

Raising the voice of Caribbean Marine Protected Area Managers

[Cancun] (March 1, 2016) *Twenty-five staff of marine national parks from 12 Caribbean countries and territories are meeting this week in Mexico to hone their skills in communications and education.*

Focusing on media, innovations and communications strategies, the meeting seeks to enhance support for coral reef conservation and the sustainable use of marine resources.

“Communicating is at the core of what marine national park managers do – starting with communicating the rules and regulations of a protected area, to engaging communities in decisions, right up to building support amongst high level leaders” explains Ms. Emma Doyle, Coordinator of the meeting from the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute.

“Protecting coastal and marine resources is critical for the sustainable development of the countries of the Wider Caribbean, where an estimated 70% of the 80 million inhabitants live in coastal areas.”

Coming from all corners of the Caribbean, the meeting participants include marine national park staff from Mexico, Belize, Honduras, The Bahamas, the Turks & Caicos Islands, the British Virgin Islands, Bonaire, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines and Grenada. It is taking place in a premier marine national park of the Caribbean, the Parque Nacional Costa Occidental de Isla Mujeres, Cancun y Punta Nizuc.

“The participants identified areas where they most desired training or assistance with communications,” explained Ms. Doyle. “The week’s activity is tailored accordingly and we’re sharing best practices with each other on all aspects of communications.”

“Communicating effectively is essential in a job where we often have to tell a fisher that they can’t fish in a certain place or at a certain time, we have to explain to a tourist why it costs money to visit a protected site, and we have to justify why the marine environment merits public funding. We are tasked with being spokespersons for the marine environment, but too often learn through trial and error,” commented Mrs. Celia Mahung of TIDE Belize.

“Keeping pace with the how to involve young people in marine conservation is another challenge,” she added. On their first international exchange visit as guest speakers, the Junior Rangers of Bonaire National Marine Park in the Netherlands Caribbean are helping others in the region to develop appealing programs for youth.

Organized by the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute, the activity is made possible with support from NOAA’s Coral Reef Conservation Program, and with the participation of experts from The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Sustainable Grenadines Inc., the Grenada Broadcasting Network and STINAPA Bonaire.

For more information please contact Emma Doyle at emma.doyle@gcfi.org.



Participants in the communications meeting – C. Mahung, TIDE Belize, E. Weir, The Bahamas National Trust, V. Clarke and S. Young, Belize Audubon Society (Photo: P. Etienne)