

# The Reporter

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## Oceana to protect Belize's unique Reefs

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L-r Andrew Sharpless, Cesare Gaviria, Audrey matura-Sheppard, Dr. Daniel Pandy, Michael Hirshfield.

Oceana, an NGO campaigner, kicked off the opening of their Central American office in Belize with 3 days of events, culminating in a ribbon cutting ceremony at the new Regent Street office.

Oceana's main objective is to protect and restore the world's oceans, which they do through advocacy. They are a team of marine scientists, economists, lawyers, and advocates who promote specific and concrete policy changes to reduce pollution and to prevent the irreversible collapse of fish populations, marine mammals and other sea life. They are global in scope, dedicated to conservation. Oceana has campaigners based in North America, Europe and South America, and now they are in Belize to help protect and preserve Belize's unique reefs.

The Oceana team kicked off the 3-day affair with a cocktail on Friday night, November 13, which was held at Radisson Hotel. The Deputy Prime Minister, Hon. Gaspar Vega, Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment as well as Carolyn Trench-Sandiford, PUP Chairman, both made positive remarks and pledged to offer full support to Oceana in Belize. On Saturday, November 14, the team traveled to South San Pedro, where they gathered at the Banyan Bay Villa, meeting with the Minister of Tourism, Hon. Manuel Heredia. They ended the day with snorkeling, both at the Hol Chan Marine Reserve and Shark Ray Alley, before heading back into the city. The group also travelled west to the capital city, Belmopan, where they met with Governmental officials including the Prime Minister, Hon. Dean Barrow and the CEO in the Ministry of Agriculture, Gabin Canto.

The team of scientists and environmentalists, concluded their 3 day event with a ribbon cutting ceremony at their office, located at the corner of Dean and Regent Streets in Belize City. In attendance to celebrate their great achievement, were Michael Hirshfield, Senior Vice President of North American Oceans and Chief Scientist at Oceana, who gave the welcome address; Andrew Sharpless, Chief Executive Officer at Oceana, who delivered the keynote address; Dr. Daniel Pauly, who has a doctorate degree in Fisheries biology, Former Columbian President, Cesar Gaviria; Imani Fairweather-Morrison, of OAK Foundation; Hon. Marco Pech, Minister of State in the Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment, and Audrey Matura-Shepherd, Vice President of Oceana in Belize who gave the vote of thanks. Rev. Fernando Magana did the blessing of the building, and the ribbon was cut by Hon. Marco Pech and Imani Fairweather-Morrison. Also in attendance was the Leader of the opposition, Hon. Johnny Briceno, among other local governmental entities.

Oceana's main headquarters is located in Washington DC, and they have offices in Madrid, Spain; Brussels, Belgium; Santiago, Chile; Juneau and Anchorage, Alaska; Portland, Oregon; Monterey, California; St. Petersburg, Florida; Boston, Massachusetts, and New York, New York.

To learn more about Oceana, visit their website at [www.oceana.org](http://www.oceana.org).

**By Anita Nembhard - Freelance Writer**