



Regional Opportunities



Authors

1. Lori Maddox - Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (ELAW)
2. Alejandra Serrano Pavón - Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (ELAW)

Collaborators

Jennifer Gleason
Killian Doherty
Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (ELAW)

Reviewers

1. Claudia Ruiz- MAR Fund
2. Maria Jose González- MAR Fund
3. María del Carmen García -Consejo Nacional de Areas Nacionales Protegidas -CONANP- Mexico
4. Adriel Castañeda -Fisheries Department-Belize
5. Luisa Fernández -Ministerio de Recursos Naturales y Ambiente -MARN-Guatemala
6. Skarleth Pineda y Alberto Cantor- Dirección de Biodiversidad -DiBio-MiAmbiente- Honduras

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This document corresponds to point number six of the final products as established in the agreement signed by MarFund and ELAW, where a summary document is requested with information and recommendations for the harmonized monitoring of specific opportunities

Opportunities identified at the regional level:

1. Declaration of Tulum.
2. Paris Agreement under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
3. Prohibition of oil operations.

The Declaration of Tulum creates a logical framework under which the four MAR country governments can work together to take action needed to advance restoration of the reef. The Declaration of Tulum should provide the framework for adopting additional agreements and protocols to ensure the conservation and restoration of the MAR.

In addition, in each of the MAR countries, laws exist under which government ministries or departments could assert authority to adopt regulations and take strong action to conserve and restore the reef. However, it is also true that in each of the countries, no law specifically *requires* the governments take action or dedicate funds to restoring the reef.

Below we include specific recommendations to improve the likelihood of reef conservation and restoration.¹

1. Declaration of Tulum

The first recommendation is for the four MAR governments to sign an agreement under the Declaration of Tulum, in which each country commits to identify areas of the reef in most need of conservation and with most potential for restoration, and commits to direct their efforts to restore those areas. The fact that we are at Tulum +20 creates an opportunity to advocate for new initiatives related to reef restoration.

Civil society of the four MAR countries can petition their governments to collaborate and sign a Memorandum of Understanding committing to work together on reef restoration. This process is a political process and depends on high-level negotiations between the four governments. However, this could be carried out through the Mesoamerican Reef Restoration Network², which can urge their governments to initiate this discussion through all of the creative strategies at their disposal – starting with meetings with government representatives asking them to take this on – to major campaigns involving media strategies, etc.

¹ In each of the MAR countries, stronger laws are needed to *protect* the reef by means of reduced coastal developments, better watershed management including more protective effluent discharge limitations and protection of mangroves.

² <http://coralmar.org/>

If the governments sign this regional agreement for reef restoration, laws will need to be adopted in each country to guarantee that actions will be taken – such as laws *requiring* regular and systematic mapping of priority areas of the reef for restoration, undertaking restoration where required, and dedicating funding for that.

A regional agreement under the Declaration of Tulum could also require improved transparency and accountability regarding the collection and expenditure of fines and fees raised from environmental infractions or entrance fees for visiting protected areas and which could and should be directed towards restoration.

The Central American Integration System (SICA) provides a platform for advancing transboundary initiatives in the region, and the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD) is charged with advancing an environmental agenda on that platform. CCAD is the entity identified as the most appropriate to promote a regional agreement between the Central American nations about reef conservation and restoration protocols, a harmonized legal framework that would facilitate rapid evaluation and restoration of reefs following accidents and following extreme weather events, and targets for funding from governments to protect and restore reefs.

2. Paris Agreement under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) creates another opportunity to advance reef restoration. The Paris Agreement requires each Party to submit its own Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the UNFCCC Secretariat describing the commitments it plans to undertake in both reducing emissions and adapting to climate change. The NDCs are submitted every five years. The next set of NDCs will be due in 2020. Each of the MAR countries could (and should) include reef restoration as a central part of its 2020 NDC. The Mesoamerican Reef Restoration Network could petition the governments of the four MAR countries to include reef restoration in their NDCs, which could create new opportunities to finance that work. Belize's current NDC mentions impacts to the reef from climate change and suggests sustainable management of fisheries could help improve the resilience of the reef ecosystem, but does not mention reef restoration.³ Guatemala does not mention the reef in its NDC.⁴ Honduras recognizes the impact of climate change on the reef and the importance of the reef, but does not commit to specific action.⁵ Mexico does include: "Increase carbon capture and strengthen coastal protection with the implementation of a scheme of conservation and recovery of coastal and marine ecosystems

³ Belize NDC, available at: https://unfccc.int/files/focus/ndc_registry/application/pdf/belize_ndc.pdf.

⁴ Guatemala NDC, available at:

<http://www4.unfccc.int/submissions/INDC/Published%20Documents/Guatemala/1/Gobierno%20de%20Guatemala%20INDC-UNFCCC%20Sept%202015.pdf>.

⁵ Honduras NDC, available at:

http://www4.unfccc.int/ndcregistry/PublishedDocuments/Honduras%20First/Honduras%20INDC_esp.pdf

such as coral reefs, mangroves, sea grass and dunes.”⁶ It would be good specify an amount of coral reefs that should be recovered during the next period of adaptation.

Each country will have its own process for developing the new NDCs. The most appropriate place to contribute recommendations for the new NDC would be to work with the UN Climate Change Focal Points for each country.⁷ The authorities responsible for issues related to climate change are: the Belize National Climate Change Office, the Ministerio de Ambiente y Recursos Naturales in Guatemala, la Secretaría de MiAmbiente (Dirección de Cambio Climático) in Honduras, and la Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (SEMARNAT) in Mexico.

3. Prohibition of oil operations.

On December 29, 2017, the Governor-General of Belize signed into law the Petroleum Operations (Maritime Zone Moratorium) Act, banning petroleum operations within the maritime zone of Belize. Mexico has established a safeguard for oil exploration in 2016 to ban this activity in the Yucatan Peninsula, home of Mexico’s part of the Mesoamerican Reef.⁸ Also, with the recent creation of the Protected Area Biosphere Reserve for the Mexican Caribe, petroleum operations are prohibited under the management program.

The Mesoamerican Reef Restoration Network could use the opportunity created by adoption of this measures in Belize and Mexico to create campaigns encouraging other governments in the region to similarly ban oil exploration that would impact the reef in the region. The Mesoamerican Reef Restoration Network can propose that their governments adopt a ban through a wide variety of campaign strategies including replicating the citizen referendum and other campaign strategies that were used in Belize.

⁶ Mexico NDC, available at: <http://www4.unfccc.int/submissions/INDC/Published%20Documents/Mexico/1/MEXICO%20INDC%2003.30.2015.pdf>.

⁷ The Focal Points are listed at: http://unfccc.int/parties_observers/parties/national_focal_points/items/9336.php

⁸ Through a Presidential decree, Mexico has established a safeguard zone banning oil exploration in a portion of the Yucatan Peninsula (http://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5464474&fecha=07/12/2016).