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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PILOT PROJECT TO MONITOR AND SURVEIL AKUMAL'S FISH REFUGE LAUNCHED—A FIRST OF ITS KIND IN MEXICO

On Tuesday, January 17, 2017, Centro Ecológico Akumal (CEA) added the *Control Center for Monitoring and Surveillance of the Akumal Fish Refuge* to its list of conservation projects in Akumal. In partnership with the Nature Conservancy, the launch of this pilot project aims to provide surveillance on the fish refuge and monitor the commercial fish stocks to move Akumal towards more sustainable fishing practices that will preserve the ecosystem biodiversity and allow the commercial fish stocks to recover.

According to CEA's ongoing monitoring activities, commercial fish stocks have decreased by 60 per cent over the past seven years.

"This decrease can be attributed to mainly overfishing but also to coral reef degradation, increased tourism activities and water quality. Yet despite the ZRPA (Zona Refugio Pesquero Akumal) being decreed a no-take zone in April 2015, illegal fishing in the area continues and commercial fish stocks remain at a critical level, says Ivan Penié, project and Research Coordinator at CEA.

"By improving the surveillance within the area and having the support from the local fishing cooperatives and sport fishing charters, we will be able to gain better insight and have more robust channels for reporting so that the authorities can take action."

Penié explains that the surveillance and monitoring project is a four-prong approach. In addition to the onshore video surveillance that will continually stream activity in the refuge to a monitoring center, several boats will be armed with electronic devices to track such things as conditions and fishing location trends. Fishing charters will also be issued phones with an easy-to-use application to document their catch such as measurements, images, size which can be input directly to the monitoring database.

CEA's researchers will also be completing in-water transects at various times and locations to establish the baseline of commercial fish stocks in Akumal to measure the overall effectiveness of the fish refuge.

“A key part of this project is the community involvement, states Penié. “We will be doing workshops geared to both the local Mexican and foreign communities to collaborate in the surveillance and monitoring. It is an opportunity for all facets of the community to work together for a common goal for securing healthy and sustainable coastal fisheries.”

A surveillance and monitoring project like this is the first of its kind in not only in Quintana Roo, but in Mexico.

With the current financial backing of the Nature Conservancy, the project is slated to run for the duration of 2017 with various assessments and evaluations to determine the future of the project at the end of its term.

Centro Ecológico Akumal is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping create a model for sustainable tourism development in the Mexican Caribbean, through research, education and outreach.

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MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE AKUMAL FISH REFUGE

[Akumal Fish Refuge: Officially decreed by government](#)