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PRESS RELEASE

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Marine litter scientists from the UK and Belize working together to tackle plastic pollution in the ocean

27 June 2023, BELIZE CITY, Belize – Scientists and leaders from across Belize are meeting at the Water Quality and Marine Pollution Workshop on 27th June 2023 at Radisson Fort George Hotel in Belize City, to share their ideas and develop next steps to tackle ocean pollution and support a healthy marine environment. At the event, hosted by the Department of the Environment (DOE), experts will be sharing current monitoring practices, scientific knowledge, and identifying opportunities to collaborate and coordinate Belize's national response to river and marine pollutants. Among the attendees are key stakeholders from the Government of Belize, managers of Marine Protected Areas, and scientists from water quality monitoring laboratories.

In recent years, the serious issue of marine litter has been recognised by international governments and organisations, as well as local communities, as a growing threat to the marine environment and people's health and livelihoods. Marine litter is found in all oceans of the world, in both densely populated and remote locations. Supporting good water quality is vital for both a healthy ocean and for people and their livelihoods.

Marine scientists from the UK government are working alongside colleagues at the Belize Department of the Environment to identify country specific solutions to marine litter and other types of marine pollution, including reducing reliance on single-use plastics, improvements in waste management, and developing more sustainable life cycles for plastics.

The partnership between the UK and Belize is taking place through the UK's Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCP), to strengthen marine science expertise, develop science-based policy and management tools and create educational resources for coastal communities. The programme tackles the key marine challenges of pollution, biodiversity

and sustainable seafood, and aims to deliver positive impacts on the livelihoods of coastal communities that depend on healthy marine ecosystems.

Specialized UK government agencies, the [Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science \(Cefas\)](#), the [Joint Nature Conservation Committee \(JNCC\)](#) and the [Marine Management Organisation \(MMO\)](#) work together on the programme on behalf of the UK's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

The Department of the Environment's Chief Environmental Officer, Mr. Anthony Mai, commented, "We are pleased to be working with our UK partners through the Ocean Country Partnership Programme towards implementing national solutions to the issues of marine litter and water quality, so that we can protect Belize's precious natural resources now and for future generations. This week's Water Quality and Marine Pollution Workshop and the Belize Marine Litter Action Plan gives us the opportunity to take actions to protect the ocean and support the health and livelihoods that depend on the marine environment."

Cefas Chief Executive, Mr Neil Hornby added, "Cefas is delighted to be collaborating with the government and other organisations in Belize to work together towards sustainable management of Belize's marine environment for the benefit of Belizeans today and for generations to come. Cefas has international expertise and experience in marine environmental science and policy which we are pleased to share with Belize, and other partner countries, to help address the problem."

The British High Commissioner to Belize, H.E. Nicole Davison remarked, "The UK has been working with Belizean colleagues since 2018 in the region, working with local colleagues and stakeholders to monitor litter, clean beaches and raise awareness of sustainable actions which includes a programme of work to ensure that the partnership supports proactive outcomes for the environment and people."

During their visit, the OCPP team will also be working together with colleagues at the University of Belize and the Department of the Environment at the microplastic laboratories that have been set up in Belize as part of the programme. The development of these labs is aimed at monitoring environmental samples for the presence of different types of microplastics. They will also be carrying out beach litter assessments to measure the different types of marine litter. The data gathered will assist Belize in making informed management decisions to protect the environment.

Wider work in the OCPP project in Belize includes:

- Collaboration between Belize and the UK's Joint Nature Conservation Council (JNCC) to support Belize's Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), including partnering with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to deliver training and guidance for Green Listing Belize MPAs, funding site-level Management Effectiveness Assessments for 14 MPAs and updating MPA Management Plan templates.
- Cefas are also reviewing data collection within MPAs providing recommendations to improve monitoring and collection of MPA data.

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- The UK's Marine Management Organisation (MMO) is also working with the Government of Belize to review Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing in Belize waters and delivering an independent review of the rights-based fishing Managed Access Programme, building a better understanding of fishing activity within and surrounding Belize's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and identifying where new technologies may help monitoring and enforcement.
- Cefas is also collaborating with the Belize Agriculture Health Authority (BAHA) and the Ministry of Agriculture to support safe and sustainable aquaculture, improve biosecurity and strengthen regulatory frameworks for animal health and trade.

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About the Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCP)

The [Ocean Country Partnership Programme \(OCP\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk) works with countries to strengthen marine science expertise, develop science-based policy and management tools and create educational resources for coastal communities.

Through the OCP, the UK government partners with ODA-eligible countries to deliver tangible and positive impacts on the livelihoods of coastal communities that depend on healthy marine ecosystems.

OCP partnerships are primarily delivered by a joint UK OCP Team from 3 UK government organisations: the [Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science \(Cefas\)](#), the [Joint Nature Conservation Committee \(JNCC\)](#) and the [Marine Management Organisation \(MMO\)](#) who work together on the programme on behalf of the UK's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

The OCP will support countries to be equipped with the skills and expertise needed to tackle, reduce and mitigate marine pollution through the development of science-led policy. By improving our understanding of the impacts of pollution, as well as identifying and supporting effective responses, we will make sure that communities are better equipped to prevent and manage marine pollution.

The OCP will support the development of the skills and expertise needed to adopt sustainable seafood practices. This will reduce risks such as the spread of zoonotic diseases from unsustainable or unsafe activities, and will support trade in safe seafood. The programme will also help crack down on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing by

supporting the development of better management, monitoring and enforcement capabilities.

The OCPP will help countries to develop the skills and expertise needed to establish designated, well-managed and enforced marine protected areas. This work will support healthy ecosystems with thriving biodiversity and fisheries that communities rely on for food and livelihoods.

The programme aims to achieve these objectives by strengthening marine science expertise, developing evidence-based policy and management tools, and creating educational resources for coastal communities.

About Cefas

The Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) is a world leader in marine science and technology, providing innovative solutions for the aquatic environment, biodiversity and food security. Cefas is an Executive Agency of Defra and the UK's most diverse centre for applied marine and freshwater science and research. For more information about Cefas visit www.cefas.co.uk and follow @CefasGovUK.

Litter info:

Globally it is estimated that 6.4 million tonnes of litter enter the oceans each year and 8 million items of litter enter the oceans each day. Up to 90% of marine litter is made up of plastics, originating from both land and sea-based sources. This makes plastic pollution one of the most widespread and immediate problems facing our oceans, which requires urgent and coordinated responses to take effective action.