



# THE FORCE PROJECT

## FUTURE OF REEFS IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

### UTILA CAYS, COMMUNITY MEETING

July 26th, 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 Cays to:

- Explore recent changes in tourism, fishing, and the community of the Utila Cays.
- 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 the Utila Cays 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.

#### CONTENTS:

Historical Timeline  
Key Events  
"A Meeting About..."  
Key Issues  
Diving  
Fishing  
Project Information



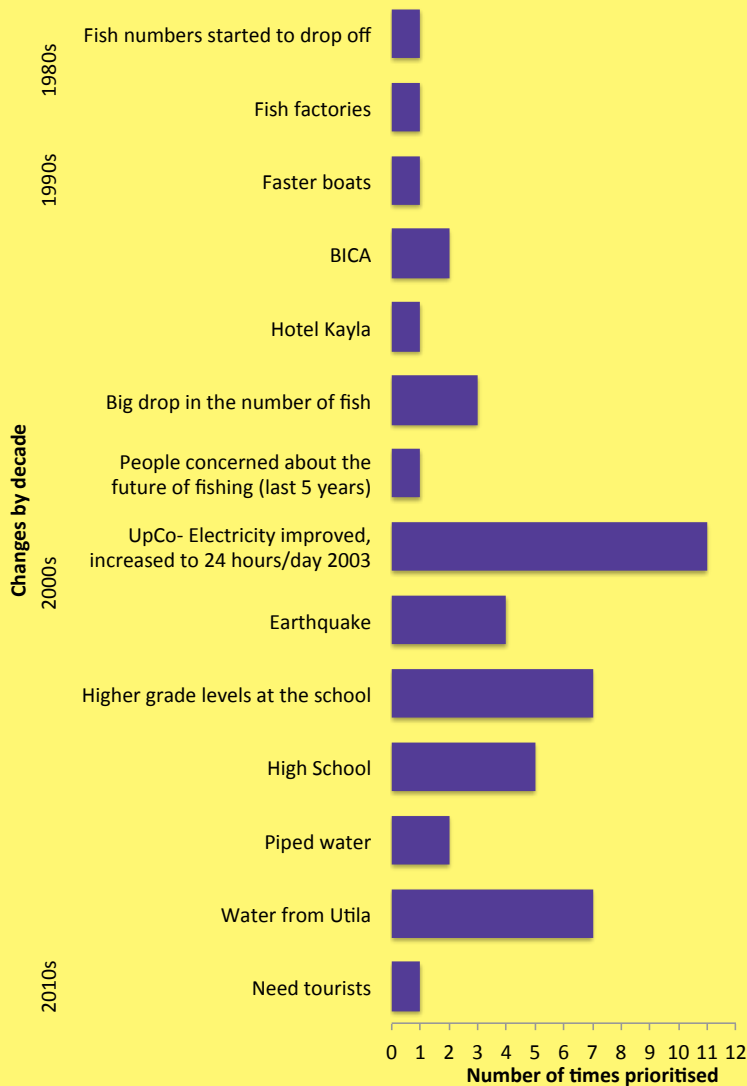
# HISTORICAL TIMELINE

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 the Utila Cays 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?”

- All the fishermen
- The whole community on the Cays
- Fish factory owners
- Alcalde (Mayor)
- Business owners
- BICA

### 2) “...TOURISM ON THE SEA?”

- Alcalde (Mayor)
- Hotel owners
- Restaurant owners
- Dive shops
- Fish factories

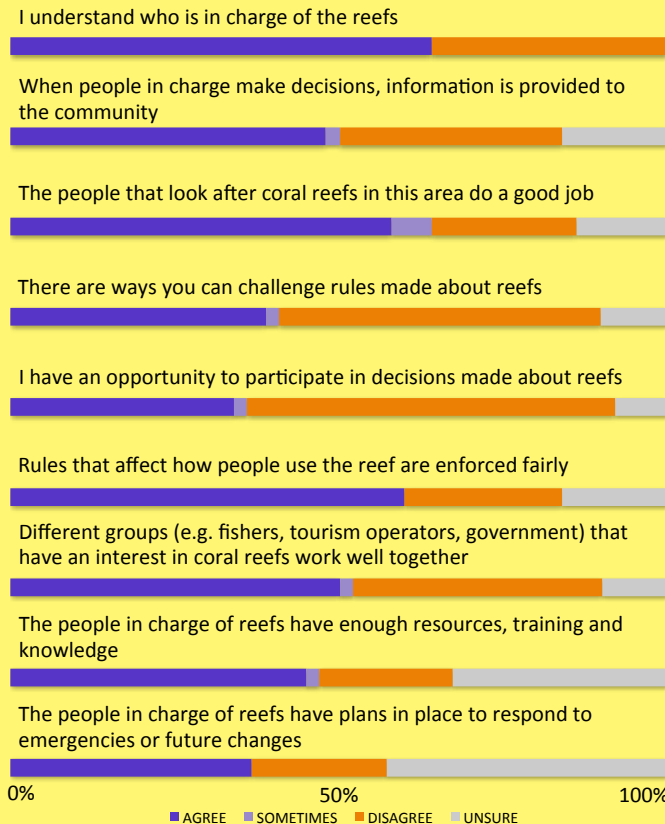
### 3) “...THE FUTURE OF THE COMMUNITY?”

- Herman
- Louis
- Michael
- Jerry
- Sidney
- Alcalde (Mayor)
- Congressmen
- Miss Betty
- School teachers
- UCME (the Steves)
- BICA



## 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

Most people thought that fish, lobster and conch are scarcer now than in the past. People mentioned having to travel further to catch the same amount of fish on the banks. Several people also commented that conch are smaller now than they used to be. However, people commented that most fishers on the Cays do not fish on the near shore reef.

Several other factors were thought to affect the reef, including the increase in population on the island, which has led to encroachment of houses into the sea, breaking up of coral, reclaiming land, over-fishing and increased pollution.

### LIVELIHOODS

Many people were concerned about the future, some saying that within 5 years they are going to be in serious trouble if there is not enough fish to sustain the island. People felt their children have few options in the future, and many people expressed a need for better education on the Cays.

People running businesses on the Cays also said it was difficult to make a living. The Cays do not benefit from tourism in the same way as Utila, and many people are keen to see more tourism on the Cays to provide more job opportunities.

### MANAGEMENT OF THE REEF

Most people on the Cays feel that BICA is the main organisation involved in reef management. However, many people felt that BICA are ineffective and lack resources. People thought there was a need for more patrols at different times of the day to address issues related to fishing on the reef. Not everyone was supportive of BICA, although some expressed the view that BICA should have a stronger role as long as it does not prevent them from fishing.



## 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

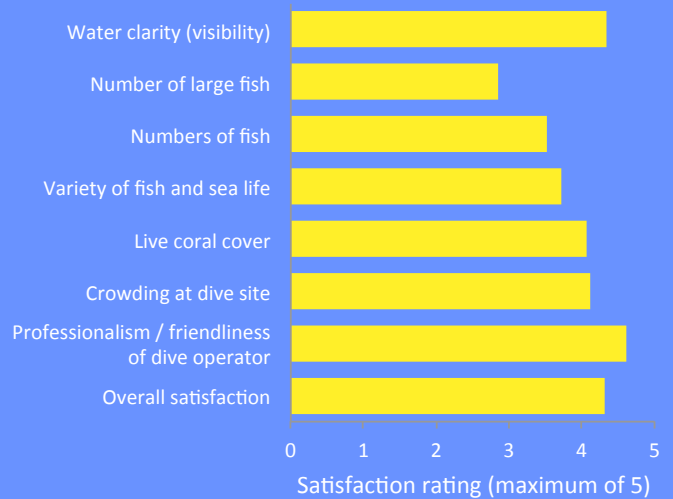
Of the divers who were interviewed in Utila and the Utila Cays (80 in total), 95% were visiting Utila for the first time and 40% said the main reason why they came was to dive. 32% of visitors were from Europe and 32% were from the USA. The divers who come to Utila are mostly beginners, with only 6%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



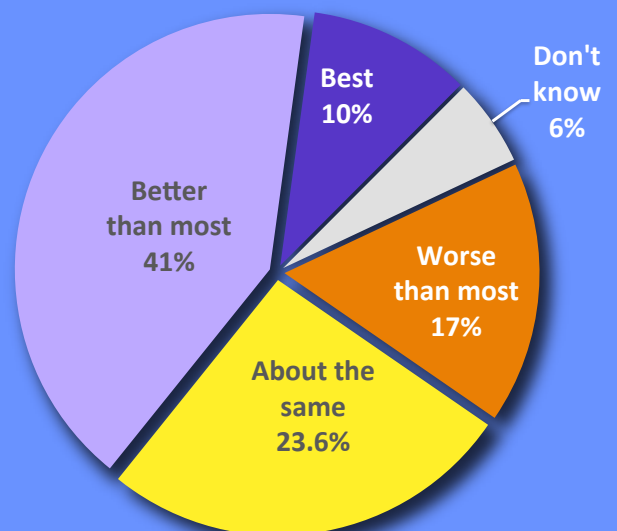
## DIVER SATISFACTION

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. In the Utila Cays, many of the fishers interviewed own wooden or fibreglassed dories and fish with rods and reels or by hand. Fishers in the Utila Cays travel many miles from shore to fishing sites and shallow banks around the Bay Islands. In addition to trolling and bottom fishing for yellow-tail snapper, deep fishing for grouper and snapper species such as “long-tails”, “silks” and “yellow-eyes” is also very popular. Fishers spend about 9 hours line fishing and the average age of the fishers was 46 years. Fishers from the Utila Cays are very knowledgeable about the movement of fish and know how the “moons” and the seasons affect fish behaviour. For example, in the mutton snapper fishery the fishers know how storms trigger the arrival of these fish and so the community gets involved to make use of this opportunity. Diving for lobster and conch also appears to be a very important fishery and high prices are received for their sale. Many people have noticed a decline in the number and size of these animals and are concerned that it may get worse in the future.



## 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.