



# Achieving Fair and Effective Marine Protected and Conserved Areas in Belize Through the IUCN Green List Standard:

## Phase III Narrative Report

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IUCN – Protected and Conserved Areas



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Sustainable Fisheries For Our Future



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This report is compliant with [JNCC's Evidence Quality Assurance Policy](#).

**Ocean Country Partnership Programme:**

The Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) is a UK Government-led programme delivered under the Blue Planet Fund in Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) eligible countries. Through this programme, Cefas, JNCC and MMO will provide technical assistance to support countries to tackle marine pollution, support sustainable seafood practices and establish designated, well-managed and enforced MPAs.



## Executive summary

This Phase III Narrative Report documents achievements under the project “Achieving Fair and Effective Marine Protected and Conserved Areas in Belize through the IUCN Green List Standard”, implemented by IUCN with support from the UK Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP). The project supports Belize’s commitments under the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People and the Belize Blue Bond Agreement, which identifies the IUCN Green List as a key performance indicator for the quality and effectiveness of marine protected areas (MPAs).

Building on capacity-building and self-assessment activities undertaken in Phases I and II, Phase III focused on establishing the institutional and technical foundations required for Belize to engage formally in the Green Listing process. Key objectives included training the national Expert Assessment Group for the Green List (EAGL), advancing arrangements for national coordination and mentorship, and supporting the formal registration of selected MPAs on the IUCN Green List COMPASS platform.

Major achievements include the successful training and operationalization of the EAGL, including the appointment of a Chair and Co-Chair, and increased government readiness to coordinate the Green Listing process. Three of the five pilot MPAs—Corozal Bay, Turneffe Atolls, and Glover’s Reef Marine Reserve—were formally registered on COMPASS, enabling them to progress toward candidacy. Overall, Phase III significantly strengthened Belize’s readiness to implement the IUCN Green List and advance toward its Blue Bond commitments.

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## 1. Background

The Belize government is a member of the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People (HAC), which champions the adoption of Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Through the Belize Blue Bond Agreement, Belize government has committed to achieve Green Listing of three Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) by 2026. The IUCN Green List is recognized as the key performance indicator for the sustainable financing mechanism under the Belize Blue Bond framework. It is also a Convention of Biological Diversity voluntary indicator for measuring the quality elements of Target 3.

Phases I and II consisted in:

- 1) socialising the IUCN Green List among Belize government agencies in charge of MPAs in the country, as well as the co-managers, and building capacities on the Standard, its programme and Listing process,
- 2) conducting a first self-assessment using the IUCN Green List self-assessment tool, and
- 3) providing recommendations for potential pathways or roadmaps for implementing the IUCN Green Listing throughout the network.

Phase III aimed at establishing the foundations for the IUCN Green Listing in the country.

## 2. Objectives

Phase III consisted in the following objectives:

1. Complete the training required for the seven selected Expert Assessment Group for the Green List (EAGL) members.
  - a. Deliver a training package which ensures the EAGL members will be able to provide the independent auditing role required to ensure the five selected MPAs can progress through the formal Green Listing process.
2. With the support from Belize government, identify the Implementing Agency and a list of potential mentors, and ensure they are prepared to support the formal Green Listing process for the selected MPAs.
  - a. Work with the Belize government and relevant co-managers to identify and agree who is best placed to be the Implementing Agency and a potential list of mentors.
  - b. Ensure the chosen Implementing Agency has the knowledge, training and tools required to coordinate the formal Green Listing process for Belize from the end of this contract.
3. Support the Belize government to ensure all five MPAs are formally registered onto the COMPASS platform by the end of the contract.

### 3. Achievements

#### 3.1 Objective 1- EAGL Training

The EAGL training took place in Belize City on October 1-2, 2025. Six out of the seven EAGL members attended (Figure 1). The training was delivered by Nadine Seleem, the IUCN Green List Assurance Senior Officer, and by Jose Courrau, the IUCN Green List Coordinator for the Caribbean Region.

The first day of the training focused on the Green List Standard. The objective was to provide substantive explanations of the Standard overall rationale and narrative, of the criteria and indicators in depth and the types of Means of Verification or evidence that site representatives are expected to submit with their application. Rightsholders/stakeholders' identification and engagement, as well as identifying and prioritising values, and site values tables were discussed.

The second day of the training focused on the EAGL's role & responsibilities in the Green Listing process. It consisted in explaining the EAGL's structure and functioning, the site assessment requirements, including desk reviews and site visits, the reporting and voting, and the post-EAGL assessment review and validation processes. The objective was to present each step of the Listing procedure and the key roles that the EAGL plays in assessing the site applications with objectivity and impartiality.

Upcoming updates to the Standard and User Manual as well as new tools in development were also presented and discussed, ensuring they were aware of what is ahead.

The EAGL members were very enthusiastic and engaged throughout the training, exchanging perspectives on the Green List Standard and its interpretation for the country, as well as its different sites and ecosystems. All of them were already acquainted with the Green List. Four of them were already members of the Selva Maya EAGL, a regional EAGL for terrestrial protected areas across Belize, Guatemala and Mexico, but were not yet formally trained.

At the end of the two-day training, the EAGL appointed a Chair and a Co-chair, respectively Zoe Walker and Edilberto Romero.

Besides the training, the IUCN representatives had a preliminary follow-up meeting with the National Biodiversity Office (NBIO) to start discussing next steps for the sites' registration and application as well as timeline for necessary activities.



**Figure 1:** Members of the EAGL during the training delivered in October.

### **3.2 Objective 2- Implementing agencies & mentors**

The three phases of work on Green Listing delivered under the OCPP have been led by the Ministry of Blue Economy and Marine Conservation and the Belize Fisheries Department.

The Government of Belize has committed to using the IUCN Green List to improve both terrestrial and marine protected areas. Moving forward three “natural” implementing agencies were therefore foreseen to take on the role of coordinating the Green Listing process through the protected areas networks: the Belize Fisheries Department, the National Biodiversity Office and the Forest Department. Discussions need to happen bilaterally and collectively to decide on this role and on their collaboration.

Regarding the recruitment of mentors, it was decided that it would be premature to start this process, without clarifying which entities will endorse the role of implementing partners and their modalities of work. It is always preferable to assign these roles in-house, including mentors, if we want the support to be sustainable. If institutions don't have the human resources to fulfil this role, mentors can be hired as external consultants or selected as volunteers, depending on the extent of support that is expected and timeframe. In all cases, it is essential to have clarity and adequate resources in place before engaging with external people if need be.

An online meeting convened the Government of Belize's representatives from the Ministry of Blue Economy and Marine Conservation and from the Belize Fisheries Department on 3 December 2025 to discuss the next steps. They informed us that they were preparing a future funding proposal focused on ensuring financing for continued support for the Green Listing process into 2026. IUCN, with Jose Courrau as focal point, will provide inputs in the full proposal, as required.

### **3.3 Objective 3- COMPASS registration**

During the meeting with the Government of Belize on the 3 December, it was also decided to complete the last steps under this project and contract. First, the registration of the five pilot marine protected areas to the IUCN Green List through its online form should be completed as soon as possible, allowing access to the IUCN COMPASS platform for Green Listing sites. Second, an online orientation of COMPASS to selected people from the Government of Belize and co-managers, who will support site representatives with uploading their evidence. It was agreed that the Fisheries Department team and co-managers were best placed to use COMPASS.

The induction session on COMPASS took place on December 17. Six trainees from the Fisheries Department, co-managers and National Biodiversity Office attended. Nadine Seleem provided a tutorial on the COMPASS platform, showing what actions were required for the application phase and how the candidate and green listed phases are mapped in the platform.

Two applications had been received, Turneffe Atolls and Corozal Bay, by the time of the training session. During the training the application form for Glover's Reef Marine Reserve was also completed.

Nadine Seleem provided an overview of the COMPASS database, highlighting its key features such as the navigation bar, search function, and site page structure that displays process and required actions. She encouraged participants to upload a test document into the right field. She also emphasized the fact that COMPASS is a user-only access, but that the user can be changed or the log in be shared with other staff. She also clarified that

COMPASS serves as a means for communication and sending notifications to EAGL members and site representatives when actions are required.

The attendees who had direct access to COMPASS were invited to navigate through the platform, find information and upload the necessary documentation for the site's application phase.

The training session was recorded and will serve as learning materials for Belize site representatives.

## 4. Conclusion

Phase III successfully established the core institutional, technical, and procedural conditions necessary for Belize to implement the IUCN Green Listing for marine and terrestrial protected areas. The training and formalization of the national Expert Assessment Group represent a critical milestone, ensuring that Belize now has the independent assessment capacity required to support credible and transparent Green Listing decisions.

Progress was also made toward defining national coordination arrangements and identifying pathways for sustained support to site-level implementation. While a formal implementing agency and mentor structure were not finalized within the project timeframe, clear next steps were agreed with government counterparts, including the preparation of a proposal to secure dedicated coordination and mentoring support through the Belize Blue Bond framework.

The registration of three pilot MPAs on the COMPASS platform marks Belize's transition from preparatory activities to active participation in the Green Listing process. However, further efforts will be required to complete registration for all selected sites and to maintain momentum toward candidacy. Overall, Phase III has laid a strong foundation for Belize to achieve high-quality, equitable, and effective conservation outcomes aligned with global standards and national financing commitments.