

# ENCA

Environmental Network *for* Central America

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## Land Grabbing

Land grabbing continues to blight Central America

## Fruit Certification

We follow up on our previous reports on this subject

## Coral Conference

The news and views from the Belize Coral Conference



**EL SALVADOR HOLDS  
OCEANAGOLD AT BAY**



ENCA aims to work directly with people in communities who are seeking to arrest environmental degradation and who are often struggling against the repression and violence of armies and police forces acting under the command of wealthy individuals, transnational corporations and corrupt politicians. We campaign with them to place environmental rights within national constitutions and to ensure that all natural resources are made to benefit the many and not the few.

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A protestor in El Salvador holds a sign reading "No to Mining."  
(AP/Luis Romero)

# El Salvador resists the mining companies

*On Friday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2016, the World Bank's International Court for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) passed its judgement regarding the case presented to the World Bank tribunal by Pacific Rim / OceanaGold against the government of El Salvador. After seven years, the international arbitration tribunal at the World Bank ruled in favour of El Salvador and against Pacific Rim Mining Corporation. ENCA congratulates all those involved in this battle against a polluting transnational company that chose to sue the people who objected to its pollution of their environment. Nobody has fought harder than our Salvadoran colleagues and partners in the MUFRAS-32 organisation whose campaigns we have publicised several times in previous ENCA Newsletters. We salute and congratulate them, but they and we know that justice in this case does not mean that we can expect transnational mining corporations to change their usual practices elsewhere in the region or worldwide.*

*The following summary of events in the case was offered by MUFRAS-32 and the National Roundtable Against Metal Mining just before the ICSID's judgement was made public.*

On 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016, the ICSID [International Court for the Settlement of Investment Disputes] declared closed its arbitration proceedings in the case that Pacific Rim / OceanaGold initiated on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2009 against El Salvador. During that time the country has spent more than \$13 million in legal costs and the company has pressed for more than \$300 million in compensation because the country would not allow it to abuse its environment and the health of its

inhabitants by means of its mining exploitation.

The next stage, after the declaration of the closing of the case, is the arbitration award which was made public on 15<sup>th</sup> October. What is certain is that the process does not finish with the award and it can be extended indefinitely on the initiative of either side.

The mining company alleged that the exploration license granted during the government of ex-President Francisco Flores automatically assigned it the right of exploitation. However, as a result of not complying with environmental and feasibility requirements, the successive governments of Antonio Saca and Mauricio Funes refused the authorisations.

The governmental rejection of the Pacific Rim / OceanaGold project also reflected the scientific evidence regarding the economic, social and environmental non-viability of metal mining in the country due to the limited territorial coverage, the high population density and the serious degradation of the water resources.

The opposition of different sectors of the country (environmental NGOs, the Catholic hierarchy, etc) was also a crucial factor behind the denial of permits, and, fundamentally the community resistance in Cabañas, where environmentalists were even assassinated. The Salvadoran population has increased its awareness and rejected metal mining. This was demonstrated by the results of a recent survey conducted by the José Simeón Cañas Central American University – UCA – in which more than 73% of people expressed their agreement that the





Members of the National Roundtable Against Metal Mining with President Salvador Sánchez Cerén

government should prohibit metal mining in the country.

The Episcopal Conference of the Catholic Church, and especially the Archbishop of San Salvador, Monseñor José Luis Escobar Alas, has publicly and repeatedly declared its rejection of metal mining in El Salvador, considering it to be an outrage against the environment and against the health of the population.

On Thursday 25th August 2016, in an audience with the MNFM [Mesa Nacional Frente a la Minería / National Roundtable Against Mining] in which ENCA's partner MUFRAS-32 participated, the President of the Republic, Salvador Sánchez Cerén, reaffirmed his commitment not to permit metal mining during his government – see photo. This provided an opportunity for the MNFM to deliver a draft Executive Decree for the prohibition of metal mining which, if sanctioned, would be active whilst the Legislative Assembly considers for approval the Law of the Prohibition of Metal Mining.

Despite these favourable conditions for preventing metal mining, Pacific Rim / OceanaGold intensified its efforts to

blackmail the government of President Sánchez Cerén into acceding to a negotiation in the ICSID case before the judgement was passed, a negotiation which would permit the exploitation of gold and silver in San Isidro, Cabañas. It is even known that certain high level state functionaries were sought out by the company with the idea of gaining their approval of metal mining in the country.

Also the mining company reinforced its efforts to seek out those who would approve of mining in Cabañas through the El Dorado Foundation which plays on the needs of poor people in the communities by offering palliatives to anyone who can get people to be in favour of mining.

Organisations like MUFRAS-32 which form part of the MNFM continue to raise awareness and to organise people in resistance to metal mining exploitation, defending the right of access to water and the right to life. In particular, they are developing draft laws to prevent metal mining throughout the country at all times with a view to pressing Salvadoran legislators to statutorily approve these laws.

## A thank you from El Salvador to ENCA and its members

*Following the announcement of the ICSID judgement in favour of El Salvador, Hector Berríos of MUFRAS-32 and the National Roundtable Against Metal Mining sent the following note to ENCA.*

"Thank you for your congratulations, compañeros. Allow me to call you 'compañeros', a term used to refer to all who work together with us and who have supported us; and you have collaborated with us in support of our work. Thanks for your very necessary solidarity which enables us to continue with our efforts. Stay with us to help us seek the approval of a law that prohibits exploitative metal mining in our country along with an executive decree that would normalise such prohibition."



**ENCA will again be at this year's Latin America Conference in London. ENCA members will be presenting on 'Defending Human Rights Defenders' and we will also have our stand.**

**Join us for the day, book your place at  
[www.latinamerica2016.org.uk](http://www.latinamerica2016.org.uk)**



# GROWING LAND GRABS

The Worldwatch Institute's *'State of the World 2015: Confronting Hidden Threats to Sustainability'* reports that as global agricultural resources shrink or shift, the practice of 'land grabbing' is growing.

Since 2000, more than 36 million hectares have been purchased or leased by foreign entities, mostly for agricultural use. Today, nearly 15 million hectares more is under negotiation ([www.worldwatch.org](http://www.worldwatch.org)). "Farmland is lost or degraded on every continent, while 'land grabbing' – the purchase or lease of agricultural land by foreign interests – has emerged as a threat to food security in several countries," writes Gary Gardner, contributing author of the Worldwatch Institute's report.

About half of grabbed land is intended exclusively for use in agriculture, while another 25 percent is intended for a mix of agricultural and other uses. (The land that is not used for agriculture is often used for forestry.) Land grabbing has surged since 2005 in response to a food

price crisis and the growing demand for biofuels in the United States and the European Union. Although over half of the global grabbed land is in Africa, land grabbing is not unknown in Central and South America.

The largest investor country is the United States, a country already rich in agricultural land. The United States alone has acquired about 7 million hectares worldwide. Malaysia comes in a distant second, with just over 3.5 million hectares acquired.

Land grabbing is precipitated by the growing challenges shaking the foundation of food production: the water, land, and climate that make crop growth possible. Globally, some 20 percent of aquifers are being pumped faster than they are recharged by rainfall, stressing many key food-producing areas.

The dangers of land grabbing are evident. Large-scale purchases often do not consider the interests of

smallholders who may have been working the land over a long period. The transfer of resources from poorer countries to wealthier ones increases the vulnerability of the target countries that surrender their own access to land and water resources to foreign investors and governments.

By preventing food waste, increasing water efficiency, conserving agricultural land, and decreasing production of meat and biofuels (both of which require large quantities of land and water for grain or crops), Gardner believes that the stress on food systems can be reduced. In addition, the international adoption of the right to food, already integrated in the constitutions of 28 countries, will ensure that food cannot be withheld for political reasons.

For more information on the project, visit <http://www.worldwatch.org/state-world-2015-confronting-hidden-threats-sustainability-0>.



# Tourism, Home Burnings and Territorial Evictions Along the Garífuna Coast in Honduras



*In September we received the following news about land rights on the northern coast of Honduras from Rights Action. The news is originally from OFRANEH, the Black Fraternal Organisation of Honduras, which ENCA has supported in the past.*

Yesterday, the Court in Tela issued a not guilty ruling in favour of the Garífuna community of Barra Vieja, which is being harassed by the Indura Hilton, by means of the National Port Company and the Honduran Institute of Tourism.

The trial against the leadership of Barra Vieja took place after 64 members of the community were put on trial in June of last year. The court declared them innocent of the crime of seizure of property. The ruling in the case indicated, among other things: "It is unknown at this time how many hectares or manzanas are registered in favour of the National Port Company, or the Honduran Institute of Tourism, the National Agrarian Institute and the Tela Bay Project." There certainly exists an overlap between the various government entities and the investors. However, it remains clear that the land in question is part of Garífuna ancestral territory.

For over four decades, the Garífuna communities in Tela Bay have suffered strong threats to their territory, accompanied by assassinations of leaders, promoted by business people and politicians who have sought to create a tourism enclave, refusing to consider the environmental and social costs.

While in Tela the ancestral territory rights were recognized for the Barra

Vieja community, on September 8, in the afternoon, a contingent of police accompanied by a group of armed civilians attempted to evict a group of neighbours from the community which had recovered a piece of land that had been 'sold' in an irregular manner to foreigners.

The police presented an order of eviction, issued on April 7, 2016, by judge Víctor Manuel Melendez Castro. The eviction order was sought by Mr. John J. Scott and Sandra L. Scott, who claim they are the owners of a piece of land in San Blas, located in the Municipality of Santa Fe, Colón.

The use of hired thugs by the police to burn down the dwellings and their contents is, by itself, a violation of the law, as well as violating the rights of the Garífuna people to their ancestral territory. The members of the community of Giriga (Santa Fe) emphatically rejected the eviction attempt.

In 2007, Trujillo Bay became a *piñata* of territory, promoted by the Canadian Randy Jorgensen, known as the King of Porn, who received unlimited help from the Municipalities of Santa Fe and Trujillo. Apparently, the Scotts are connected to Jorgensen, as is indicated in a blog about tourism published by Sandra Scott.

During the administration of post-military coup regime leader 'Pepe' Lobo, Jorgensen counted on his unconditional help to obtain environmental permits and 'legalize' his projects of real estate speculation and the construction of the Banana Coast cruise ship docks.

In December 2011, the Public Prosecutor's office issued an order against Jorgensen, accusing him of seizure of property.

It took until 2015 for him to finally appear in court in Trujillo, which then granted him a provisional acquittal. The Appeals Court of Ceiba nullified this provisional acquittal and required Jorgensen to appear again before the courts, which Jorgensen refused to comply with. The King of Porn has thus far avoided facing justice.

Both Trujillo Bay and Tela Bay have become focal points of dispossession in the name of tourism, and the businesspeople and investors supported by the State come and push out the Garífuna communities, which have to endure the overlapping pressures.

With the advent of petroleum production in the Moskitia region, there arises a new threat to Trujillo Bay and its inhabitants: the construction of a petroleum refinery, which endangers the fragile and rich biodiversity of the region.

*By OFRANEH, Sambo Creek, Aug 10, 2016 (translated by Steven Johnson)*  
<https://ofraneh.wordpress.com/2016/09/10/presiones-territoriales-en-la-costa-garifuna-fallo-a-favor-de-barra-vieja-e-intento-de-desalojo-en-santa-fe>

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*Rights Action has sent an initial \$1,000 to OFRANEH to help the families of Santa Fe whose homes were burnt.*

# More on tropical fruit certification

*In ENCA 67 we included an article from the organisation Banana Link on the certification of tropical fruit suppliers by the Rainforest Alliance. Since then, Banana Link has produced more information on certification by the Rainforest Alliance – 'Banana Trade News Bulletin No.55 (August 2016). Given that this issue affects us all as consumers of tropical fruits and users of supermarkets, we reproduce this further information here. We are grateful to Banana Link for their permission to include it here.*

RA certified products (which today include bananas, pineapples, coffee, tea, palm oil and a great many other commodities) are increasingly popular with retailers and other businesses which offer cheap food and drink. Among the companies selling products which carry the RA's green frog logo are McDonald's, Dunkin Donuts, Kraft, Unilever, Mars and a great many others not usually perceived as particularly socially or environmentally responsible.

To gain RA certification, banana and pineapple plantations have to comply with [Sustainable Agriculture Network \(SAN\)](#) standards, developed and revised by its International Standards Committee, composed of SAN's Secretariat and currently a group of 9 experts.

Use of the RA label has expanded rapidly, particularly in coffee, cocoa, tea and bananas since 2010. Around 1 million metric tonnes of bananas were certified in 2010. Today over 6 million tonnes display the frog logo, meaning that 5.5% of world banana exports were RA certified in 2014.

This is an impressive achievement, but the rapid expansion of RA certification has invited a growing suspicion that much of its success can be attributed to the laxity of the standards themselves and the undemanding nature of the RA certification process.

## SAN standards

Within the Sustainable Agriculture Standard, there are 100 criteria, grouped under ten guiding principles. Six of these principles involve ecological criteria, one relates to management systems and the other three contain social criteria. Of the 100 criteria, 16 are critical and have to be passed to achieve RA certification.

The critical environmental criteria require the protection of existing ecosystems on the farm, the non-destruction of rainforest for farming activities and an embargo on hunting wild animals. Farms may not discharge waste into natural water systems and there is a list of forbidden chemical and biological substances.

The critical social criteria require that: farms do not employ children under the age of 15, use forced labour or apply discriminatory employment practices; workers must have the right to organise freely and to negotiate their working conditions collectively; farms must have and divulge a policy guaranteeing this right and must not impede workers from forming or joining trade unions or from undertaking collective bargaining; and wages should at

least equal the regional average or legally established minima.

Other critical criteria include, in the area of health and safety, that workers in contact with agrochemicals should use personal protective equipment and, in the area of community relations, that farms should put in place policies and procedures which identify and take into account the interests of local populations.

In addition to complying with the critical criteria, farms must also comply with at least 50 per cent of the applicable criteria, relating to each of the ten guiding principles and at least 80 per cent of the total applicable criteria of the Sustainable Agriculture Standard. 46 per cent of all criteria are checked in each individual audit.

Although it's not possible to analyse the SAN criteria in detail here, it is worth noting that the critical criteria are mostly requirements which are already contained in national legislation, existing company Codes of Practice and in other standards such as GlobalGAP, which are already required by EU retailers selling imported bananas and pineapples. Only one criteria relating to restoration of natural ecosystems appears to add value beyond usual pre-existent requirements.

When it comes to non-critical criteria, there is enough flexibility in the requirements to make it possible for most commercial banana and pineapple plantations to achieve certification without any great

difficulty.

## Certification

SAN authorises a number of bodies to audit farms and approve certification. 84% of all certifications for all products are carried out by a division of the Rainforest Alliance, RA-Cert (also known as Sustainable Farm Certification International Ltd., SFC). The remaining 16% are mostly carried out in regions which do not export bananas or pineapples to the EU, which means that 100% (or very nearly 100%) of banana and pineapple plantation audits are carried out effectively by Rainforest Alliance itself. As a leading member of SAN, Rainforest Alliance sets its standards and as the owner of RA Cert it also audits farms.

Where violations are found, plantations are normally given warnings, encouraging them to improve performance in future. There is a system for whistle-blowing and RA usually responds quickly to allegations. Some complainants report however that making and following up a complaint can involve a lot of time and effort and there can be no guarantee that they will be satisfied by the outcome.

The only external challenges to the system tend to come from trade unions and civil society organisations which know about the daily realities of life on RA Certified farms. Neither of these agencies have the financial resources to monitor RA farms systematically. Nevertheless, when they do find the resources to investigate, violations of standards (including critical criteria) appear to be almost invariably found. This inevitably raises questions as to the overall reliability of RA and its certification system.

## Do certified farms comply with SAN Standards?

It is not always easy for external agencies to get access to farms. This makes it difficult to assess RA's environmental impacts in any detail. It is easier to assess the Alliance's social impact as information can be obtained, if necessary, by interviewing workers and trade union organisers outside the plantation gates.

Preliminary investigations of RA's performance in banana and pineapple farms have been carried out by Banana Link (UK), by Oxfam Germany, by a number of Latin American trade unions and by SOMO Netherlands – for the tea, coffee and flower sectors. Their findings are briefly outlined below:

In Costa Rica, in Ecuador, in Honduras and in Guatemala (and in Kenya for tea) researchers found Rainforest Alliance Certified farms where: trade union membership and activities were suppressed and unionised workers sacked; wages paid were below the legal minimum requirement; hours worked exceeded legal limits and overtime was not paid; areas for eating and sanitary facilities were not provided; migrant workers were contracted at lower rates than national workers; use of subcontractors generated instability in the workplace; safety equipment was inadequate and agrochemical contamination occurred; workers suffered health problems associated with the use of agrochemicals; contracts without social security and other social guarantees were used; there was evidence of environmental non-compliance.

Ecuador and Costa Rica are the biggest suppliers of bananas to the EU. Costa Rica is the biggest supplier of pineapples. Some of the farms investigated are known to supply Lidl (and also Aldi).

## So does Rainforest certification deliver?

It would appear that RA certification does not provide a guarantee that even such "critical criteria" as basic labour rights or payment of minimum wages have been respected. The SAN and RA aspire to offer sustainable tropical fruit and to do this at no extra cost to consumers. When supermarkets offer fruit to consumers at exceptionally low prices, however, they need in turn to buy from their own suppliers at the lowest possible prices.

'Hard discounters' like Lidl and its competitor, Aldi, have driven prices down to levels not seen since the 1970s. Other supermarkets are trying to match these low prices but costs to producers have risen dramatically in this period.

Can it be realistic to expect banana and pineapple growers to produce sustainably when the prices they are paid barely cover the costs of production? Is it surprising that, when researchers investigate RA Certified farms, they find that SAN standards are not being met? Producers have to pay RA for certification which adds further to their costs. When low prices are paid to producers it makes it more difficult for them to meet the costs of sustainable production and this makes it more likely that production systems will lead to negative social and environmental impacts.





# Spiny lobsters and the Guna Indians of Panamá

In ENCA 65 we reported on a funding request we had received from CENDAH (Panamanian NGO, the Centre for Environmental and Human Development). Although \$2,000 had been requested in the application, the ENCA was only able to grant \$900 on account of both a shortfall in our funds and the receipt of more applications than normal. Nevertheless, the programme went ahead, and in September this year ENCA member Martin Mowforth was fortunate enough to visit the San Blas island of La Tigre to meet some of the lobster catchers and to view progress with the programme. His report follows.

Fishing for the Caribbean *dulub* (spiny lobster – *Panulirus argus*) in the Guna Yala Indigenous territory of Panamá has declined in the last few years due to habitat degradation, over-fishing and the absence of a genuine sustainable management. The sustenance of the Guna family depends on this product of the sea. From the sale of *dulub*, families maintain their children's education and the house in general.

The environmental degradation of their natural habitats has limited the availability of natural refuges for juvenile lobsters in the red algae amongst the roots of the mangroves, the marine grasses and coral reefs, where levels of lobster predation are high, giving rise to a search for refuges.

Earlier work led to the Panamanian Centre for Environmental and Human Development (CENDAH) introducing artificial refuges or '*casitas cubanas*' in the area for juvenile lobsters to provide a natural habitat where juveniles tend to concentrate themselves. These offer greater protection in terms of both shade and against predators, especially the Lion Fish which has also been responsible for

reducing the lobster population. The *casitas cubanas* also provide for a re-stocking of the population, thereby reducing the pressure of fishing in the coral reefs and helping their conservation. Moreover, it renders the family economy more sustainable. As part of the initiative to improve the sustainability of the *dulub* catch, workshops were held with the Guna lobster catchers on the biology and life cycle of the *dulub* and to ensure that they refrained from taking young lobsters.

There has been a good measure of success with the project with some of the *casitas cubanos* harbouring up to 30 juvenile and young adult lobsters during the day. (The lobsters generally hide during the day and come out of their refuges at night to feed.) Several of the concrete *casitas*, however, have sunk into the sand and mud leaving insufficient space for the animals to crawl under. This is really the result of choosing to make the *casitas* from concrete. The original idea for such *casitas* came from Cuba where they were made out of wood and weighted down with rocks. The Guna divers at first tried to raise the *casitas* by pumping air underneath them, but the pipes used to pump that air kept cracking and splitting. The solution which they intend to try next is to prop up the current subsided *casitas* with short wooden blocks to prevent them sinking into the mud and sand.

It is currently too early to judge the precise level of success of the project, although CENDAH does keep track of the production quantities of the *dulub*. ENCA is also in regular contact with the personnel of CENDAH. Indeed, we may soon be receiving another funding request from them for different aspects of the programme and for follow-up to it. We therefore hope to be able to report on

these levels in a future issue of the ENCA newsletter.

The direct beneficiaries of the programme are lobster catchers who make up 150 families (45%) of the 784 people of the community of Digir (on Isla Tigre), although the initiative does not exclude anybody in the community from its benefits because the majority of people are fisherfolk or farmers. And in one way or another all the residents of Digir fish for lobsters which they consume as well as sell. Similarly, neighbouring communities on other islands are also dedicated to the fishing for the *dulub*.

On finishing the initiative, it is hoped that:

- The lobster catchers will be able to monitor and recognise the juvenile lobsters;
- Monitoring of two of the stations established will have been completed;
- The pressure on the reef will have been reduced;
- Deteriorated reef areas will have recuperated;
- 150 families of lobster catchers will have benefitted through the generation of income;
- 50 lobster catchers will have been through the training programme;
- Meetings between lobster catchers of different islands will have been arranged and held;
- The prohibition season for the *dulub* catch will have been extended by one month;
- A work schedule for the extension of the programme will have been arranged.

Further information, reports and articles are available from Martin upon request.



## Costa Rica Abandons Río San Juan Road

Costa Rica has abandoned plans to complete a road on its side of the Río San Juan that was begun under the presidency of Laura Chinchilla in retaliation for Nicaragua dredging the river which lies entirely within Nicaragua's borders. The road quickly deteriorated dumping a huge amount of silt in the river. According to the Costa Rican newspaper, La Nación, 42 people are being investigated for corruption during the road's construction. The government announced that the road would not be completed due to "lack of design and funds."

(Source: Informe Pastrán, Sept. 16)

## Eruption of Turrialba Volcano

Turrialba Volcano, east of the Costa Rican capital San José, emitted a series of eruptions over the course of a week in September. Clouds of ash were erupted reaching up to 2,000 metres in height and spreading out towards the capital city. The eruption caused the closure of the Juan Santamaría international airport as well as covering San José with a thin layer of ash. One headline read: 'The Turrialba Volcano Just Made an Ashy Mess out of Costa Rica's Airports'. After a few days, a change in the wind direction took the ash clouds towards the city of Limón and the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica, filling rivers with ash.

Over the last three years, Turrialba has shown frequent activity and geologists from the University of Costa Rica expect it to continue, possibly for years. Short earth tremors are frequently associated with the eruptions.

## El Gran Canal will bleed Nicaragua's reserves

*Eduard Müller Castro, the chair of Biosphere Reserves for UNESCO, launched harsh criticism of the Nicaraguan megaproject.*

"The Canal will not be any retaining wall; it will be an open vein that will drain what remains. That has been more than proven in other similar projects," said environmentalist Eduard Müller Castro, chair of Biosphere Reserves for UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), to La Prensa, in response to the question of whether the Grand Canal could prevent invasions of the Indio Maíz Biological Reserve.

Müller is also rector of the University for International Cooperation based in Costa Rica. On 12 and 13 July this year, he participated in a series of conferences about Bosawas and the Peruvian Amazon organised by the Central American University in Managua.

In several presentations made both in Nicaragua and abroad, the company in charge of the Grand Canal project, HKND Group, said that the megaproject "is the only real way to save what remains of forests in Nicaragua and to restore the degraded areas."

According to Müller, however, "we must see the legitimacy of the approach, and definitely use it to improve the ecology; but there is no way it can be done. We have to see the economic interest for the country; I personally believe that it's not sound to think of competing with the Panama Canal, even less so now that it is newly expanded. It's done; the costs are covered."

Currently, the Indio Maíz Biosphere Reserve in south-eastern Nicaragua has experienced an "alarming change of

forest use to grassland area," indicates a study by the Humboldt Centre.

### Climate change and the Grand Canal

During his presentation in the series of conferences about Bosawas and the Peruvian Amazon, Eduard Müller confirmed that as a result of climate change induced temperature increases on the planet "you don't have to worry about the Canal; it [deforestation] will happen on its own." Studies carried out by HKND Group showed that there would be a lack of water associated with climate change. HKND also confirmed in its public presentations that "without the Canal, the increasing rate of deforestation means that most of the forest will be lost within 10 to 15 years."

### Biological Connectivity

HKND has also stated on several occasions, in its reports and documents, that the Grand Canal would protect the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor. The Mesoamerican Biological Corridor is a space between southern Mexico and Costa Rica where a wide variety of flora and fauna co-exist.

Müller said that, "the power to cooperate across borders would be of utmost importance, so thinking that the Canal will fit with this kind of collaboration I see as being far removed from reality."

### Irreversible impact

For Nicaraguan environmentalists like Jaime Incer Barquero, the Nicaragua Canal would bring "irreversible impacts" to the country's ecosystems, especially to the great Lake Cocibolca. Of the 278 kilometers in length of the Interoceanic Canal, 107 are in Lake Cocibolca, which according to the General Law of National Water is the principal strategic reserve of drinking water in the country.

*Translated for ENCA by Norvis Vasquez*

# Coral conference in Belize

*In July this year, a range of Belizean and international organisations held a conference on the health of the Belizean coral reef. This article (reproduced here by kind permission of Mike Rudon) reviews the conference.*

## **'Government of Belize Scores Poorly on Environmental Regulations'**

Of six indicators, the Government of Belize (GOB) received the worst marks in the area of environmental regulations. Candy González was scathing in her evaluation, and told News Five that recent projects have shown that developers have a definite impact on the decisions made by the Department of the Environment.

Candy González, President, Belize Institute of Environmental Law & Policy

"I think that we have proof of that in seeing some of the, let's say, they are called financial investment contracts or host country agreements – the agreements like were made between NCL [Norwegian Cruise Lines] and the government – and you have to really question where the balance was in terms of the environment and development. I think a lot of things that are already in the pipeline in terms of development highlight the fact that development is taking the lead in the race over protection of the environment, and I think it's important to each and every one of us to try and direct attention to the fact that you might put money in your pocket today, but tomorrow you might be left with nothing and no way to make a dollar because you've sold everything that was of value, and there has to be a balance. There has to be a balance that looks toward the future."

<http://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/131669>

## **A Reef Scorecard for Belize's Barrier Reef System**

Today, various entities dedicated to the important work of preserving and protecting our natural heritage presented



what they are calling a reef scorecard. It's all about getting Belize's Barrier Reef System off the World Heritage Site's endangered list, where it has languished since 2009. So is enough being done to ensure that happens anytime soon? News Five's Mike Rudon attended G.O.B.'s report card day and has the story.

Belize's Barrier Reef System is responsible for fifteen percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product. But it is in danger. It's a World Heritage Site, but it's been on the endangered list since 2009 and obviously not enough has been done to get it off.

#### **Valentino Shal, World Wildlife Fund**

*"What we are doing here today is to look at what needs to be done to get the Belize Barrier Reef System off the endangered list and also to ensure that it is a healthy and functioning resource. The indicators of this score card are based on the exact same indicators that are included in the desired state of conservation report that the World Heritage Committee and UNESCO gave to the government. So this is a report that outlines all of the indicators and issues that the government must address in order for it to be reinstated."*

This scorecard is really a report card of how effective government has been in implementing policies and actions to address the indicators. A score of one signified major concerns. A score of two – Some concerns and a score of three – good progress. None of the six indicators received a three, but five of six received a two – meaning that there has been some progress, but not enough. The first indicator was oil, specifically offshore drilling.

#### **Janelle Chanona, Vice President, OCEANA Belize**

*"Roughly eighty-five percent of our exclusive economic zone and our territorial waters would be vulnerable to offshore oil activity if the moratorium was ever lifted, and that really is the key takeaway for where we are on oil - that there is pressing need for us to get the moratorium formalized, for the government to outline the specific conditions under which that*

*moratorium would be lifted and that is why we have some concerns regarding progress."*

Mangroves was the second, particularly the unregulated removal of mangroves from sensitive zones.

#### **Roberto Pott, Country Coordinator, Healthy Reefs**

*"We have to be able to catalogue and recognise the areas that are sensitive in terms of our fishing industry, our tourism industry and in terms of shoreline protection. There is little to no incentive for development to maintain mangroves intact and so we need to revisit that and see how we can improve that."*

The third indicator was Coastal Development and Tourism.

#### **Valentino Shal**

*"In February of this year the Cabinet adopted the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan after several years. It's a little late but still good. We welcome that. But at the same time it's clear that there are insufficient resources being put towards the implementation of the plan, so we have a problem there."*

The fourth – Fisheries.

#### **Roberto Pott**

*"We were so optimistic when the Coastal Zone Plan came through, at least I was optimistic that when the plan passed, the Fisheries Bill would have followed shortly. We have to give recognition to the government that they did get the Managed Access Programme started, and that's major progress. It's a major milestone for the region and maybe the world. But we need to get the policy in place that would support Managed Access."*

And the fifth – World Heritage Value.

#### **Amanda Burgos-Acosta, Executive Director, Belize Audubon Society**

*"Yes, we have mentioned the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan and the*

*fact that that policy is now Cabinet endorsed, but it's difficult to enforce it, so it needs some kind of legal teeth. What we really were recommending is that within the World Heritage Site that there is an Act or a Bill that can guide development. That was one of the triggers that actually led to our inscription on the endangered list, because we had development within some of the more pristine sites within our World Heritage."*

While those areas received scores of two, the area of Environmental Regulations received a definite score of one – meaning major concern.

#### **Candy G3n3zalez, President, Belize Institute of Environmental Law & Policy**

*"We can't applaud the Environmental Protection Act like we used to be able to. We've had a lot of promises that it's going to be improved, but until those things are actually put into law, then they're just words and that's the problem with a lot of the things called Cabinet decisions and Memorandums and understandings of one kind or another. They can be made in a day and they can be changed in a day."* According to the organisers and presenters of the scorecard, it's about making sure that all of us realize that we play a role.

#### **Janelle Chanona**

*"Government knows...we have regular meetings and regular conversations with our government partners to consult and to talk about how we move forward from here, but it's just as important for the public to be constantly updated with what is happening, why it's not happening, how it needs to happen, what are we talking about long term. We are custodians of this but we're not just custodians, we are direct beneficiaries – every single one of us through all these goods and services and it's about really thinking about long terms and balancing everything that we have to balance to ensure that we can always benefit from this."*

<http://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/131674>





## Latin American Festival Night Fundraiser

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of August, ENCA hosted a joint fundraiser with As Seen From The Sidecar and raised a total of £1300 to be split between the two organisations. The event began with a talk from Doug Specht on Solidarity with Latin America in a Post-Brexit era. This was followed by James Watson talking on the work of ENCA and introducing speakers from the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign and the Central American Women's Network. Finally, there was a talk from Matt Bishop and Reece Gilkes, of As Seen From The Sidecar, on their plans to circumnavigate the globe on a scooter with a sidecar, telling stories of everyday life and raising awareness and funds for the fight

against modern day slavery. After the talks, there was live Latin American inspired music from the amazing Nana Y La Esencia and DJ sets from Simon de La Onda and Gonzalo. Don't worry if you missed this one though, the organising committee have plans to put on another event in the new year. Special thanks should go out to the speakers, artists, Amy Haworth Johns, Matthew Zimmer, Christian Peña and everyone who came along!

*To read more about As Seen From The Sidecar, visit the website at [www.AsSeenFromTheSidecar.org](http://www.AsSeenFromTheSidecar.org).*



**enca.org.uk**  
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### Meeting Dates 2017

Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> Feb; Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> Jun; Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> Oct

ENCA meetings are held at the NSC's office at the Durham Road Centre, London, N7 7DT. Meetings are held on Sundays from 12:30 pm to 5 pm and we start with lunch which is made up of whatever people attending choose to bring to share.