verified ecological and social outcomes, offering a results-driven alternative to traditional financing. The study will draw on lessons from successful models such as the Jaguar Bond and Indonesia’s small-scale fisheries bond, with the goal of identifying scalable and sustainable financing options tailored to Belize’s blue space.

What’s next for Belize’s Blue Economy?



Updated ICZMP

Reflects new climate data and stakeholder input



Blue Economy Bill

Formalizes governance and legal mechanisms



Resilient Bold Belize

Aligns climate resilience and economic growth

03 Participation Overview

A diverse group of over 90 participants from more than 40 organizations attended the Blue Forum, reflecting the broad cross-section of Belize's marine and coastal governance landscape. Stakeholders included representatives from national government agencies, MPA co-managers, civil society organizations, academic and research institutions, regional bodies, international partners, and private sector actors engaged in fisheries, tourism, and conservation finance.



Prime Minister, Hon. John Briceño

The Forum was officially opened with a keynote address by Hon. **John Briceño**, Prime Minister of Belize and Minister of Finance, Investment and Economic Transformation, Civil Aviation & E-Governance. His remarks underscored the strategic importance of Belize's ocean spaces to national development and reaffirmed the Government's commitment to integrated governance, innovative financing, and sustainable ocean stewardship. The Forum concluded with closing remarks by **Hon. Andre Perez**, Minister of Blue Economy and Marine Conservation, who highlighted Belize's leadership in blue economy policy and the need for continued collaboration across sectors to accelerate progress.



Photos of participants

Government participation was led by agencies responsible for advancing Belize's blue economy strategy, such as the Ministry of the Blue Economy and Marine Conservation, the Blue Bond and Finance Permanence Unit, the Belize Fisheries Department, and the CZMAI. These entities collectively oversee marine conservation, fisheries management, and coastal zone governance. Civil society and MPA co-management organizations brought perspectives from community-level governance and on-the-ground implementation, while academic partners contributed technical and research expertise.

International and regional partners, including multilateral agencies and conservation organizations, participated as knowledge partners and collaborators, strengthening dialogue on finance, governance, and monitoring frameworks.

While demographic data were not systematically collected, women were visibly represented across panels and delegation leadership, particularly within scientific and civil society institutions. This reflects broader national trends in Belize's marine and conservation sectors and affirms the Forum's inclusive ethos.

The multi-sectoral composition of the Forum facilitated meaningful exchange across institutional boundaries. Presenters brought actionable knowledge and frameworks, while attendees engaged with challenges and opportunities through structured discussions and collaborative exercises.

Participating Organizations and Agencies

Government Ministries & Statutory Bodies

- Ministry of the Blue Economy and Marine Conservation
- Blue Bond and Finance Permanence Unit
- Belize Fisheries Department
- Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute
- Belize Coast Guard
- Ministry of Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management
- Belize Port Authority

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) & Local Conservation Organizations

- Oceana Belize
- Belize Women in Fisheries Network
- National NGOs supporting conservation, advocacy, or gender equity
- Belize Tourism Industry Association (BTIA) national representatives (where relevant)

Academic & Research Institutions

- University of Belize Environmental Research Institute
- University of South Florida
- Stanford Natural Capital Project
- Mote Marine Laboratory
- Individual marine researchers and consultants

Private Sector

- Belize Tourism Industry Association
- Marine product exporters and small businesses supporting coastal livelihoods
- Financial sector stakeholders linked to biodiversity finance pilots
- Local chapters and tour operators

MPA Co-Managers

- Turneffe Atoll Sustainability Association
- Sarteneja Alliance for Conservation and Development
- Toledo Institute for Development and Environment
- Southern Environmental Association
- Belize Audubon Society

Community-Based Associations & Fisher Groups

- Northern Fishermen Cooperative Society Ltd.
- National Fishermen Producers Cooperative Society
- Placencia Fishermen Cooperative Society Ltd.
- Shark Fishers Association
- Belize Federation of Fishers
- Other local community conservation associations represented through co-managers

Regional & International Partners

- Inter-American Development Bank
- The Nature Conservancy
- Global Ocean Accounts Partnership
- Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism
- World Wildlife Fund
- MAR Fund
- Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre
- Oak Foundation



04 Synthesis of Thematic Pillars

The Forum was structured around five interrelated thematic pillars that reflect the strategic priorities of Belize's blue economy agenda. Each session featured presentations, moderated discussions, and participant engagement that collectively shaped a multidimensional view of progress, innovation, and institutional coordination. This section synthesizes the outcomes of each thematic pillar, with a focus on sectoral linkages and alignment with national and regional frameworks.



4.1 Science-Based Planning for Ocean Management

Presentations under this pillar focused on the operationalization of Belize's MSP process, the ongoing update of the ICZMP, and the integration of natural capital and ocean accounting frameworks. The use of digital tools such as SeaSketch⁶ and MARXAN⁷ supports precise marine zoning by integrating stakeholder input with ecological and spatial data.

Innovations included the application of spatially explicit ecosystem service data and the Ocean Use Survey (OUS)⁸, which produced a comprehensive map of over 5,000 ocean-use polygons. This has positioned Belize as a regional leader in participatory spatial planning. Alignment with national policies was evident in the integration of these tools into the draft MSP framework, as well as in their potential to support the Blue Bond conservation targets and 30x30 commitments.

6 A web-based geospatial tool that allows users to visualize marine spatial data, draw planning zones, run basic reports, and facilitate stakeholder engagement in marine spatial planning processes.

7 A decision-support tool used in conservation planning to identify spatial areas that efficiently meet conservation targets while minimizing cost and conflict.

8 The Belize Ocean Use Survey (OUS), part of the Sustainable Ocean Plan (BSOP), is a participatory mapping activity where stakeholders identify and share their ocean usage and values within Belize's coastal zone.



4.2 Science to Action - Adaptive Management and Enforcement

This pillar addressed the translation of ecological research into policy and enforcement practice. Case studies from the Turneffe Atoll Marine Reserve, the Queen Conch fishery, and shark conservation efforts illustrated how species-specific monitoring, enforcement technologies (e.g., SMART patrols, drones), and community reporting mechanisms are reinforcing compliance.

A key takeaway was the need to improve coordination between enforcement actors, namely the Fisheries Department, Belize Coast Guard, and community co-managers, by developing shared protocols and integrated monitoring systems. This discussion reinforced the importance of adaptive frameworks that can respond to ecological data and enforcement feedback in real time.



4.3 Inclusive Ocean Stewardship

This session spotlighted Belize's growing network of community-led conservation efforts. Presentations from organizations such as SACD, Fragments of Hope, and the Shark Fishers Association illustrated how community actors are directly involved in resource monitoring, restoration, and data collection.

Innovation was seen in co-designed research methodologies that integrate scientific protocols with local ecological knowledge, improving both data quality and community ownership. The discussion highlighted that inclusive stewardship is not peripheral but central to marine governance, with implications for data systems, decision-making processes, and funding eligibility under mechanisms such as the Belize Fund for a Sustainable Future.



4.4 Financing for the Future

The fourth pillar explored the enabling conditions for sustainable blue finance in Belize. Presentations from the BFSF, IDB, Oak Foundation, and others discussed existing and emerging mechanisms, including biodiversity credits, blue carbon, natural asset companies, philanthropic funding, and outcome-based finance. While Belize's Blue Bond was recognized as a flagship achievement, participants emphasized the need for regulatory readiness, ecological baselines, and institutional capacity to manage new instruments such as biodiversity credit markets and outcome-based finance.

Sectoral alignment was evident in the potential to tie financing instruments to national targets and co-management outcomes. Participants also noted the opportunity to integrate finance metrics with natural capital accounting platforms to improve accountability and impact tracking.

As a next step, the government of Belize is working with IDB to develop a feasibility study for an outcome based financing framework, which could be replicated to the Mesoamerican Reef and Greater Caribbean.



4.5 Coastal and Marine Resilience for a Sustainable Future

This session addressed Belize's exposure to coastal hazards and the role of nature-based solutions⁹ (NbS) in reducing risk. Scientific inputs presented reef and mangrove restoration as cost-effective methods to mitigate storm surge and erosion, supported by data from models assessing flood exposure and ecosystem service values.

Innovations included the Super Reefs concept, the integration of flood modeling into spatial planning, and proposals for incorporating NbS into national adaptation plans and infrastructure strategies. Alignment was seen between these interventions and the objectives of Belize's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), which reinforces the potential to unlock climate finance and resilience-building partnerships.

⁹ The World Bank defines Nature-Based Solutions (NbS) in the blue economy context as actions that leverage natural processes and ecosystems to support sustainable development, enhance climate resilience, and protect biodiversity, particularly in coastal and marine environments.

05 Cross-Cutting Synergies

This section maps where tools, frameworks, and institutional mechanisms intersect and where they are connected in practice. It highlights where individual mechanisms complement each other, or even play dual roles in supporting data, compliance, planning, or finance. Understanding these points of synergy helps identify opportunities for strategic alignment, and to make better use of existing systems.

Mechanism / Tool	Description & Context	Cross-Cutting Role	Demonstrated Use	System Synergies
Marine Spatial Planning (MSP)	National spatial framework led by CZMAI; integrates ecological, social, and economic data to guide zoning, re-align conservation and development priorities.	National and seascape level planning and adaptive management.	Used SeaSketch and MARXAN to generate proposed zoning informed by OUS and stakeholder inputs.	Directly informed by OUS data
Ocean Use Survey (OUS)	Participatory stakeholder mapping exercise incorporating input representing 5,000+ ocean users to define current ocean space use across Belize's EEZ.	Informs spatial planning, identifies conflict zones, and elevates community knowledge in zoning decisions	Over 5,000 polygons submitted; data that is incorporated into zoning and management outcomes of MSP.	Provides baseline use data for MSP and feeds into MARXAN modeling.
MPA Co-Management Partnerships (e.g., SACD, TASA)	Independent marine conservation NGOs that have the capacity to co-manage MPAs and conduct research, monitoring, and enforcement	Governance, enforcement, science collaboration, and grant eligibility (e.g., BFSF)	SACD collects data on conch and shark spawning grounds; TASA uses SMART and drones for patrols.	Co-Managing Organizations conduct research, collect field data and support MPA enforcement and compliance.
Ocean Accounts, Natural Capital Valuation, MRV	Economic valuation of ecosystem services to inform national decision-making	Basis for biodiversity finance, public investment, and climate planning	Stanford Natural Capital Project's plans to create dashboards that will be used to track ecosystem service values and GDP linkages.	Will provide input for outcome-based finance.

Mechanism / Tool	Description & Context	Cross-Cutting Role	Demonstrated Use	System Synergies
Outcome-based finance	Proposed outcome-based finance mechanism to reward conservation performance	Connects finance, stewardship, valuation, and governance	Discussed in Day 2 finance panel; pilot outcome-based finance aligned with marine restoration potential.	Linked to Ocean Accounts for verification, supports MPA co-management performance, and can unlock new investment for NbS.
SMART, Drones, and MARXAN, Tech-based tools	Tech-enabled monitoring, spatial modeling, and enforcement tools	Improve decision support, real-time enforcement, and spatial analytics	TASA uses SMART and drones; CZMAI uses MARXAN to model zoning.	Data feeds back into MSP revisions, informs Ocean Accounts indicators, strengthens compliance for finance outcomes
Nature-Based Solutions (NbS)	Restoration of mangroves, coral reefs, and seagrass to enhance climate resilience	Supports resilience, biodiversity protection, and potential access to climate finance	Super Reefs and flood modeling presented by UCSC and TNC as part of national adaptation plans.	NbS sites prioritized through MSP; restoration outcomes tracked through Ocean Accounts and monitored by co-managers.

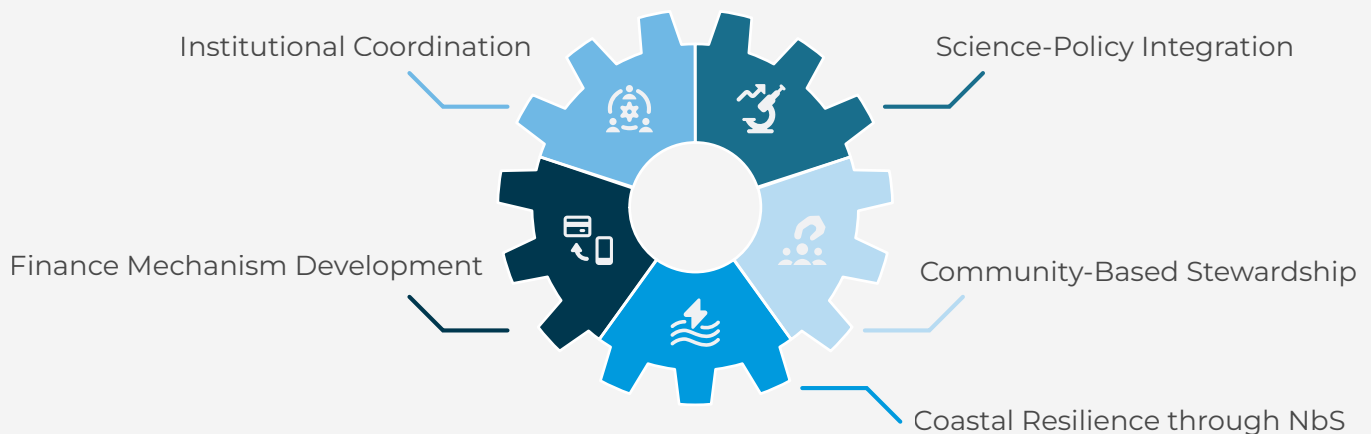


06 Pathways and Priorities

Both days provided a basis for identifying structural pathways to strengthen marine governance, investment frameworks, and institutional collaboration in Belize’s Blue Economy. These pathways reflect the evolution of national systems from foundational activities such as data collection and pilot initiatives to more integrated and policy-embedded mechanisms.

Based on Forum inputs, five core transition pathways were identified. Each pathway aligns with technical domains and policy targets already articulated in national strategies, including the Marine Spatial Planning Policy (draft 2024), the Blue Economy Development Policy and Strategy (2021–2026), the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), and Belize’s international commitments under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14). These priorities are further reinforced in **Belize’s Nationally Determined Contribution**, which outlines actions across marine conservation, ecosystem-based adaptation, and sustainable coastal development, linking biodiversity protection with climate resilience and blue economy outcomes.

Pathways to Belize's Marine Governance



6.1 Institutional Coordination

The consolidation of marine planning, management, and enforcement under shared mandates, such as the MSP and the ICZMP, requires defined implementation structures. A transition from fragmented institutional roles toward coordinated governance models, with centralized spatial data management and inter-agency enforcement protocols, is necessary to implement the MSP effectively and achieve area-based management targets under GBF Target 3.

6.2 Science-Policy Integration

Natural capital accounting, ocean accounts, and ecosystem service valuation have become essential tools for quantifying the ecological and economic value of Belize's marine resources. These tools are critical for advancing a data-driven approach to ocean governance and financing. The next step is to formalize their integration into national development and planning systems, including Belize's Medium-Term Development Strategy, public investment frameworks, blue economy reporting structures, and a national MRV system to track ecological, economic, and financial performance.

Belize has already initiated important steps, including work with the Stanford Natural Capital Project and regional knowledge partners, to design ecosystem valuation dashboards and strengthen institutional capacities. Moving forward, broad-based consultation and stakeholder engagement will be central to the design and operationalization of Belize's MRV architecture.

To strengthen this monitoring framework, the inclusion of measurable indicators will be essential. **Examples could include hectares of mangrove cover restored, improvements in a coral reef health index, the number of biodiversity credits issued, or the percentage of seagrass beds maintained in good ecological condition.** These indicators provide tangible benchmarks that link ecosystem health with economic and policy outcomes, enhancing accountability and demonstrating progress toward national and international commitments.

6.3 Finance Mechanism Development

While the Blue Bond and the Belize Fund for a Sustainable Future (BFSF) offer structured and performance-linked financing models, Belize is now advancing additional mechanisms to unlock climate and biodiversity finance at scale. These include emerging instruments such as biodiversity credits and blue carbon credits, which require legal, regulatory, and technical foundations. Marine biodiversity underpins key sectors such as tourism, fisheries, and emerging blue carbon markets, reinforcing its role as a productive asset in Belize's economy.

Two proposed legislative frameworks will be key to enabling this next generation of finance:

- **The Blue Economy Bill** (in development) aims to formalize institutional roles, support cross-sector coordination, and enable integration of financing, planning, and monitoring systems to guide long-term investments in marine and coastal assets.
- **The Carbon Market Bill** (also under development) will establish the regulatory architecture for carbon credit generation, verification, and trading, particularly for nature-based solutions such as mangrove and seagrass restoration. This includes protocols for MRV, as well as alignment with international standards, including Article 6 of the Paris Agreement and the Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market (ICVCM) and the IAPB Principles for High-Integrity Biodiversity Credit Markets.

6.4 Community-Based Stewardship

Co-management entities and fisher associations are already engaged in monitoring and ecosystem restoration. Strengthening these systems involves formalizing their roles in national policy, improving access to long-term finance, and incorporating community-generated data into decision-support tools such as the Ocean Use Survey (OUS) and SMART enforcement systems. As Belize moves toward implementing outcome-based finance mechanisms, including those under exploration through the upcoming feasibility study with IDB, MRV systems will be essential. These systems can validate conservation outcomes and help unlock performance-linked funding for community-led stewardship.

6.5 Coastal Resilience through Nature-Based Solutions (NbS)

Forum sessions highlighted opportunities to integrate mangrove, reef, and seagrass restoration into coastal risk reduction strategies. Technical modeling presented at the Forum supports the use of NbS in flood mitigation and shoreline protection. These approaches align with Belize's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and highlight the need to embed NbS into national planning systems and development practices, not as externally financed add-ons, but as integral components of resilient infrastructure, land use planning, and ecosystem management. This direction is also consistent with the IDB's Biodiversity and Natural Capital Action Plan (2024–2025), which promotes the integration of nature into planning, finance, and governance systems.

These pathways do not function independently. Each depends on enabling conditions such as institutional capacity, cross-sectoral data integration, and policy coherence. Taken together, they represent a progression toward integrated, evidence-based, and policy-aligned systems that can support Belize's long-term marine governance and Blue Economy development objectives.



07 Strategic Recommendations to Support Implementation

Building on the transition pathways outlined above, Forum participants identified a series of actionable recommendations to strengthen the implementation of Belize’s Blue Economy policy agenda. Rather than proposing new interventions, these recommendations reflect a convergence of priorities expressed through technical presentations, stakeholder breakout discussions, and post-Forum feedback.

The following table consolidates these recommendations by aligning them with their associated transition pathways and identifying next steps that are already underway or can be prioritized for near-term implementation.

Transition Pathway	Shared Forum Recommendations	Next Steps for Implementation
6.1 Institutional Coordination: Strengthen alignment across MSP, ICZMP, and marine enforcement mandates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalize the MSP and ICZMP Establish inter-agency coordination structures Clarify roles for enforcement and data management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legally adopt the MSP Update ICZMP by 2025 Operationalize data-sharing protocols
6.2 Science–Policy Integration: Formalize use of ocean accounts and ecosystem valuation in planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embed natural capital accounting and ocean valuation into public investment systems Create integrated decision-support tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete national ecosystem dashboards with Stanford NatCap Develop MRV system for outcome tracking Align ocean accounts with SEEA and national budget planning
6.3 Finance Mechanism Development: Scale up access to sustainable ocean finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop regulatory frameworks for biodiversity and blue carbon credits Tie financing to MRV and verified outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalize the Blue Economy Bill Finalize the Carbon Market Bill Conduct feasibility study on outcome-based financing with IDB
6.4 Community-Based Stewardship: Empower fisher associations and grassroots actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide capacity building for local governance. Expand access to finance for CBOs Institutionalize community participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish project support windows under BFSF. Formalize performance-based funding models Strengthen legal instruments for participatory governance
6.5 Coastal Resilience and NbS: Use ecosystems as infrastructure for adaptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate NbS into land use, infrastructure, and DRR plans Align with NDC and adaptation strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embed reef, mangrove, and seagrass restoration in coastal planning Use NbS modeling in spatial decisions. Mainstream NbS into business-as-usual policy, not as add-ons



08 What can others learn from Belize?

Belize's experience shows that building a thriving Blue Economy is not simply about new projects or sectoral funding; it is about creating the enabling conditions that turn ambition into system-level change. A critical takeaway is **Belize's priority on developing policies and legislative frameworks that give marine conservation and sustainable use legal standing**. From the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan to its draft Marine Spatial Planning Policy, Belize continues to formalize the rules of engagement for ocean users, seeing that national goals are grounded in law, not just goodwill.

Another lesson lies in **how the Blue Bonds and Finance Permanence Unit operates at the highest level of government**. This is more than institutional symbolism; it ensures that debt-for-nature commitments are embedded in national decision-making and aligned with broader fiscal and development policies. Other countries can draw from this approach to strengthen coordination across ministries and agencies that might otherwise operate in silos.

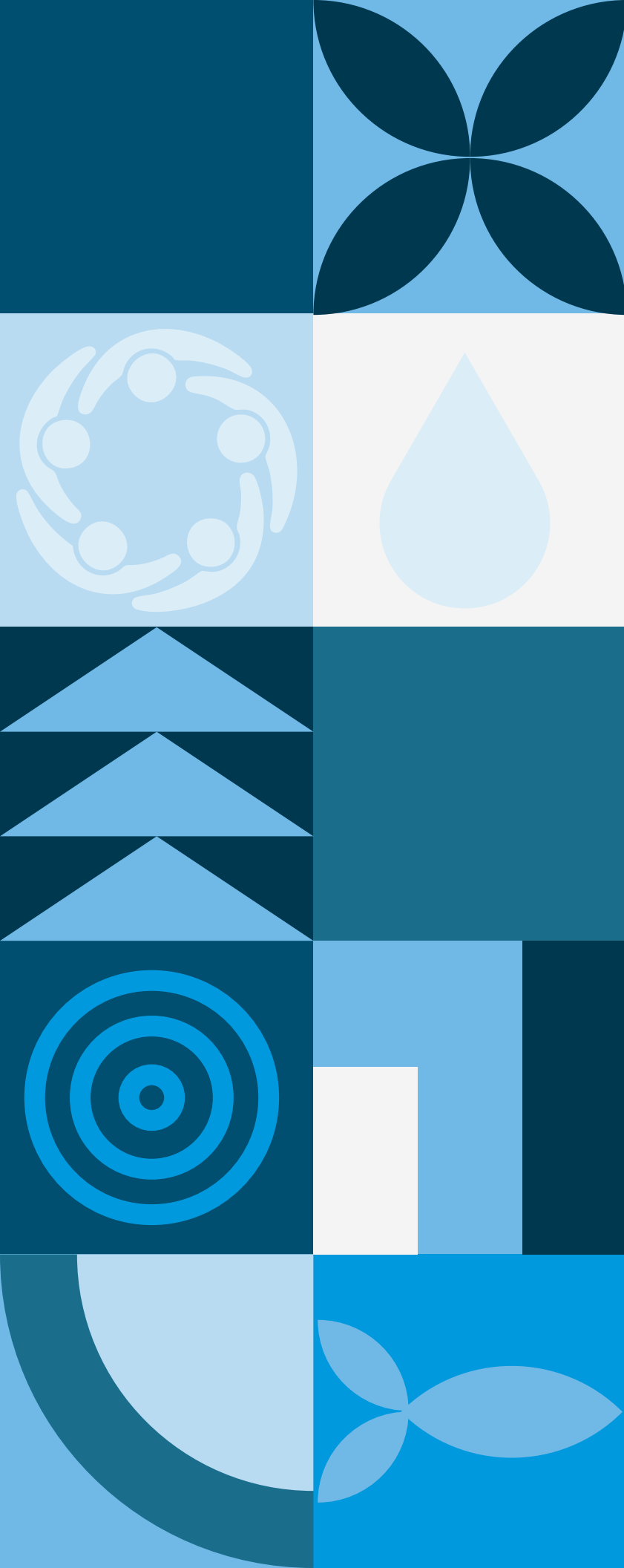
A successful Blue Economy depends on both ecosystem health and the well-being and livelihoods of the people who rely on it. Belize's ongoing work to include fishers, coastal communities, and MPA co-managers in governance spaces signals an important shift: marine resource users are recognized not just as beneficiaries but as partners in decision-making.

Belize's experience also shows **how structured public-private partnerships can mobilize new sources of conservation and livelihoods finance**. By combining innovative instruments like the Blue Bond with blended grant-making through the Belize Fund for a Sustainable Future, the country shows how diverse capital sources can be leveraged to fund marine protection, livelihoods, and local stewardship.

Finally, Belize's case shows the importance of breaking barriers and empowering community actors to participate directly in governance. From fisher associations with formal representation to community-led monitoring, these innovations create a sense of shared ownership and accountability that top-down models cannot replicate.

Taken together, Belize's journey offers the clear message that sustainable ocean economies are not built by technical solutions alone but by aligning finance, legal frameworks, and human systems in ways that put people and ecosystems on equal footing. This is the lesson and the invitation that Belize offers to its regional neighbors and other ocean states working to secure a sustainable future for their blue spaces.

Belize's experience offers a model for implementing the IDB's regional biodiversity strategy, particularly for Caribbean nations seeking to align marine conservation with sustainable development.



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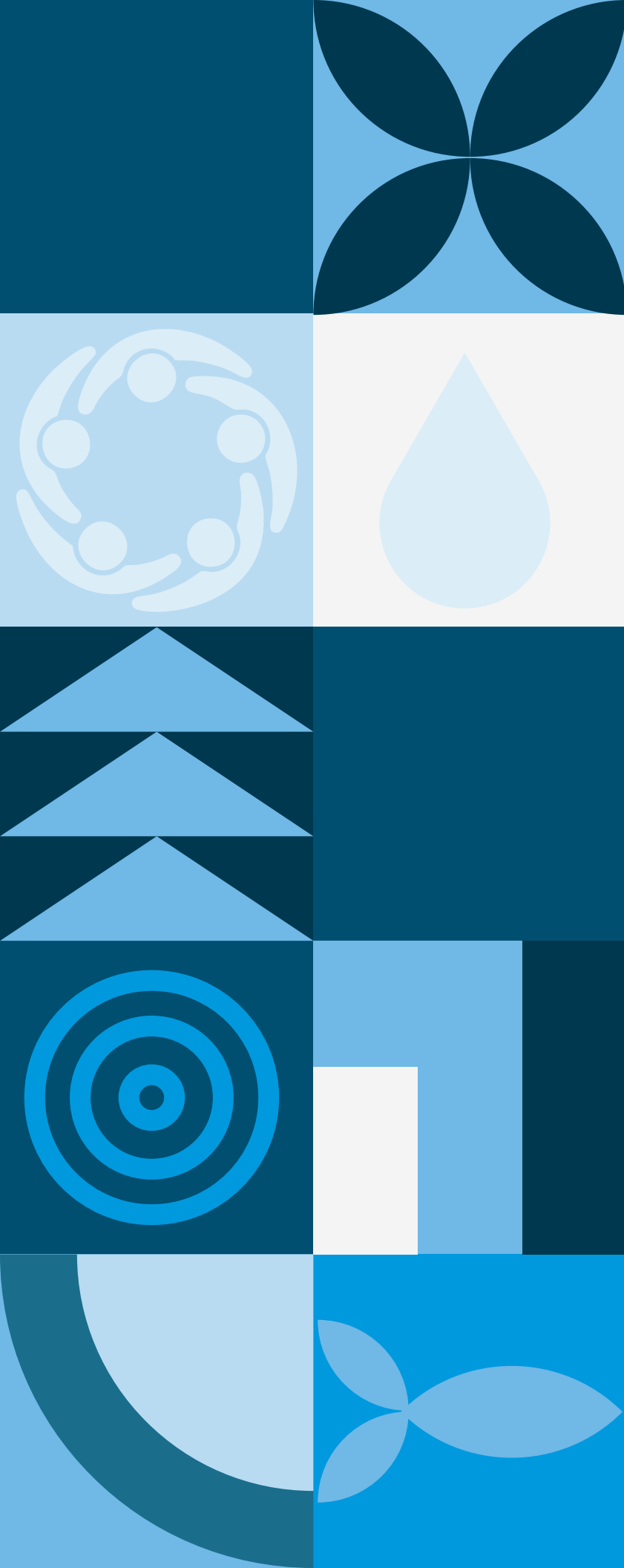
ANNEX

09 ANNEX

Policies and Instruments Supporting Belize’s Blue Economy

Policy / Instrument	Year Enacted / Ratified	Description
Blue Economy Development Policy and Strategy (BBEDPS)	2021–2026	National policy framework guiding Belize’s transition to a sustainable Blue Economy. Outlines four pillars: enabling conditions, marine spatial planning, sustainable financing, and ecosystem-based adaptation.
<i>Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan (ICZMP)</i>	2016 (Update in progress, due 2025)	Provides a national framework for the sustainable use and management of Belize’s coastal resources through zoning, climate risk planning, and stakeholder integration.
<i>Fisheries Resources Act</i>	2020	Replaces the 2003 Fisheries Act; includes provisions for co-management, sustainable fisheries practices, and marine biodiversity protection. Strengthens legal basis for fisher associations and protected area governance.
<i>National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP)</i>	2016–2020 (Update pending)	Aligns with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD); includes national biodiversity targets, marine ecosystem protection goals, and biodiversity mainstreaming strategies.
Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) Policy	Draft 2024 (Pending ratification)	Provides the legal and policy framework for spatial allocation of marine uses within Belize’s EEZ. Informed by participatory mapping, OUS data, and zoning tools such as SeaSketch and MARXAN.
Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) 3.0	2024	Belize’s climate action commitment under the Paris Agreement. Includes detailed actions for marine conservation, blue carbon, nature-based solutions, and climate adaptation in coastal and marine areas.
Belize National Climate Resilience Investment Plan (NCRIP)	2021	Provides investment pathways for climate-resilient development, including coastal infrastructure, nature-based solutions, and risk reduction strategies.
Belize Fund for a Sustainable Future (BFSF)	2022	Independent conservation trust fund created as part of the Blue Bond agreement. Provides grants and outcome-based finance for marine protection and sustainable development.

Policy / Instrument	Year Enacted / Ratified	Description
<i>Blue Bond Agreement</i>	2021	Debt-for-nature swap mechanism negotiated with The Nature Conservancy and international lenders. Provides \$364 million in restructured debt and commits Belize to 30% marine protection by 2026.
Outcome-Based Finance Feasibility Study	In Progress (2024–2025)	Conducted in partnership with IDB to assess potential for biodiversity credit markets, performance-linked conservation finance, and outcome-based payments.
Carbon Market Bill	In Development (2024)	Proposed legislation to establish the legal framework for blue carbon and biodiversity credit trading, aligned with Article 6 of the Paris Agreement and international standards.
Blue Economy Bill	In Development (2024)	Will formalize institutional roles and governance architecture to coordinate blue economy investments, planning, and reporting. Aims to strengthen policy coherence across sectors.
<i>Oceans Economy and Trade Strategy (OETS)</i>	2018	Developed with UNCTAD support, this strategy identifies priority marine-based sectors for trade, including fisheries, aquaculture, and marine tourism.
<i>National Sustainable Development Strategy</i>	2016–2021	Broader national strategy incorporating environmental, social, and economic sustainability goals. Provides overarching guidance for blue economy integration across sectors.



10

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