

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

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**INFORMATION PAPER ON
ESTABLISHING A MARINE MAMMAL REGIONAL ACTIVITY NETWORK
IN THE WIDER CARIBBEAN REGION**

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

Establishing a Marine Mammal Regional Activity Network in the Wider Caribbean

Summary

The purpose of this information paper is to present the rationale for the establishment of a Marine Mammal Regional Activity Network (MMRAN) and to explore the steps needed to create such a network for the conservation and management of marine mammals in the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR). This information paper was prepared to further build on the recommendations of the *Scientific and Technical Analysis of the Implementation of the Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Mammals (MMAP) in the Wider Caribbean*¹ hereafter termed “MMAP Technical Report.” The MMAP Technical Report was completed under the auspices of the Caribbean Marine Mammals Preservation Network (CARI’MAM Project), and discussed and endorsed by the Species Working Group under the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW Protocol). The proposed MMRAN would serve to organize, coordinate, and facilitate communication, and provide resources to those involved in marine mammal conservation and management in the WCR in continuation of previous networking initiatives launched throughout the region.

The establishment of a MMRAN is in line with past decisions endorsed by the SPAW Conference of the Parties (COP) relating to the establishment of Regional Activity Centres (RACs), Regional Activity Networks (RANs), and other supportive networks.² As far back as the historic first Intergovernmental Meeting on the Action Plan for the Caribbean Environment Programme (CEP) at Montego Bay in April 1981, the importance of RACs and RANs for the implementation of the Convention and the underlying Protocols and Programs was noted. Related specifically to marine mammals, a key overarching recommendation of the MMAP Technical Report is to develop a coordinated multilateral approach to marine mammal conservation, including the development of a strategic regional network, to further support the work realized in the region, building upon the momentum achieved regarding marine mammals in the current biennium.

RANs are not a new concept. They already exist in the WCR and have been implemented successfully within the Cartagena Convention’s various Protocols for many years. They also exist in other UN Environment Regional Seas areas, with tailored variations, as a source of knowledge, expertise, and multi-stakeholder networking to support respective Conventions and Protocols.³ The Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network (WIDECAS) is an example of a species specific RAN of the CEP that supports the implementation of the SPAW Protocol.

¹ SPAW-RAC. (2020). *Implementation of the Action Plan for Marine Mammals in the Wider Caribbean Region: A Scientific and Technical Analysis*. Authored by Vail, C. and Borobia, M. UN Environment, Caribbean Environment Programme, Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife Regional Activity Centre. 158 pp.

² Guidelines for Establishment and Operation of Regional Activity Centres and Regional Activity Networks for The Cartagena Convention (DEC)/CAR IG.24/CRP.9Rev.1 10 September 2008

³ <https://www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/oceans-seas/what-we-do/working-regional-seas/regional-seas-programmes>. UN Environment Regional Seas Programmes website, which outlines summaries of organizational and operational structures of the 18 existing Regional Seas Programmes, including the seven where the Secretariat is administered by the UN Environment.

Background

The establishment and operation of RACs and related RANs have the potential to become one of the most effective ways for governments and CEP partner organizations to implement cooperative measures and programs called for by the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols. Overall, RACs and RANs represent an institutional framework of technical cooperation consisting of regional and national institutions selected for the purpose of coordinating the implementation of CEP activities in a systematic manner.⁴

A host agreement was signed between the Government of France and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 2000, effectively establishing the Regional Activity Centre for the SPAW Protocol (SPAW-RAC) in Guadeloupe, in conformity with the Decision of the Seventh Intergovernmental Meeting of the Cartagena Convention adopting the Terms of Reference for the SPAW-RAC.

Within the framework of the CEP, three RACs also support the Protocol Concerning Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities (LBS). These RACs are based and function within existing institutions, and include the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency, Information and Training Centre (REMPEITC- Caribe) in Curaçao, the Centro de Ingeniería y Manejo Ambiental de Bahías y Costas (CIMAB) in Cuba, and the Institute of Marine Affairs (IMA) in Trinidad and Tobago.

The MMAP Technical Report aims to assess progress by SPAW Contracting Parties and other countries in the region towards achieving implementation of the MMAP since its adoption in 2008. Its foremost recommendation is to:

- ‘Create a Marine Mammal Regional Activity Network (RAN) by strengthening existing regional institutional frameworks, partnerships, and collaborative data sharing and building on the foundations of CARI’MAM. This could be achieved by designating collaborative regional and national partners and institutions selected for the purpose of coordinating and supporting the implementation of MMAP activities in accordance with the adopted CEP RAC/RAN Guidelines. This would include the development of a strategic RAN workplan and identification of country coordinators(...).’

The idea of establishing Wider Caribbean networks of related expertise to share resources, knowledge, and experience is not new, and guidelines to establish such networks were adopted by contracting parties to the Cartagena Convention in 2008.⁵ Also the agreement between the

⁴ Paper on Expanded Role of Regional Activity Centres to the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols Within The Wider Caribbean Region, Fourth Meeting of the Contracting Parties (COP) to the Protocol Concerning Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities (LBS) in the Wider Caribbean Region Roatan, Honduras, 4 June 2019. UNEP(DEPI)/CAR IG.41/INF.6

⁵ Guidelines for Establishment and Operation of Regional Activity Centres and Regional Activity Networks for The Cartagena Convention. UNEP(DEC)/CAR IG.24/CRP.9 Rev.1. 10 September 2008

UNEP and the Government of France on the establishment of the SPAW-RAC outlines the operations and functions of the SPAW-RAC as it relates to RANs.⁶

An example of a successful existing RAN of the CEP is the WIDECAST network for sea turtles, which for over 30 years has been “committed to facilitating a regional capacity to ensure the recovery and sustainable management of depleted sea turtle populations.” WIDECAST is a volunteer coalition of experts in more than 40 nations and territories across the WCR, established to support the implementation of the SPAW Protocol and Programme. It seeks to bring the best available science to legislation and policy; to education, training and outreach; to conservation and advocacy; and to in situ research and population monitoring.⁷

In 2016 two white papers were presented at the STAC. The first white paper presented the Sister Sanctuaries Program for Marine Mammals in the Wider Caribbean. This initiative of the US/NOAA, Dominican Republic, France and the Netherlands was a stepping stone in achieving the need to work toward common conservation in the region, in specific centered on humpback whales.

The second white paper presented the CARI’MAM project, co-funded by European funds and coordinated by the Agoa Sanctuary for marine mammals (French Biodiversity Agency) with the support of the SPAW-RAC. It launched in 2018 and started to regroup stakeholders from the whole region. Experts from more than 25 territories in the WCR (beyond the scope of the SPAW protocol) participated in actions and exchanges through the project. CARI’MAM deliverables includes the redaction of the MMAP Technical Report and bi-annual discussions on which is based this proposition of RAN. The majority of stakeholders interviewed identify as of now CARI’MAM as the network of stakeholders more than a project limited in time.

Several research projects have also encompassed collaboration in part or all Caribbean region in the last years such as, for example, CHAMP project (NOAA), CWOP (Sea Vida) or REMMOA surveys (Pelagis).

These initiatives have been restricted either spatially or temporally, and show the desire and support for sustainable and region-wide cooperation on marine mammals. For this reason the MMAP Technical report recommends the establishment of a Marine Mammal RAN to build upon the experiences of the CARI’MAM project and establish a sustainable network on marine mammals including all SPAW Contracting Parties in the Wider Caribbean Region. The creation of a RAN would support this need by facilitating exchanges, foster partnerships, help data collation

⁶ Agreement between the Government of the French Republic and the United Nations Environment Programme for the Contracting Parties to the Cartagena Convention regarding the establishment in the French Department of Guadeloupe of a Regional Activities Centre for the Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife in the Wider Caribbean Region, Article 2 paragraph 2.

⁷ Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network, www.widecast.org

and bring the necessary tools to each country of the protocol (expertise, resources, and trainings).

Definition of a RAN

A RAN can be defined as a network of technical institutions and individuals, including governmental, intergovernmental, non-governmental, academic, and scientific institutions, that provide input, peer review, and expertise to increase the level and depth of cooperation and sharing of expertise in the CEP region.⁸

RANs can represent an institutional framework of Wider Caribbean regional and technical cooperation for the purpose of coordinating and implementing activities in support of the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols in a systematic manner, facilitating the exchange of information and technical expertise, and providing the resources required for implementing project activities.⁹

In the example of WIDECAS, members from the 40 nations and territories in the network routinely communicate and share resources. They also meet annually to evaluate current national and regional programs and to set priorities for the coming year. Such priorities may include habitat censuses, population monitoring, research, training, and the development of guidelines and protocols. These types of joint efforts ensure compatibility, sharing of resources, and coordinated projects, including education initiatives.

The Creation of a Marine Mammal RAN for the Wider Caribbean

The purpose of a Marine Mammal RAN would be to serve as a formal, permanent, coordination and communications network to facilitate the sharing of information, knowledge, and resources among those involved in marine mammal management, protection, and conservation across the WCR. It would ensure the continuity of networking activities initiated through the CARI'MAM project for which the funding ends in November 2021.

The RAN could assist member governments in the region by serving to centralize and mobilize expertise to guide their efforts to promulgate national MMAPs; create species recovery plans — similar to the WIDECAS Sea Turtle Recovery Action Plans (STRAPs) — established with the close participation and input from country focal points; develop, coordinate, and improve marine mammal conservation policies and practices within their national jurisdictions and governmental responsibility; and above all promote sustainability and ownership from different stakeholders.

Such a marine mammal network could benefit from the varied expertise of local, national, and international marine mammal experts, including from education institutions, the private sector, academia, civil society as well as the nonprofit sector, to synergistically assist in achieving the goals of the SPAW Protocol.

⁸ Taken from “Guidelines for Establishment and Operation of Regional Activity Centres and Regional Activity Networks for The Cartagena Convention. UNEP(DEC)/CAR IG.24/CRP.9 Rev.1. 10 September 2008”

⁹ Ibid.

Given the importance of marine mammals in the region¹⁰, their transboundary nature, and the valuable on-going cooperation among five existing marine mammal sanctuaries, there is an increasing need for strengthened, dedicated long-term resources to support their conservation and management in the region. This is also in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG14 'Life below water'.

A marine mammal RAN, would serve to synergize existing efforts on marine mammal conservation in the Caribbean, extend capacities, and consolidate the current work by the SPAW-RAC as well as support the SPAW-RAC's role at the regional level in the context of strategic leadership for marine mammal conservation.

Building on the previous positive experiences from the successful WIDECAST network as a RAN, a number of activities and outputs can be achieved at no cost to the RAN. Such benefits could include strengthening multi-partner coordination and cooperation, sharing academic resources, best practices, funding and conference opportunities, peer exchanges, and training.

In light of the above, the proposal below outlines possible steps for establishing a Marine Mammal RAN for consideration and subsequent endorsement by the SPAW STAC and SPAW COP within the Cartagena Convention framework. Such steps are not meant to be exhaustive or exclusive of any other responsibilities, roles, and opportunities for the development of the Marine Mammal RAN.

Proposed Steps in Developing a Marine Mammal RAN for the Wider Caribbean Region

1. Establish a temporary Working Group including focal points of Contracting Parties and experts appointed by Contracting Parties under guidance of the SPAW-RAC, to consider the potential costs and benefits of a Marine Mammal RAN and draft a proposal on how a Marine Mammal RAN could operate including a terms of reference for the RAN and roadmap for the establishment within the current CEP biennium.
 - Use the final conference of the CARI'MAM project meeting (september 2021) to draw lessons from the CARI'MAM project and further the work on the proposal of a Marine Mammal RAN.
2. The Marine Mammal Experts of the Species Working Group to update the Marine Mammal Action Plan (MMAP), including the information and developments resulting from step 1.
3. Discuss the proposal for the establishment of a Marine Mammal RAN and the updated MMAP for review at the SPAW STAC10.

¹⁰ See for example, "Whale Watching Worldwide, Tourism numbers, expenditures and expanding economic benefits IWC/61/14, June 2009"

4. Identify one or several institutional Coordinator(s) - Identify and designate entities/organizations which would be able and willing to serve and commit resources [e.g. human, financial and infrastructure] as the secretariat or (co-)coordinator of the RAN.
5. Identify focal points to serve as national coordinators with the marine mammal RAN or for specific areas of expertise (e.g., stranding coordinators).
6. Create a reporting mechanism to provide updates to RAN members, the SPAW-RAC and the CEP Secretariat on the activities of the RAN.

Possible Proposed SPAW STAC Recommendation(s)

The STAC is invited to consider the above context and the recommendations provided below for endorsing the need for the establishment of a regional marine mammal RAN to support the activities of the SPAW Contracting Parties, other WCR countries, and CEP under the Cartagena Convention:

1. The SPAW Contracting Parties to acknowledge the need for enhanced communication and collaboration on marine mammal conservation;
2. The SPAW Secretariat and SPAW-RAC, in close consultation with SPAW Contracting Parties, consider the potential costs and benefits of a Marine Mammal RAN and draft a proposal, for discussion at SPAW STAC10, for how such a RAN could operate.
3. Request that the marine mammal RAN, once created, develops a strategic plan in collaboration with the SPAW-RAC and in consultation with the CEP Secretariat and Contracting Parties, taking guidance from the findings and recommendations of the MMAP Technical Report.