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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

Session One: 17-19 March 2021

Session Two: 14-15 April 2021

**BRIEF BACKGROUND ON SPECIES  
(Sharks, Rays, Parrotfish)**

*For reasons of public health and safety associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, this meeting is being convened virtually. Delegates are kindly requested to access all meeting documents electronically for download as necessary.*

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## SHARKS AND RAYS

The initial list reviewed by the Ad Hoc Working Group during the 6<sup>th</sup> SPAW STAC (2014) included 123 species, among which were *Manta sp. cf. Birostris*, *Sphyrna mokarran*, *Sphyrna zygaena*, *Carcharhinus longimanus* and *Rhincodon typus*. These species were grouped according to the degree of protection considered most appropriate (i.e., Annex I/II, or Annex III). The Ad Hoc Species Working Group assessed those five species as priority species for listing on Annex II and the 6<sup>th</sup> SPAW STAC later recommended that the Ad Hoc Working Group be reestablished in the intersessional period to continue its work on this matter.

*Carcharhinus longimanus*, *Rhincodon typus*, *Manta sp. cf. Birostris*, *Sphyrna mokarran*, *Sphyrna zygaena* were first nominated by the Netherlands during the 7<sup>th</sup> SPAW STAC (2016). Following the discussions, these species were listed during the 9<sup>th</sup> SPAW COP (2017) under Annex III of the SPAW Protocol as reflected in the Recommendations of the STAC Meeting. Annex II listing was considered as premature because of the lack of scientific information and the importance of the species to the economy of certain Member States.

Nominating those 5 species in Annex II of the SPAW Protocol was reiterated by France during the 8<sup>th</sup> SPAW STAC (2018). Only three experts assessed the proposals leading to difficulties to draw clear conclusions. A large debate took place during STAC8 on whether the species met the criteria and if the proposals should/could be provided with more information before concluding (particularly in regard to having enough scientific information- criterion 1, versus a precautionary approach- criterion 2 of the guidelines). As a consensus could not be reached, it was concluded that the matter would be transferred to the 9<sup>th</sup> SPAW STAC/11<sup>th</sup> SPAW COP, meanwhile *Manta sp. cf. Birostris*, *Sphyrna mokarran*, *Sphyrna zygaena*, *Carcharhinus longimanus*, *Rhincodon typus* would remain in Annex III and a revitalised species working group would be given the task to provide additional information on the proposals intersessionally. This was summarised in the recommendations as « *Addressing as priority the following species: [...] the whale shark *Rhincodon typus*; the manta ray *Manta birostris*, as well as other species proposed by Contracting Parties* ». For more detailed information, and in particular on the recommendations relating to the species proposals as well as the country statements, please see [UNEP\(DEPI\)/CAR WG.40/7 Page 21- 28- paragraphs 189 to 279](#).

A Terms of Reference (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF12) was drafted by a dedicated Working Group composed of delegates from Colombia, France, Netherlands, the United States of America, one observer and SPAW-RAC. The newly re-endorsed Species working group started to work on responding to the assigned tasks and thus providing additional information to help with the next STAC/COP discussions. The resulting documents were later reviewed by the whole group. A large number of experts contributed to the final assessments (between 14 and 17 depending of the species) earlier this year with marked tendencies for most of the species (see [UNEP\(DEPI\)/CAR WG.42/4](#)). While due to language or translations, the wording is misleading in some documents (and that can be corrected), the « proposals » were never considered as made by the group, but in response to the 8<sup>th</sup> SPAW STAC's request for additional information on the original ones before going to COP11.

## PARROTFISH

During the 6<sup>th</sup> SPAW STAC, the Observer representing MARFund raised for the first time the idea to propose for listing under the SPAW Protocol, a species such as the parrotfish whose importance in the functioning of coral reefs was stressed in the recent report entitled *Status and trends of Caribbean Coral Reefs : 1970- 2012*.

Following the recommendation of the 28<sup>th</sup> International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) General Meeting (Adopted on 17 October 2013) that urged Caribbean nations to protect parrotfish to improve coral reef resilience and a proposal formulated by France in 2018, the 8<sup>th</sup> SPAW STAC decided that parrotfish and associated species would undergo a similar process as sharks and consequently requested for the upcoming Species working group to

evaluate the status of parrotfish and determine whether any species or group of species may warrant listing in the SPAW Protocol Annexes. The exact wording in the Terms of Reference is: *Evaluate the status of parrotfish and other herbivores associated with coral reefs, seagrass beds and mangroves to determine whether any species or group of species may warrant listing in the SPAW Protocol Annexes, with due consideration to socio-cultural-economic and ecological dimensions, and provide results of reviews to the STAC.* The first draft was provided by Paul Hoetjes early 2020 and experts worked to complete it. Seventeen experts contributed to the final assessment (see UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/4). The process was relatively similar to the one above, except for the fact that there was no formal proposal from a country. The understanding was that the WG was to provide its conclusions to the 9<sup>th</sup> SPAW STAC and following that, countries could formally nominate species, at least 42 days before the COP, as well as the possibility of having several countries co-nominating the species (we have traced discussions to the 8<sup>th</sup> SPAW STAC, the elaboration of the TORs and early in the Working Groups). Recent discussions during the pre-STAC and STAC sessions show concerns about the conformity of this new approach to the Rules and Procedures of the Protocol and this needs to be discussed.