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PRESS RELEASE

Ministry of Blue Economy's Position on S.I. No. 57 of 2021

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The Ministry of Blue Economy and Civil Aviation hereby provides clarity on the matter of Statutory Instrument No. 57 of 2021, which now allows for the participation of permanent residents in the fishing industry of Belize.

In 2019, the Government of Belize, under the previous administration, issued legislation (S.I. No. 81 of 2019) to exclude permanent residents from being eligible for commercial fishing licenses. That was done under the perception that these licensed permanent residents were responsible for the depletion and overfishing of fish stocks in Belize. To date, the Fisheries Department has not validated this as data from 2015 to 2019 shows that the maximum number of licensed permanent residents did not exceed 40 fishers. Given the evidence that the fisher population in Belize is over 3,400, this number did not provide justifiable basis for this exclusion.

The ministry differs from the position recently expressed in the media that national fishery resources are overfished. The Fisheries Department has not established the overfishing of any commercial fisheries.

It is not justifiable to identify permanent resident fishers as being the sole culprits in illegal fishing. Illegal fishing is a complex matter that requires a multi-prong approach to ensure its deterrence and elimination. As with all international and domestic fisheries activities, there are areas of concern, particularly illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. The ministry is addressing these in coordination with fisheries enforcement officers as well as other partners including the Belize Coast Guard and marine protected areas personnel.

It is the firm position of the Ministry of Blue Economy and Civil Aviation that permanent residents who have met the legal requirements should be

afforded the opportunity to participate in the industry. As persons who are legally granted residence in Belize, it is the country's responsibility to provide them equal opportunities to care for their families, especially their children, many of whom are Belizeans. The government's role is not to marginalize but rather to put in place policies and programmes that will result in a robust, fair and profitable sector for all.

It is important to highlight that this S.I. No. 57 of 2021 is in alignment with the new Fisheries Resources Act No. 7 of 2020 as well as the mandate of the Ministry of the Blue Economy to allow for non-Belizeans to participate in the development of the sector. Central to the ministry's mandate is the development and realization of the economic potential of Belize's "blue" resources while putting in place requisite social safeguards that are based on inclusion, equal opportunity and "blue" justice for all.

The Ministry of Blue Economy and Civil Aviation invites the guidance and input of all its partners in government, non-governmental organizations and the wider community.

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