

# Hol Chan Marine Reserve

A SPAW listed protected area



**Country:** Belize

**Management structure / authority:** Fisheries Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

**Date of establishment:** 1<sup>st</sup> July 1987

**Date of listing under SPAW:** 23 October 2012

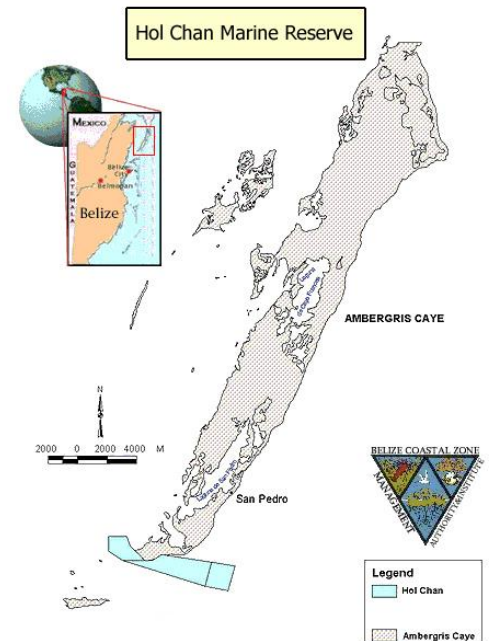
**Size:** 55 sq. km

**Marine surface:** 42 sq. km

## Context:

The Hol Chan Marine Reserve was established in 1987 to conserve a small but representative portion of Belize's coastal ecosystem. The process of establishing the marine protected area involved a complex set of consultations and compromises between tour guides, fishermen, conservationists and government. Ultimately the Marine Reserve was created through a collective initiative and under the Fisheries Act as a multi-use order to ensure sustainable use and guarantee its conservation.

The marine reserve has become an important snorkel and dive site due to its diversity, size and number of fishes found in the area. Management have capitalized on tourism by levying a fee on foreign tourist. Revenues from the visitor's fee are reinvested into management activities of the protected area. This has allowed the marine reserve to finance most of its operations.



## Main fauna populations and/or those of particular importance present (resident or migratory) in the area:

The main fauna population in the marine reserve marine including fish, cnidarians and other invertebrates. Commercially valuable species include various species of fin fish, spiny lobster and queen conch. Also found at the marine reserve are the endangered manatee and marine turtle including the hawksbill, logger head and green turtles.



### Main ecosystems in the area:

In the Hol Chan Marine Reserve, three different habitats can be found, the first one is the coral reef habitat, including the fore reef, the reef crest, the back reef, the Hol Chan Channel and the shark and ray alley.

The second one is the lagoon habitat, that consists chiefly of coarse to fine sand and the seagrasses *Thalassia* and *Syringodium*. In lesser amounts occur sand and rubble zones including sponges, small coral formations and various coralline algae.

The third one is the mangrove habitat, this area of the reserve is comprised of seven mangrove cayes lying just off the southern tip of Ambergris Caye, separated from the cayes by the Coca Chica "cut".

### Potential Threats:

Attaining self-sufficiency from the funds generated from the sale of tickets is currently the biggest issue facing the reserve. The lack of adequate community participation in the management of the reserve is also an issue.

The concentration of visitors in two small areas has already led to the degradation of the reef and seagrass habitat. Land-based sources of pollution from all the development projects occurring on the island pose a serious threat to the integrity of the reserve.

## MANAGEMENT PLAN

### Zoning Plan, Enforcement and Surveillance

- Maintain a sample coral reef ecosystem in its natural state
- Regular patrols
- Underwater "spot" checks
- Spend time explaining the rules of the reserve to the tourists

### Research and Monitoring

- Physical and Chemical studies
- Biological studies
- Socio-economic studies
- Climatic studies
- Continue the reef-mooring program

### Interpretation and Education

- Museum and Resource Center
- Interpretive Materials
- Education and Community Outreach
- Expand the education and research program

### Recreation and Tourism

- Artificial reefs
- Provide recreation and tourism services and preserve the value of the area for fisheries
- Increase the size of the reserve boundaries and staffing

### Environmental Management

- Limit the number of snorkelers
- Conduct more vigilant "underwater" patrols
- Limit scuba diving
- Regulate visitor interactions with the nurse sharks and stingrays

### Administration and Financial Sustainability

- Implement and update the management plan
- Synthesize data and generate reports
- Increase enforcement and surveillance activities
- Increase the entrance fees

### Contact:

Website: [www.holchanmarinereserve.org](http://www.holchanmarinereserve.org)

Email address:

The Hol Chan Marine Reserve is part of the **SPAW protected areas managers network**.

For more information about it: <https://www.car-spaw-rac.org/?Protected-Areas>