



THE FORCE PROJECT

FUTURE OF REEFS IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

UTILA, COMMUNITY MEETING

July 12th, 2011

OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

The FORCE project, a five-year initiative funded by the European Union, commenced in 2010 and brings together a team of researchers from 20 organisations based in 10 countries within the Caribbean, Europe, the US and Australia.

Caribbean people rely heavily on coral reefs, which contribute billions of dollars each year through tourism, fisheries and coastal protection. Coral reefs are being damaged by activities such as unsustainable fishing and pollution, and face an uncertain future with global climate change.

The FORCE project will address important questions about how changes will affect coastal communities and livelihoods such as fisheries and tourism. Recommendations will be disseminated to stakeholders throughout the Caribbean on how to protect the reefs.

COMMUNITY MEETING

FORCE fieldwork started in Honduras during June 2011. The FORCE team visited West End Roatan, Utila, and the Utila Cays. A meeting was held in Utila to:

- Explore recent changes in tourism, fishing, and the community of East Harbour.
- Talk about changes in people's use of the sea and coral reefs.
- Discuss the groups and organisations involved in coral reef use and management.

People were asked to help build a timeline about changes in Utila and discuss who is involved in looking after the reefs. This leaflet presents the results of this meeting and some early results from the project.

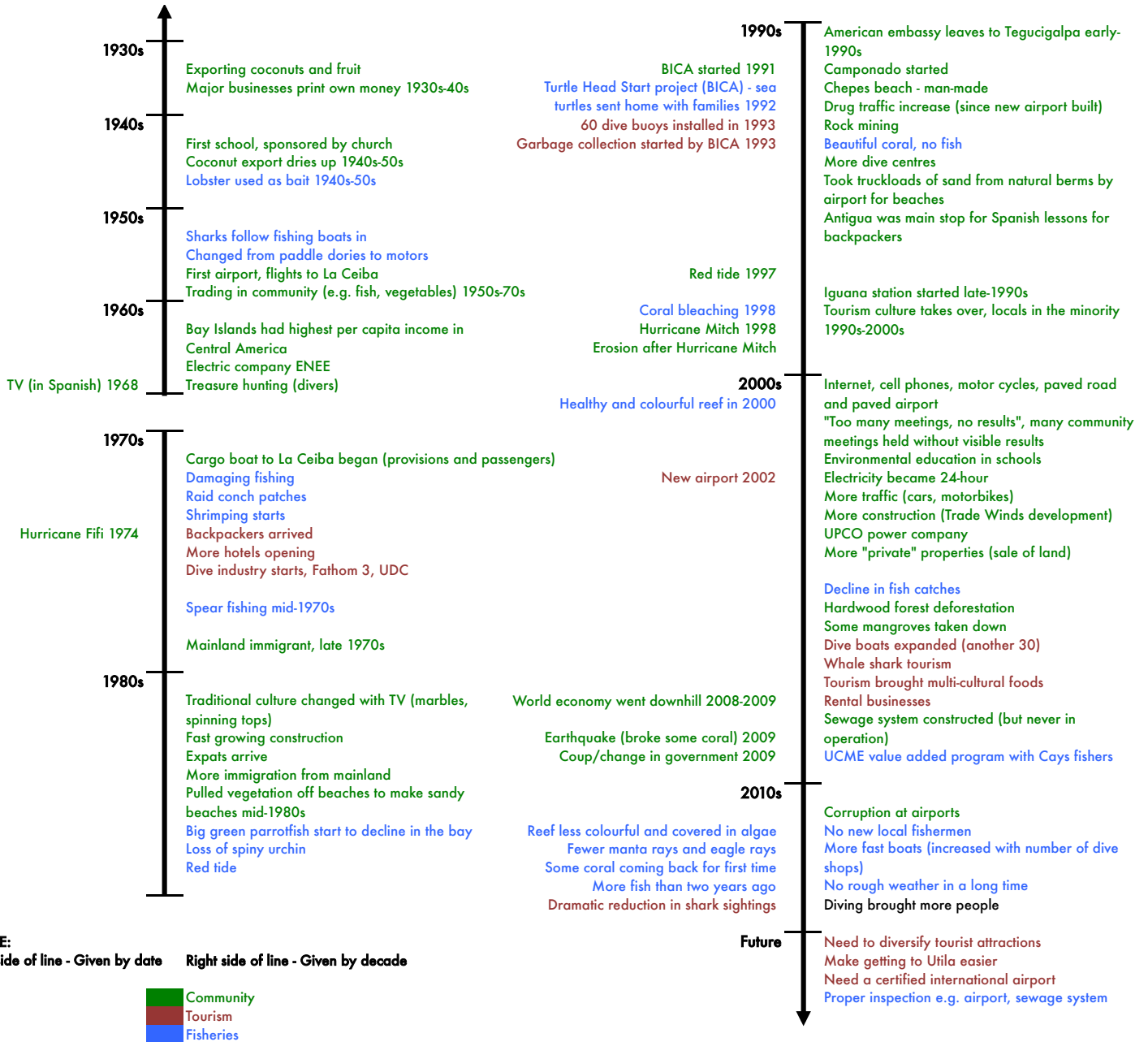
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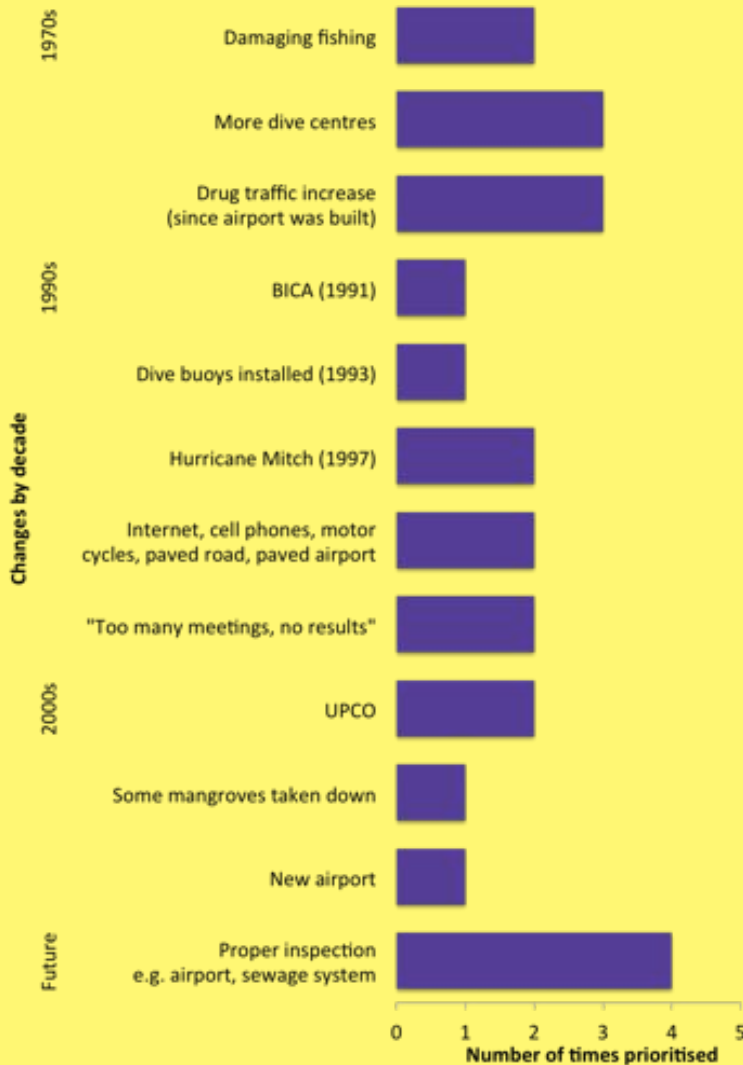
HISTORICAL TIMELINE

The purpose of the timeline was to learn more about the history of the community and the changes that have been important to local people. The timeline shows events and changes in Utila identified by people at the meeting.



KEY EVENTS

People at the meeting identified the most important changes that have affected how people use the reefs.



"WHO SHOULD BE AT A MEETING ABOUT...?"

The FORCE team wanted to find out people's opinions on who should be involved in taking care of the reefs. People identified the following stakeholders that should be invited if a meeting was held about fishing, tourism, or their community. Responses are listed in order of importance according to community members.

1) "... FISHING ON THE REEF?"

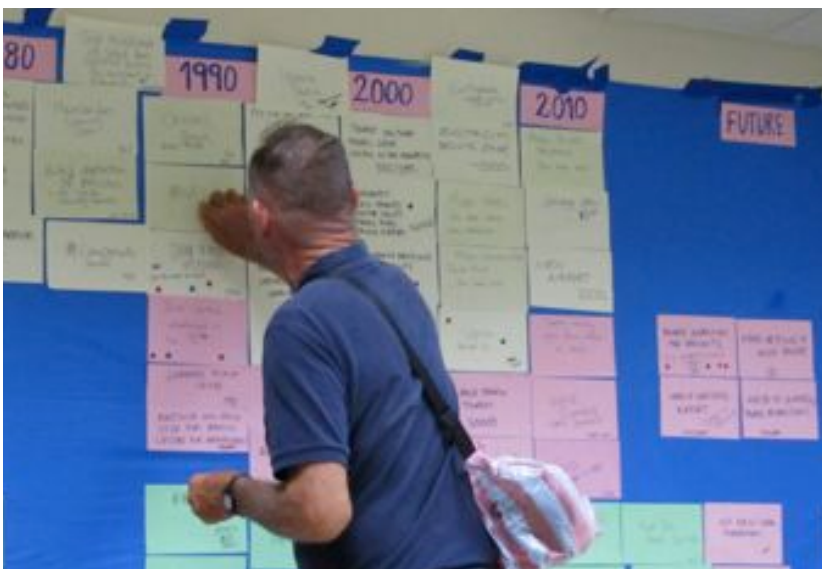
- Fishermen
- Restaurants
- DIGEPESCA
- Regulators
- People from the Cays
- UCME
- BICA
- Fish buyers
- Community members
- Divemasters
- Schools
- Someone from the hyperbaric chamber

2) "...TOURISM ON THE SEA?"

- Dive Shops
- Municipality
- BICA
- NGOs
- Chamber of Tourism, Canatur
- Restaurants
- Hotels
- Schools
- Iguana Station
- Whale Shark & Oceanic Research Centre
- Art galleries
- Police

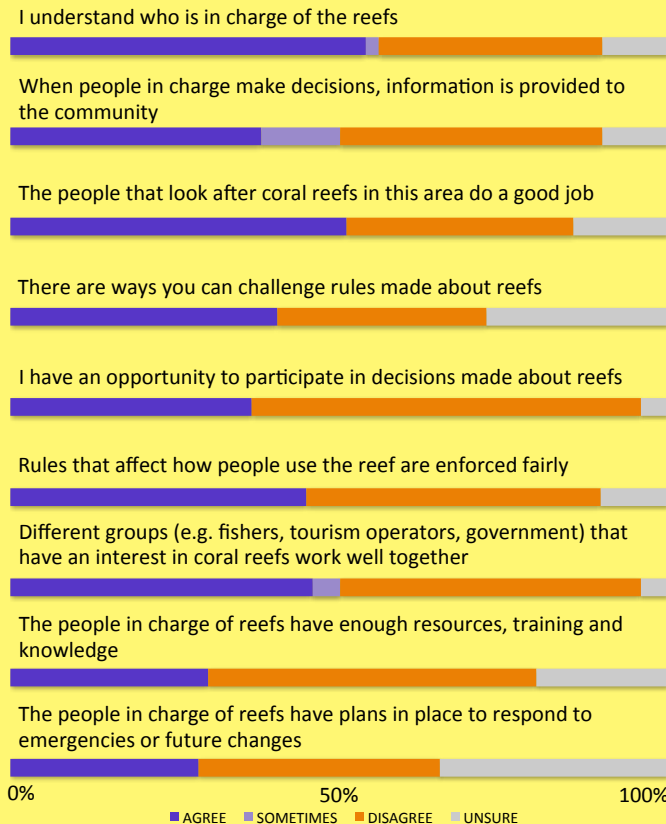
3) "...THE FUTURE OF THE COMMUNITY?"

- Schools/teachers
- Mayor
- Community members
- Bank
- Youth of the community
- Committee for National Plan
- Investors
- Ministers/priests
- Justice of the Peace



OPINIONS ON REEF MANAGEMENT

We are interested to get people's opinions about how the reefs are being looked after. People we interviewed were given a series of statements and asked whether they agreed or disagreed. The following shows the community's feelings about the management of the reefs.



KEY ISSUES

REEF HEALTH

Dive operators and other resource users who have experience of the reefs generally thought that there has been a decline in the numbers of fish, conch and lobster. Most people we spoke to thought that the reefs were reasonably healthy, though some people talked about increasing water temperatures and coral bleaching, increasing boat traffic and pollution from land affecting the reef.

LIVELIHOODS

There was a feeling that the reefs should be better protected as Utila depends almost entirely on the dive industry. In terms of fishing, there is some commercial fishing, but most is in deep water or on offshore banks so direct dependence on the near shore reef is low.

Tourism has provided opportunities for people to get involved in the dive industry, or work as boat captains running snorkelling and fishing trips for tourists. These jobs provide more money than fishing used to. However, some said there are few opportunities for young people, as the tourism industry is saturated, and there are few local dive instructors on the island. People were also concerned about the dependence on this one sector if the health of the reef was to decline in the future.

MANAGEMENT OF THE REEF

Many people were unaware of how the reefs are managed and did not feel they had enough information. Some people said that there was a need to improve relationships between resource users (dive operators and fishers) and BICA. However, people were generally positive about the existing Marine Park, yet few people thought it has had a positive effect on fish populations.

The rules that govern the reefs were generally supported, but people commented that a lack of enforcement is a major problem. There is widespread consensus of the benefits of the reefs for the island, and people state the need for stronger enforcement.



DIVING

Every year thousands of tourists from around the world travel to the Bay Islands to have the chance to experience beautiful coral reefs and abundant fish life. As a result the dive industry plays a very important role in the economy of the Bays Islands. Interviews were carried out with over 20 dive businesses in the Bay Islands to get an understanding of the economic value of the industry. More than 160 SCUBA divers were also interviewed to identify how changes in reef fish could affect the dive industry, and to gather information on the types of divers who visit.

Low-cost SCUBA certifications attract many divers to Utila, many of whom heard about the area either through word of mouth or travel guides. With well over 5,000 certifications per year, some of the dive operators stated that they provide extra training in order to ensure that the high volume of new divers do not negatively affect the reefs

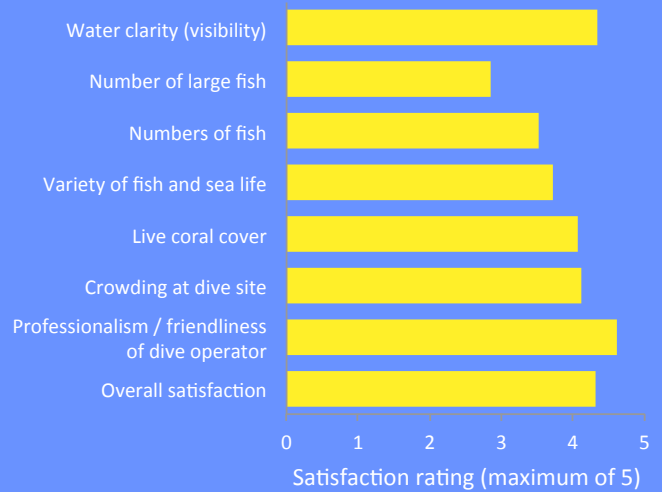
Of the divers who were interviewed in Utila and the Utila Cays (80 in total), 95% were visiting Utila for the first time and 40% said the main reason why they came was to dive. 32% of visitors were from Europe and 32% were from the USA. The divers who come to Utila are mostly beginners, with only 6% of those interviewed certified as Rescue Diver or higher.



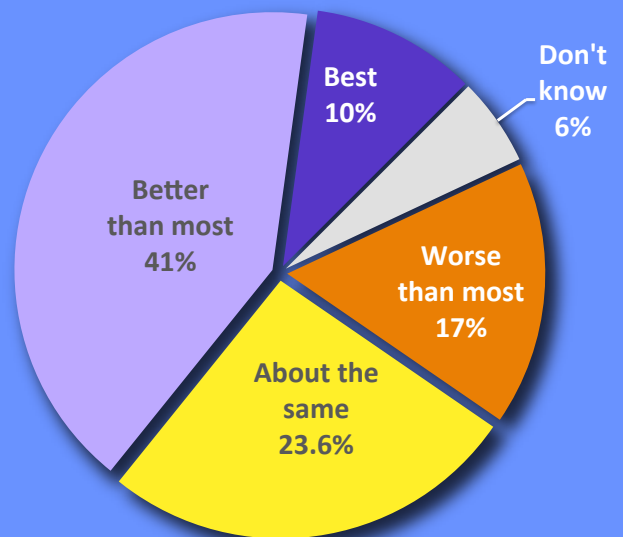
DIVER SATISFACTION

Most of the divers were reasonably satisfied with their recent dives in Utila. Approximately 60% said that Utila was better than most of the places they had dived before and 13% stated that it was the best. Almost all the divers were very satisfied with the experience of diving in Utila. Divers were most satisfied with the professionalism and friendliness of the dive operators and the water visibility on the dive. Divers stated that they would have been more satisfied if they had seen more fish and larger fish on their dives.

DIVER'S LEVEL OF SATISFACTION FROM THEIR MOST RECENT DIVE



HOW WOULD YOU RATE UTILA COMPARED TO OTHER PLACES WHERE YOU HAVE DIVED?



FISHING

Over 90 fishers were interviewed from the Bay Islands, including people who fish for food, for fun and to earn a living. Most were “local islanders”, as well as people from around the north coast of Honduras.

Fishing plays an important role in the lives of many on the Bay Islands. Many of the fishers interviewed in East Harbour, Utila own wooden or fibreglassed dories and fish with rods and reels or by hand. Fishers in East Harbour travel many miles from shore to fishing sites and shallow banks around the Bay Islands. In addition to bottom fishing for deep snapper species such as “Caribbean reds”, “silks” and “yellow-eyes”, many fishers troll for kingfish, wahoo, tuna, mahi mahi, barracuda and spend about 6 hours fishing. Many have had knowledge passed down from their parents on how to fish sustainably, taking only a certain amount of the larger fish. Some of the fishers in the area also take part in the larger-scale commercial fishery where boats travel hundreds of miles offshore to reach the outer banks to capture popular species such as yellow-tail snapper. The average age of the interviewed fishers was 51 years and 52% said that they were fishing less than they did ten years ago, with age being one of the main reasons.



USING THIS INFORMATION

This report shows some of the information we collected from people in Utila Cays. This information will be used to help to describe people’s opinions on how coral reefs are used for fishing and tourism, and how the reefs are being looked after.

The information people shared with us will help to develop an understanding about how people depend on reefs and how they will respond to changes in the future.

While this project is not involved in making decisions, we will share this information with people and organisations involved in reef management and decision-making at local and national levels. None of the information collected during this project will be linked to anyone’s name, but we hope that the project will provide an opportunity to share the interesting stories that we have collected.

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THANK YOU!

Many thanks to all that attended this meeting or took the time to contribute information to our research.

After Honduras FORCE team is conducting further fieldwork in 3 countries.