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Eighth Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) to the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) in the Wider Caribbean Region

Panama City, Panama, 5 - 7 December 2018

Caribbean Wildlife Enforcement Network (CaribWEN)

Briefing

For reasons of economy and the environment, Delegates are kindly requested to bring their copies of the Working and Information documents to the Meeting, and not to request additional copies.

CaribWEN: Caribbean Wildlife Enforcement Network

Overview

The illegal trafficking in wildlife is recognized as a global threat to many protected plant and animal species, and affects all countries and regions. This trade has been recognized by the United Nation's Sustainability Agenda, including targets 15.7 and 15.c of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These targets specifically urge countries to end wildlife poaching and trafficking.¹ The UN General Assembly adopted resolution 69/314 [*Tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife*] in July 2015, recognizing the economic, social and environmental impacts of the global illegal trade in wildlife and calling for Member States to take decisive steps at the national level to prevent, combat, and eradicate this trade.² With its mandates to protect wild flora and fauna in the Region, the SPAW Protocol requires Parties to adopt cooperative measures to ensure the protection and recovery of endangered and threatened species of flora and fauna listed in its Annexes.³ This includes preventive measures, such as the prohibition of certain activities and enforcement of national legal and regulatory instruments, to achieve these ends.

With its unique and extraordinary biodiversity, the Caribbean is under constant threat from organized wildlife criminals. Both terrestrial and marine species in the region are harvested, hunted and trafficked, including turtles and other reptiles, queen conch, sharks, birds, and forest products. Because this activity often involves organized crime syndicates, addressing this trade requires a coordinated and committed regional response. Wildlife enforcement networks that coordinate and pool expertise to combat wildlife crime and facilitate regional cooperation have proven to be effective tools in combating wildlife crime.⁴ However, no such network currently exists in the Caribbean region.

It is within this framework, and the increasing global profile and dedication of effort towards addressing the trafficking in protected species, that the UNEP Caribbean Environment Program (CEP) Secretariat announces its commitment to support the establishment and implementation of a Caribbean Wildlife Enforcement Network (CaribWEN) in partnership with, and under the leadership of, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

CaribWEN History and Foundations

July 20-22, 2016: UNODC, on behalf of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime and in collaboration with the Government of the Bahamas, organized the first "Caribbean Regional Wildlife Enforcement Workshop" in Nassau. The workshop brought together experts and

¹ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/> and https://www.cites.org/eng/CITES_welcomes_UN_SDGs_with_target_to_end_poaching_trafficking_wildlife_25092015

² http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/69/314

³ SPAW Protocol, Article 11 (1). Under this article, Parties are required to prohibit the taking, possession, killing and commercial trade in Annex I and II species and regulate the collection, harvest and trade in Annex III species.

⁴ http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/World_Wildlife_Crime_Report_2016_final.pdf

government officials from 11 countries in the region to discuss and identify key threats and recommendations in relation to wildlife crime, and with a view to strengthening and enhancing regional cooperation and enforcement. The workshop recommended the establishment of a CaribWEN which would facilitate increased information sharing, provide a platform for capacity building and sustainable financing, and lead to greater enforcement actions. Central to the initiative was the identification of country focal points in order to facilitate ongoing dialogue between interested parties.⁵

May 10-11, 2017: The second regional meeting of CaribWEN was convened in Bridgetown, Barbados. Focal points from eight countries were present, reaffirming interest in the establishment of CaribWEN, and discussing a possible structure and framework for network coordination and implementation. At this workshop, participants agreed that UNODC and UNEP were uniquely positioned to support the formal creation and future coordination of CaribWEN

Since that time, CEP has affirmed its commitment to supporting UNODC's leadership and providing regional coordination to assist in the development of CaribWEN under the auspices of its SPAW Program. With the programmatic infrastructure provided by the SPAW Regional Activity Center (RAC), coupled with the mandates to protect species under the Protocol, the CEP is positioned to support UNODC in its coordination of CaribWEN.

Coordination and Next Steps

The following objectives were agreed to by participating Member States at the 2017 Barbados meeting and serve as the cornerstone for the next steps in 2019.

CaribWEN objectives

1. Joint enforcement among countries to detect and intercept illegal trafficking of terrestrial and marine wildlife;
2. Timely and secure exchange of information and intelligence on wildlife crime and criminal networks;
3. Capacity building and training including border control, legal, technical and operational components for officers in member countries;
4. Collaboration on developing harmonized policies and regulations on dealing with cases of wildlife trafficking by air, sea and land.

CEP will offer to support UNODC in achieving these objectives.

⁵ The workshop declaration is appended to this briefing.

Caribbean Wildlife Trade

Wildlife trafficking—the illegal poaching, transit, trade and sale of wildlife—is one of the most lucrative forms of transnational organized criminal activity.⁶ UNEP has identified the illegal trade in terrestrial and marine animals and plants as one of the largest sources of criminal earnings in the world, on a par with the trafficking of drugs, people and arms, and estimated to be worth US\$50-150 billion per year.⁷ The primary markets for wildlife crime include seafood; pets; zoos and breeding; food, medicine and tonics; art, décor and jewelry; cosmetics and perfume; fashion; and furniture. These activities affect local communities, endanger local wildlife populations and may lead to the violation of human rights.⁸

Although there are currently no comprehensive analyses of the extent and magnitude of wildlife trafficking in the Caribbean Region, some consolidated data exists for the Latin American region as a whole (including Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America). Like many regions struggling against this trade, the Caribbean is home to many developing countries, has thousands of imperiled and endemic species amidst great biological diversity, and struggles with corruption and enforcement. The Latin American region as a whole, including the Caribbean, has been designated a priority region for combating wildlife crime by the United Nations.⁸

For perspective, between 2005 and 2014, over 13,000 shipments of wildlife and wildlife products—out of nearly 50,000 *worldwide*—originated in Latin America and were denied entrance at US ports of entry. Globally, shares of total seizures from Latin America for that timeframe represent about 15% of all trade.⁹ For the US only, shipments were exported from 45 of 72 countries and territories in the Latin American region, with Mexico exporting more than 70 percent of shipments. The majority of this trade was sourced from wild populations and imported for personal use or consumption. For US ports of entry, the top five countries of export for wildlife products includes Mexico, Haiti, Peru, El Salvador, and The Bahamas.¹⁰ The United States is generally believed to be one of the largest consumers of illegal wildlife and wildlife products.

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and CITES, the top-five seized species (genus) from the Region include conch, sea turtles, caimans, crocodiles, and iguanas.¹¹ Some areas of potential concern can be identified from this regional aggregated data. For example, shipments involving illegal queen conch were most frequently exported from Haiti

⁶ Goyenechea, A., & Indenbaum, R. A. (2015). Combating wildlife trafficking from Latin America to the United States. Defenders of Wildlife. 95 pp. <https://defenders.org/sites/default/files/publications/combating-wildlife-trafficking-from-latin-america-to-the-united-states-and-what-we-can-do-to-address-it.pdf>

⁷ UNEP. (2014). UNEP Year Book 2014: Emerging Issues in our Global Environment. United Nations Environment Programme, Nairobi

⁸ Goyenechea, A., & Indenbaum, R. A. (2015). Combating wildlife trafficking from Latin America to the United States. Defenders of Wildlife. 95 pp. <https://defenders.org/sites/default/files/publications/combating-wildlife-trafficking-from-latin-america-to-the-united-states-and-what-we-can-do-to-address-it.pdf>

⁹ UNODC. (2016). World Wildlife Crime Report: Trafficking in protected species. New York: United Nations. 101 pp. http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/World_Wildlife_Crime_Report_2016_final.pdf

¹⁰ Defenders of Wildlife. (2016). Trends in wildlife imports from Latin America denied entry to the United States. Fact Sheet 1. https://defenders.org/sites/default/files/publications/trends_in_wildlife_trade_from_latin_america_to_the_us.pdf

¹¹ Goyenechea, A., & Indenbaum, R. A. (2015). Combating wildlife trafficking from Latin America to the United States. Defenders of Wildlife. 95 pp. <https://defenders.org/sites/default/files/publications/combating-wildlife-trafficking-from-latin-america-to-the-united-states-and-what-we-can-do-to-address-it.pdf>

and seized in Miami, and about half of the shipments involving the common caiman were exported from Mexico.¹² The Dominican Republic is the most common exporting country for endangered hawksbill sea turtle items, and over half of the shipments of the common iguana were exported from Mexico. A number of iguana species are hunted for food or the high-end black-market pet trade, and several iguana species of the insular Caribbean are among the most endangered group of lizards in the world.¹³ The majority of these specimens are sourced from the wild.¹⁴

Latin America's marine species, including sharks, sea cucumbers and totoaba, are also targets of the illegal wildlife trade. For example, in October 2015, over 1,300 pounds (602 Kg) of endangered totoaba fish bladders originating from Mexico and in transit to Hong Kong (through Venezuela) were seized by customs officers in Puerto Rico. In that same month, Mexican officials seized an illegal shipment of 17 tons of sea cucumbers.¹⁵ This illegal trade can also threaten other local endangered species. For instance, the totoaba is endemic to the Gulf of California where the critically endangered vaquita resides. Illegal fishing for totoaba has led to the entanglement (bycatch) and demise of this small porpoise whose entire population contains less than 30 individuals.

This snapshot of wildlife trade in the Latin American and Caribbean region suggests that the potential significance and impact of this trade should not be underestimated. An analysis of SPAW-listed species in trade has not been conducted to date. Despite this lack of comprehensive data, a survey of media reports on cases in South and Central America and the Caribbean provides insights into, and some measure of, the trade's alarming dimensions. Within the region, all countries play a role as either source, transit or destination countries. CaribWEN can provide the means to begin to collect and assess the magnitude and impact of the trade, and to share the responsibility to act.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ <https://www.fws.gov/international/pdf/Caribbean-Iguana-Workshop-Proceedings.pdf>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Goyenechea, A., & Indenbaum, R. A. (2015). Combating wildlife trafficking from Latin America to the United States. Defenders of Wildlife. 95 pp. <https://defenders.org/sites/default/files/publications/combating-wildlife-trafficking-from-latin-america-to-the-united-states-and-what-we-can-do-to-address-it.pdf>