



Mesoamerican Reef Fund

The MAR region encompasses the largest coral reef in the Atlantic, and is part of the interconnected system of coastal habitats and currents that extends throughout the wider Caribbean. Its coastline stretches for 1,000 kilometers from the tip of the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico to the Bay Islands in Honduras, passing through Belize and Guatemala. It is home to some of the world's most stunning beaches and vibrant waters, with an astonishing array of over 500 known fish species, some of the largest remaining populations of manatees and sea turtles, possibly the largest known aggregation of whale sharks, and valuable concentrations of mangroves, sea grass, and coral reefs.

Between one and two million people live along the coasts and islands of the MAR region, and their livelihoods depend on the health of the reef. The Mesoamerican Reef is culturally diverse, including Miskito, Garifuna, Caribbean Creole, K'ekchi, Mopan, Yucatec Maya, and Mestizo peoples. We must find a way to ensure that ecosystems in the MAR continue to provide important environmental services, and that they are managed in a way that ensures sustainable human development in the region.

FACTS

- ◆ Largest barrier reef in the Atlantic.
- ◆ Prime tourist destination.
- ◆ Has strategic economic importance for many communities around the reef.
- ◆ Provides food security for local inhabitants.
- ◆ Acts as a natural barrier against climate change threats.
- ◆ Along the shores, mangroves are nurseries for fish and shellfish, provide habitat for shorebirds and protect coastal areas from the damage associated with hurricanes and strong storms.
- ◆ The MAR provides a unique opportunity for international and interinstitutional coordination for conservation and sustainable development.

THE CHALLENGE

As in many regions of the world, the MAR is constantly threatened by coastal development, habitat loss, unregulated tourism activities, overfishing, and large-scale agro-industry applying pesticides across the region that drain into the sea, among others. Climate change exacerbates the effects of other threats and diminishes the ecosystems' resilience and capacity to sustain biological processes.

In 2004, pre-existing environmental funds of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala and Honduras came together to establish the Mesoamerican Reef Fund (MAR Fund), an institutional coalition and financial mechanism created to plan, fund and promote strategic solutions for the entire MAR ecoregion. The key objective of the MAR Fund—and the driver of its programs—is the establishment and strengthening of a functional

OUR CONTRIBUTION TO CONSERVATION

network of priority coastal and marine areas to promote climate change adaptation, conservation of natural resources and ecological processes, permanence of connectivity functions and ecosystem services, and sustainable use of resources. In other words, MAR Fund supports the backbone of the reef system by addressing issues that affect its integrity, its health, and the communities living in and around the region's protected areas. It currently focuses on a network of 14 priority coastal and marine protected areas distributed among the four countries in the region. In 2016, 14 additional areas were prioritized and MAR Fund is exploring potential funding sources for them.



Ian Drysdale

MAR Fund is based in Guatemala and has a dedicated staff of 14 people. Now beginning its 12th year of operations, the Fund has established strategic alliances with key conservation stakeholders and is considered among the most important coordinators of conservation efforts in the MAR region. MAR Fund has successfully mobilized financial resources for the region, including \$ 20.6 million of project funding and the establishment of a \$25.1 million endowment. The organization recently secured a \$10 million endowment challenge grant from Oak Foundation to provide long-term financial sustainability for marine resource management and conservation initiatives in Belize. It has committed to raise \$15 million in matching funds.



Citlali García

MAR Fund provides strategic technical and financial support for planning, managing, and optimizing the hard work of protected area managers, other partners, and communities involved in the region's conservation efforts.

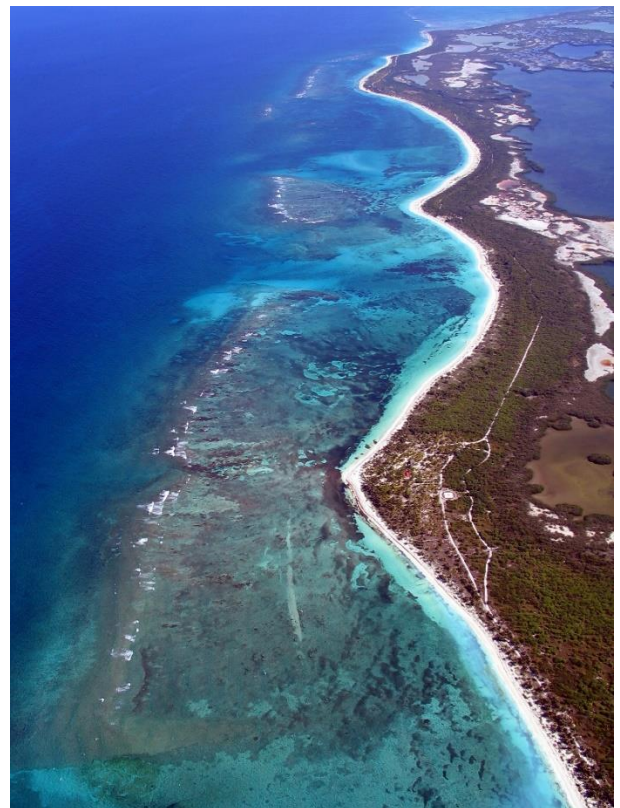
Our Project "Conservation of Marine Resources in Central America", funded by the German Cooperation through KfW, enhances the management of protected areas by funding monitoring activities, management plan updates, enforcement, infrastructure and equipment, among others.

Our Small Grants Program is another channel for supporting the conservation, effective management, and sustainable use of marine protected areas; the improvement of fisheries management, and biodiversity conservation. With the kind support of key partners through joint requests 61 for proposals, the program has funded projects developed by over 57 different organizations in the region, including local communities, government organizations, NGOs, and academic institutions. Over \$1.7 million have been approved and nearly double that amount has been leveraged.

The Community Fisheries Program promotes community participation and co-management of local fisheries. It also involves the establishment of fish recovery sites. (aka fish refuges and community marine reserves). We are contributing to the unofficial goal of fully protecting 20% of the region's territorial waters.

MAR Fund has supported and participated in establishing strategic regional alliances, such as the Connectivity Network, the Reef Restoration Network, the Lionfish Working Group and the Manatee Working Group. It is a partner in the innovative Healthy Reefs Initiative, an international effort that measures and tracks the health of coral reefs in the region, and the MAR Leadership Program, a capacity-building program that strengthens leadership skills of young conservationists in the four MAR countries.

MAR Fund has been instrumental in bringing together international, national, regional and local partners to work together to transform threats into opportunities for the reef system. Our mid-term goals include coordinating and supporting alliances around climate change mitigation and adaptation, increasing and diversifying funding sources for the region, and increasing our endowment fund to \$ 50 million.



Oceanus, A. C.

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