

# Offshore exploration ban in Belize

December 3 2015

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The Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System is recognized by UNESCO as having outstanding universal value to all humanity. Credit: WWF / Anthony B. RATH

On 1 December 2016, the government of Belize announced a policy intended to ban offshore oil exploration within the seven marine parks that make up the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System World Heritage site. This should effectively result in a total of 2,117 km<sup>2</sup> being protected.

"This is an important step in the right direction to protect Belize's [reef](#) from the threat of [oil](#), but it doesn't remove that threat entirely. We know that any oil spill within Belize's waters would have a devastating effect on the reef, including the Barrier Reef System World Heritage site.

WWF calls for a permanent moratorium or complete ban on offshore oil exploration and drilling in Belize. If the current moratorium is lifted, it must be informed by strong science, social and environmental impact assessments, an oil contingency response plan and overall agreement from the Belizean public.

More also needs to be done to address unsustainable coastal projects that can negatively affect the reef, if it has to continue to provide for the long-term economic and environmental prosperity of Belize and Belizeans," said Nadia Bood, Mesoamerican Reef Scientist at WWF.

"The reef is important to Belize's sociocultural and national economic wellbeing with many local livelihoods tied to its goods and services. Safeguarding it should be a national priority. Today we want to acknowledge an important achievement and we look forward to reviewing the policy approved by the cabinet in detail."

Over many years, WWF has worked collaboratively with the government, private sector and partners to help secure a number of conservation achievements in Belize. Since 2010 WWF has been advocating, as part of the national Coalition to Save Our Heritage, for a full ban on oil drilling in Belize's land-based protected areas and all offshore waters.

Provided by WWF

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