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INTERNATIONAL SCIENTISTS DISCUSS BELIZE'S MARINE BIODIVERSITY

Wed, June 29, 2011

A two day marine conference is underway at the Biltmore Plaza that has the participation of over twenty scientists from around the world. Whilst in country, the scientists will review the status of the country's marine biodiversity and the potential implications of oil exploration and drilling in Belize. Oil Industry Advisor and Consultant, Dr. Frank Gordon Kirkwood spoke with Love News.

Dr. Frank Gordon Kirkwood – Oil industry advisor and consultant

"Offshore is very different than onshore and I demonstrated here with two diving tanks because the pressure that you find when you drill offshore is a lot more than the pressure that you get onshore. In onshore for instance in Spanish Lookout that have relatively small oil wells that have to be pumped to get the oil out of the ground, they are very low pressure so you wither have to have a large nodding donkey pump or now they have a rotary pump to actually get that oil out. Offshore it is totally different because take the Princess acreage for instance the average water depth there is 4,000 feet so before you can even start drilling a well you have to be able to get some pressure control equipment to 4,000 feet under the sea."

Maria Novelo - Reporter

That is seismic testing?

Dr. Frank Gordon Kirkwood – Oil industry advisor and consultant

"No that is drilling. Before you drill on anything in the oil industry you have to run seismic to try and see what is the shape of the structure of the rocks under the ground to allow you to see where they may be oil captured."

Maria Novelo - Reporter

So it is a trial and error process?

Dr. Frank Gordon Kirkwood – Oil industry advisor and consultant

"It is a risk business. In the oil industry you take risk every day. It is a lot of money that you spend to find oil but if you find oil then the rewards can be very big." Among the scientists' chief concerns is how an oil spill would affect the region's biodiversity and economic gains from Belize's fishing and tourism industries. Speaking from firsthand experience of oil drilling and production in Venezuela, Research Associate, Maria Cristina Diaz shared her presentation on oil impacts with Belize.

Maria Novelo - Reporter

Can you make a comparison of what you have seen in Venezuela, how has oil drilling affected or impacted that country and what can you bring to Belize?

Maria Cristina Diaz – Research Associate

"I've always had the sense that Venezuela is a very rich country; we have always been referred to as a rich country. We produce and export over 2 million barrels of oil a day and Venezuela has been doing this for 60 years at least. When I heard that Belize is going to explore oil I said I will hate to see the destruction that is going to happen because that is really what has happened in Venezuela, the Maracaibo Lake which is one of the main places where oil has been explored is completely ecologically destroyed. At first I thought well, how it is going to happen in Belize but then it got further, I did a little research on how our economic indexes compare to our indexes and I realized that in several areas you are better off than what we are. We have a 28% inflation rate each year, this is the highest in the continent and the second highest in the world. We have a very unstable currency and your currency has been two Belizean dollars to one US dollars for twenty years, that is as long as I have been coming to Belize and ours has decreased its value thousand percent in the same time. I would invite people to really look, it is not hard to look on the Internet and look at economic effect and consequences of oil countries and realize that maybe this is not a good example to follow and I would invite to compare with countries like Costa Rica that have as important natural resources as Belize does maybe ore in the jungle, in the environment but that have explored and used it for the benefit of its people. I need to tell people consider who you want to be like, a country like Costa Rica for example or an oil mono exporting country that hasn't much of that greatness that we think that it has."

The marine conference is being carried out by the British Colombia's Fisheries Centre and its Sea Around Us Project, in partnership with Oceana in Belize. The Sea Around Us project was created to document large-scale impacts on Marine ecosystems of the world and to find solutions to the challenges they pose.

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