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

Virtual Meeting, 17-19 March 2021

**SUMMARY OF THE CARIBBEAN GLOBAL CORAL REEF
MONITORING NETWORK ACTIVITIES 2019 - 2020**





CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION 3
2. MAIN EVENTS..... 3
3. ONGOING ACTIONS.....4
ANNEXES 7



ACRONYMS

AGGRA	Atlantic and Gulf Rapid Reef Assessment
GCRMN	Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network
ICRI	International Coral Reef Initiative
ICRS	International Coral Reef Symposium
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
SCTLD	Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease
SPAW	Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife
STAC	Scientific and Technical Committee
UNEP-CEP	United Nations' Caribbean Environment Programme

Summary of the Caribbean Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network activities for 2019 – 2020

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Definition

The Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN) was established to support the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI)'s Call to Action and Framework for Action in 1994. It works through regional networks, comprising a variety of institutions, with the aim of strengthening the provision of the best available scientific information and communication on the status and trends of coral reef ecosystems, for their conservation and management.

1.2 GCRMN- Caribbean

The GCRMN-Caribbean is an open network of coral reef scientists, managers and government expert representatives involved with coral reef monitoring in the region, led by a Steering Committee with the support of UNEP-CEP and the SPAW-RAC as regional coordinator.

2. MAINS EVENTS

2.1 Participation to two meetings of the Global GCRMN's Steering Committee (Thailand, May 2019 & February 2020)

May 2019 – This event focused on the current status of corals reefs monitoring in each region. The meeting also made floor for a discussion on how to reinvigorate the less active regions, and helped confirming the structures of GCRMN in the regions. This event was an occasion to have a glance on the first structure of the 2020 global report.

February 2020 – This workshop was the last official meeting before the writing and the release of the “Status and trends of coral reefs of the world 2020 report”. The previous global report dates from 2008. The aim was to gather coral reefs experts and some data providers. First the GCRMN team wanted to present the preliminary results of their analyses and ask for help with the interpretation. Secondly it was the opportunity to support the GCRMN team to prepare the report by advising them on many topics (the structure, the main issues, the regional contexts, the way of communication, etc...).

2.2 Organization of the GCRMN-Caribbean's Steering Committee (Bonaire, January 2020)

For the first time in 3 years, the members of the GCRMN–Caribbean's Steering Committee managed to gather. The members established the Workplan for 2020 and 2021, and the Rules of Procedures and Terms of Reference.



Fig 1: Participants to the meeting of the GCRMN-Caribbean's Steering Committee in Bonaire

This event was co-organized by SPAW-RAC and the Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance, and gathered 28 attendees (15 members of the Steering committee, plus 13 experts from other organizations and members at large).

This regional meeting has sired a message to the Global-GCRMN that wishes to emphasize gaps in the 2020 report, to promote inclusion of socio-economic parameters in future reports, and to gather data on coastal and marine resource dependent communities (for understanding trends in coral reef health, and informing decision-making), and on emergent issues such as the Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease.

2.3 14th International Coral Reef Symposium (ICRS) in Bremen planned on July 2020 (postponed)

In order to communicate on the status of the Caribbean coral reef at the ICRS 2020 organized by ICRI and initially planned in July 2020 in Bremen (Germany), SPAW-RAC has prepared an abstract and shared it with the members of the GCRMN–Caribbean's Steering Committee to finalize it.

As this meeting has been postponed, this communication is still under preparation.

3. ONGOING ACTIONS

3.1 Daily animation of the forum

SPAW-RAC moderates the GCRMN-Caribbean forum that gathers more than 130 members and provides it, on a daily basis, with pieces of information regarding webinars, various documents, events, etc. that could be of any interest to them.

3.2 Training workshops - last one occurred in Honduras, December 2019

The GCRMN-Caribbean has produced various guidelines to better understand biophysics aspects of coral reefs in the Caribbean and provided keys for an efficient monitoring that takes into account socioeconomic features. Therefore, the SPAW-RAC has enforced training workshops to broadcast this methodology in the Wider Caribbean Region and ensure standardized data collection across complex and culturally heterogeneous societies.

Under the auspices of the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network in the Caribbean Region and funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) - Coral Reef Conservation Fund, SPAW-RAC has organized the 1st Coral Reef and Human Dimensions Monitoring in the Mesoamerican Reef Socio-Economic Assessment Workshop. The meeting was held on December 9th-13th 2019 on the Bay Island of Roatán, Honduras. The training, conducted by Arie Sanders, Associate Professor from the Panamerican Agriculture School of Zamorano, accompanied by Sara Bonilla, research assistant, enabled 15 resource managers and practitioners from Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico to implement the GCRMN-Caribbean socio-economic guidelines (formerly SocMon) in Marine Protected Areas in their home countries. After the training, participants will have to produce a socio-economic site assessment of their affiliated marine protected area in each of the 4 participating countries.

3.3 Contribution to the 2020 GCRMN Status of Coral Reefs of the World report

The International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) and the GCRMN launched a « call of data » to produce a report regarding the “status and trends of the coral reefs in the world”.

SPAW-RAC took the lead for the Caribbean region in asking members of its network to share their data and insights regarding corals status and trends per bioregion. These collected data and analyses took the shape of a chapter dedicated to the Caribbean region, the Global-GCRMN pre-wrote the draft and SPAW-RAC shared it for review to the member of the Steering Committee. The GCRMN should issue its global report in February 2021. A preview is supposed to be shown during the ICRI meeting that will be promoted at the beginning of February.

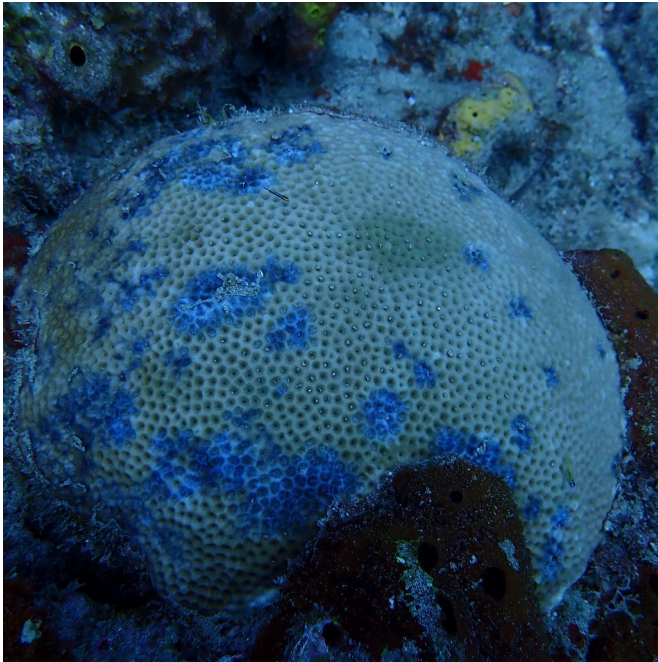
3.4 Helping merging a regional database on corals in the Caribbean

There is no dedicated platform where data regarding status and trends of the corals in the Caribbean region can be found. It has been considered that SPAW-RAC could help by gather the GCRMN data and the Atlantic and Gulf Rapid Reef Assessment (AGGRA) ones into a unique database which could possibly be hosted by AGGRA. The issue next year of the GCRMN report will help creating this database. At the same time SPAW-RAC also worked on a unique index of coral species and allies that can be found in the Caribbean, but it is still under preparation.

3.5 Response to the Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD)

SPAW-RAC is also involved into the SCTLD Response Caribbean Cooperation Team coordinated by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), making linkages with french speaking countries, and to the Coral Restoration Consortium for the organization of Reef Futures 2021. Any pieces of information regarding SCTLD is sent to the coordination of the SCTLD Regional Cooperation Team (in this case, Ms. Patricia Kramer who is a member of the GCRMN- Caribbean Steering Committee).

2.



3.



*Figure 2. SCTL on Siderastrea sp in Guadeloupe
Figure 3. Attending the World GCRMN event in Bangkok in January.*

ANNEX 1. Accepted abstract from the GCRMN-Caribbean for the ICRS 2020 (postponed)

Cross-disciplinary monitoring for Caribbean Coral Reef status

The Wider Caribbean Region (WCR), comprising the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico, includes continental coastlines as well as a wide array of islands of different sizes, geology and socio-economic features. Their coasts harbour coral reefs of fundamental importance for marine biodiversity, regional economy (mainly fisheries and tourism), coastal protection and well-being of populations. Isolated for millions of years, the WCR has a high level of endemism but also a relatively poor diversity in coral species.

In the 70s and 80s, shallow water reefs experienced a critical decline of *Acropora* spp., key reef building corals, and of the long-spined sea-urchin, an important algal grazer. Since then, the general assessment shows a high macro-algal cover and limited live coral cover with a regional average of only 17% in 2012. Although healthy and resilient reefs remain at certain locations, most have been declining for decades and are still on a downward slope.

Thus, Caribbean coral reefs are now broadly in poor condition due to increasing stresses and their conservation status is compromised. Threats include direct damage of reefs and associated habitats, water pollution, overfishing and depletion of key herbivorous species. Larger scale stressors, such as bleaching events, ocean acidification, extreme weather events, Sargassum strandings, disease outbreaks and invasive species are also impacting Caribbean reefs.

In response, many initiatives at regional, national or local scales are being implemented in the WCR to monitor, protect and restore reefs, while improving awareness. Following the “Status and Trend of Caribbean Coral Reefs 1970-2012”, United Nations’ Caribbean Environment Programme (UNEP-CEP) decided to strengthen the monitoring efforts in the region. Hence, the GCRMN-Caribbean produced new biophysical and socio-economic guidelines in 2016, endorsed and promoted by regional experts. Linkages between these two aspects have been addressed for a long time in the Caribbean. It enables an integrated comprehension of reef status that leads to improved decision making. Training workshops are regularly convened to disseminate this methodology in the WCR and ensure standardized data collection across complex and culturally heterogeneous societies. Through the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem project, UNEP-CEP also aims to integrate these data into an exhaustive regional marine habitat report and an associated action plan towards efficient conservation efforts.

ANNEX 2. GCRMN-Caribbean SocMon Training Workshop (December 2019, Roatán, Honduras)



ANNEX 3. GCRMN-CARIBBEAN UPCOMING ACTIONS

GCRMN – Global
<p>- Coordinate the data collection and analysis of the Caribbean content of the Global report</p> <p>=> share the unanimous observation: a diminution of corals and an increase of algae is observed. Exposed the following threats : Lionfish invasion, sargassum, upcoming of the SCTL D ...</p>
<p>- Highlighted => the need to take into account socioeconomic features in the next Global Report</p>
GCRMN – Caribbean
<p>- Integrated monitoring</p> <p>=> guidelines to better understand biophysics aspects of coral reefs in the Caribbean and provided keys for an efficient monitoring that takes into account socioeconomic features.</p>
<p>- Improved data collection, analysis and reporting / link with AGGRA</p>
<p>- Daily management (ToRs, communication, ...).</p>
<p>- Develop advocacy/ Ensuring liaise with ICRI, UNEP Coral Reef Unit, CRC, NOAA (Post Hurricane effort, SCTL D, etc)</p>
<p>- Looking for funding opportunities</p>