



EMERGENCY RESPONSE CAPACITIES IN THE MESOAMERICAN REEF REGION

The Mesoamerican Reef (MAR) is the largest coral reef system in the Atlantic Ocean, stretching more than 1,000 kilometers along the coastline of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras.

The Mesoamerican Reef Fund (MAR Fund), through the Mesoamerican Reef Rescue Initiative (RRI), is working to protect and increase the resilience of the MAR -and of the environmental and cultural services it provides- through capacity building, better regulations, and funding for reef restoration.



Photo: María del Carmen García-CONANP

Emergency Response for reefs

Importance

Hurricanes inflict considerable damage to the reef in terms of reduced coral cover and loss of structural complexity. Timely and effective response and restoration can reduce the risk of subsequent damage to affected corals and increase the likelihood of reefs continuing to provide valuable services to local communities in the future. (The Nature Conservancy, 2019)

Emergency response involves four main elements:

- 1) A Protocol, as the instrument that guides the early warning and emergency response actions.
- 2) Governance bodies, which include the response groups, a leading entity, a coordinating committee, an operation committee and a network of allies.
- 3) Trained response brigades, with equipment and materials to take action during the response and restoration activities.
- 4) Financing mechanisms, to provide immediate funds for early action.

MAR Fund, in collaboration with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), is working to establish and strengthen **Emergency Response Capacities** in the four MAR countries. The emergency response will provide attention to reefs damages caused by the impacts of climate events, such as hurricanes, storms and cyclones.

The base of this activity is the Early Warning and Rapid Response Post-Storm Protocol, developed by TNC for the coast of Quintana Roo, Mexico, and adopted by MAR Fund to be replicated in the rest of the MAR countries. This instrument delineates the actions to be undertaken to secure rapid reef recovery due to hurricane damage.

Main facts:

Thanks to the support of the governmental authorities of the MAR, key partners, such as TNC, and the ample participation of reef managers, a substantial amount of preliminary work has been done.

- **Belize:** with the support of the Belize Fisheries Department, a Response Coordinating Committee was formalized for two pilot reef sites, Hol Chan Marine Reserve and Turneffe Atoll Marine Reserve. The call for applications to become part of response brigades took place in 2020. The selected members had their first interaction through the webinar *Theoretical Lesson for the Rapid Response & Emergency Reef Restoration Course*.
- **Honduras:** with the support of the National Conservation Institute, Forestry Development, Protected Areas and Wildlife (ICF); the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MiAmbiente); and, the Directorate of Biodiversity (DiBio), Honduras has advanced in creating three Response Coordinating Committees, for the protected areas: 1) Bay Islands National Marine Park; 2) Cayos Cochinos National Marine Monument; and, 3) Tela Bay Marine Wildlife Refuge.

- **México:** the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONANP) formalized a Response Coordinating Committee for Xcalak National Reef Park and Banco Chinchorro Biosphere Reserve. The call for application to become part of response brigades took place in 2020. The brigades will receive training in 2021.
- **Guatemala:** progress is being made through conversations with The National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP in Spanish) in order to build post-storm response capacities in the Caribbean side of Guatemala.



Photo: Daniela Zambrano

Financial Mechanism for Emergency Response

An *Emergency Fund* was established as a financial mechanism, to provide immediate funds for emergency response and reef restoration actions in the MAR in the case of reef damage caused by hurricanes. Currently, MAR Fund is raising funds to capitalize this fund.

A pilot of the *Emergency Fund* was conducted in October 2020 in response to the affected corals in three reef sites of the Puerto Morelos National Park in Quintana Roo, following the tropical storm Gamma and hurricane Delta. With the funds granted, emergency response brigades have been able to provide immediate attention for reef restoration after the events hit the area.

Additionally, MAR Fund in collaboration with Willis Towers Watson (WTW), TNC and other key partners in the region, is working to design and implement a Parametric Insurance Model for reefs in seven key sites of the MAR Region. This innovative financial mechanism will provide a post-event response framework for reef recovery and for the coastal communities in the MAR.

About the RRI

The RRI is implemented by MAR Fund in the MAR, in cooperation with the Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD, in Spanish). A Technical Supervisory Committee leads the RRI and involves the four countries sharing the MAR, (Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras). In addition, this initiative is possible thanks to the generous support of the German Cooperation, through KfW, with an endowment of €7 million.

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