

Conference in Curaçao Focuses on Solutions for Restoring Reefs on Blue Halo Islands and Beyond

Friday – 29 May 2015

Piscadera, Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles (Waitt Institute)

PISCADERA, CURAÇAO – The Caribbean’s top ocean scientists and managers gathered in Curaçao last week to present research and share ideas for coral reef conservation at the 37th meeting of the [Association of Marine Labs of the Caribbean \(AMLC\)](#). Thanks to sponsorship from the [Waitt Institute](#), participants included fisheries officials from Barbuda and Montserrat.

“It was good to see scientists and policy makers interact. This interaction between science, policy and management is essential to generate (cost-)effective reef management strategies,” said Dr. Mark Vermeij, Science Director of the [Carmabi Foundation](#) and host of the conference.

[Andy Estep](#), the Waitt Institute’s Science Manager, reported, “throughout the weeklong conference, experts working in the region presented research on the threats to the Caribbean’s marine ecosystems, but, much more importantly, they focused on promising solutions for recovery of the regions reefs and fisheries.” One such presentation, by [Dr. Jeremy Jackson](#), revealed that 40 years of data prove protecting algae-eaters (like parrotfish and urchins) and maintaining good water quality were among the most significant ways local communities could begin to improve the health of their coral reefs and fisheries.

Solution-focused, actionable research is what underlies the work of the Waitt Institute in general and the [Blue Halo Initiative](#) in particular. Via this initiative the Institute partners with island governments (currently, Barbuda, Montserrat, and Curaçao) to envision, design, and implement sustainable ocean policies. Estep made presentations on the success to-date of the Blue Halo Initiative in Barbuda, the importance of using both biological and cultural data for designing ocean zoning, as well as the concept of developing a new platform for the management of ocean data.

Mr. Alwyn Ponteen, Montserrat’s Chief Fisheries Officer, said that attending the conference will enable him to “provide value-added technical advice to the Government of Montserrat and ocean resource-dependant stakeholders.” He added that he intends to use the knowledge and professional contacts he has gained to “improve future management, governance, conservation, development and use of our ocean resource ecosystems services under national jurisdiction.”

Scientists associated with the [Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network \(GCRMN\)](#) used this meeting as an opportunity to further their work building the gold standard for coral reef monitoring. Right now there is no standardized approach for monitoring the health of the regions coral reefs. Core GCRMN collaborators, including the Waitt Institute’s Science Manager Andy Estep, are finalizing standardized research methods and building consensus for their adoption. This will allow researchers and policymakers to compare, apples-to-apples, the health of different coral reefs and the effectiveness of different management measures.

In sum, the AMLC meeting was far more than just a conference. It was an exchange of data, strategies, and solutions that will enable Caribbean islands to reverse the declining health of their coral reefs and fisheries, and make strides towards using the ocean without using it up.

Additional information and resources:

Waitt Institute: <http://www.WaittInstitute.org>

Carmabi Foundation: <http://www.carmabi.org>

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Dropbox folder with press photos: bit.ly/WI-PressReleasePhotos

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Alwyn Ponteen, Chief Fisheries Officer, Montserrat Fisheries, Montserrat, 664.496.1996

Waitt Institute: The [Waitt Institute](http://www.WaittInstitute.org) endeavors to ensure ecologically, economically, and culturally sustainable use of ocean resources. The Institute partners with governments committed to developing and implementing comprehensive, science-based, community-driven solutions for sustainable ocean management. Our goal is to benefit coastal communities while restoring fish populations and habitats. Our approach is to engage stakeholders, provide the tools needed to design locally appropriate policies, facilitate the policymaking process, and build capacity for effective implementation and long-term success.