

**Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Regional Activity
Centres (RACs) and Regional Activity Networks (RANs)**

**Under the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols
(2026 Revised Version — Superseding the 2008 Guidelines)**

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Executive Summary

These Guidelines provide guidance on the governance and operational frameworks of the Regional Activity Centres (RACs) and Regional Activity Networks (RANs) designated under the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols. They update and replace previous guidance by drawing on the lessons learned from more than three decades of regional experience.

Objective. Strengthen coordination, accountability, transparency and sustainability within RACs and RANs.

Legal Basis. RACs and RANs are designated by Decisions of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Cartagena Convention. They operate within the framework of any strategies, programmes, frameworks and Work Plans that may be endorsed or approved by the COP¹. RACs also retain the flexibility to monitor, alert and respond to emerging environmental threats and issues, even when these have not yet been formally addressed by the COP – as demonstrated by the first responses to Sargassum invasions and threats from newly identified invasive species on Caribbean coral reefs. This proactive capacity is intrinsic to the role of the RACs as technical partners of the Convention, but it is exercised by keeping Contracting Parties duly informed, through well-established governance and reporting mechanisms.

Distinct roles.

- **RACs** serve as autonomous technical centres responsible for implementing COP-approved Work Plans and programmes and supporting national and regional capacity building, while maintaining the flexibility to respond to emerging issues.
- **The RANs** act as collaborative networks promoting research, information exchange and innovation. They operate mainly under the coordination of a specific RAC or, in the absence of a competent RAC, under the coordination of the Cartagena Convention Secretariat (CCS).

Governance. The COP provides overall oversight and may delegate its oversight role as required. The CCS coordinates implementation, while the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committees (STAC) review progress and advise the COP as required.

Financing and operations. RACs and RANs operate primarily with the support of the Host Government or Institution and/or funders. There is no automatic financial obligation from CCS unless authorized by the COP.

Reporting and Evaluation. RACs and RANs, as applicable, report biennially to CCS, STAC and/or the COP. Independent evaluations may be undertaken every four years aligned with the biennial Work Plan cycle, subject to proportional adaptations for RANs. The assessment requirements for RANs shall be commensurate with their size, structure and level of formalisation.

Flexibility and inclusiveness. The guidelines take into account the limited resources of the region and promote equitable participation between language and subregional groups. They are designed to apply to all of the various potential institutional arrangements of the Contracting Parties.

Result. They provide a framework within which RACs and RANs can function as coherent, transparent and accountable forums providing long-term support for the implementation of Parties' obligations under the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols.

¹ For the purposes of this document, “endorsed or approved” means endorsed or approved by the Contracting Parties via the appropriate governing body, unless otherwise specified.

Preface

These Guidelines update and replace the 2008 Guidelines for the Operations of the RACs and RANs for the Cartagena Convention, adopted by COP Decision UNEP(DEPI)/CAR IG.28/4.IV.1 (13th Intergovernmental Meeting, 9–12 September 2008). They have been developed following extensive consultations with Contracting Parties, Regional Activity Centres and networks, as well as partners, including in the context of the pre-COP and COP discussions on the RAC and RAN guidelines.

These revisions strengthen governance, coordination, accountability and sustainability, while preserving the decentralized and flexible framework within which RACs and RANs have operated effectively for more than thirty years. RACs are recognized as stand-alone technical partners of CCS and the Caribbean Environment Programme (CEP) - not as operational units subordinate to the administrative leadership of a Contracting Party. These Guidelines are being developed to remain in force throughout future strategic cycles and are based on field experience and proven results in the Caribbean Region.

RACs and RANs are designated by decisions of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Cartagena Convention and operate within the framework of related strategies, programmes and initiatives approved and/or adopted by the COP. They contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols. At the same time, they are skilled at tackling new environmental challenges and providing rapid technical responses — a role that has proven effective in areas such as Sargassum management, coral reef stressors and marine mammal conservation.

These Guidelines recognize that the Contracting Parties and host institutions in the Wider Caribbean Region operate under various institutional and administrative arrangements. Implementation should remain proportionate to the capacities of RACs and National Focal Points (NFPs), and the requirements should not create excessive administrative burdens or lead to structural changes that are incompatible with the realities of the region.

Recognizing there is a potential risk of duplication or overlap between the work of RACs and RANs, it is proposed that an existing RAC or the CCS serves a lead coordination function to avoid such duplication. This establishes a clear framework of cooperation between RACs, RANs and the CCS.

These Guidelines promote inclusive approaches to environmental governance and, where within their mandate, encourage RACs and RANs to seek the effective engagement of indigenous and local communities, in accordance with United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) standards and relevant COP Decisions.

Part I – Overview

Section I – Definitions and Scope of Application

Regional Activity Centres (RACs): Institutions designated by COP decision to coordinate and carry out specific technical and scientific activities in support of the Cartagena Convention and/or its Protocols. These may be carried out within existing resources and/or externally funded support as appropriate. They may also facilitate technology transfer (on voluntary and mutually agreed terms), capacity building, data sharing and cooperation. RACs may support the implementation of a specific Protocol, provide support covering multiple Protocols and/or provide direct support to CCS.

Regional Activity Networks (RANs): Networks of institutions or organizations that the COP decides could support knowledge exchange, research and technical cooperation in thematic or protocol-related areas. Depending on the thematic areas of focus, RANs operate under the coordination of a designated RAC. In the absence of a RAC with expertise in the thematic area concerned, a RAN may operate under the coordination of CCS. In order to avoid duplication and to ensure consistent technical oversight, a functional link between RACs and RANs is essential, as specified in the Terms of Reference for each RAN.

The RANs must bring a high level of recognized regional expertise to support the work of the existing RACs and the Cartagena Convention Secretariat.

Scope: These Guidelines apply to all existing and future RACs and RANs under the Cartagena Convention, including those related to the Protocol Concerning Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities (LBS Protocol), the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW Protocol) and the Protocol Concerning Cooperation in Combating Oil Spills (Oil Spills Protocol), or any cross-cutting theme identified by the COP.

A glossary of key terms used in these Guidelines is set out in Annex VI.

Section II – Background and Purpose

- 1.** RACs and RANs assist Contracting Parties (CPs) in the implementation of the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols, providing support to COP Decisions, CCS Programmes and national obligations. As the Review of the Operations, Functioning and Financing of RACs and RANs (2022-2023) shows, they are a critical and proven model for ensuring decentralized technical cooperation across the Caribbean region.
- 2.** They promote transparency, efficiency, coordination, inclusiveness and sustainability while taking into account limited institutional resources and capacities across the Caribbean region.
- 3.** Each RAC and RAN shall contribute to the objectives of the Convention and the strategies approved by the COP by serving as a regional hub for collaboration, capacity building and knowledge management, while enhancing synergies for programme implementation by CCS.
- 4.** RACs and RANs may contribute to the achievement of related regional and global environmental objectives, where this is provided for in their approved Work Plan and consistent with COP Decisions.

Section III – Governance Framework and Roles

- 5.** The Contracting Parties shall constitute the governing authority of the Convention. The COPs may request that RACs and/or RANs provide specific technical reports and/or work plan outputs for consideration by Working Groups and STACs, as appropriate before being presented at the COPs for further consideration.
- 6.** The COP may exercise its oversight role directly or through a delegated body, including the relevant Protocol COP, the STAC, or a Steering Committee, as applicable to the RAC or RAN concerned. References in these Guidelines to oversight, approval, or endorsement by the COP shall be read to include such delegated arrangements unless the context requires otherwise.
- 7.** The CCS shall coordinate the implementation of COP Decisions and ensure compliance with the objectives of the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols as well as any strategies approved or adopted by the COP.
- 8.** The CCS compiles RAC and RAN reports, coordinates evaluations and, where appropriate, ensures consistency with UNEP procedures while ensuring flexibility adapted to regional realities.
- 9.** RACs shall provide direct support to and implement approved biennial work plans and COP decisions, while providing, as appropriate, technical assistance, capacity building, coordination and resource mobilization support, while fully preserving their technical autonomy and decentralized nature as regional partners.
- 10.** RANs are collaborative networks that provide scientific input, encourage innovation, and facilitate information sharing across protocols and themes; they operate under the coordination of a designated RAC in accordance with the coordination model of the main RAC.
- 11.** All RACs and RANs are encouraged to operate in a transparent manner, avoiding conflicts of interest and disclosing affiliations or sources of funding that may influence decisions.
- 12.** Together, they constitute the technical pillar of the Convention, adding value through continuous coordination and collaboration that complements project-based partnerships and preserves institutional memory.
- 13.** CCS will organize annual virtual RAC/RAN Coordination Meetings to review progress, identify synergies and plan joint initiatives in support of the COP Decisions and approved Work Plan and Budget

Section IV – Legal and Institutional Arrangements

These Guidelines apply subject to and are consistent with the Cartagena Convention, its Protocols and the Rules of Procedure of the Conference of the Parties. In the event of any contradiction between these Guidelines and these instruments, the latter shall prevail.

The underlying legal basis for the designation of RACs and RANs is found in Article 15.1(e) of the Cartagena Convention, under which the Contracting Parties designate UNEP to “co-ordinate the implementation of cooperative activities agreed upon by the meetings of Contracting Parties.” This authority was first exercised at the treaty level through Article 9 of the Oil Spills Protocol (1983), which established a regional cooperation and training function later formalized as RAC/REMPEITC-Caribe – the first RAC to become operational, in 1995. The general framework for designating RACs and RANs was first developed as a Concept Paper presented to the 6th Intergovernmental Meeting in 1992 (UNEP(OCA)/CAR WG.10/3), and further endorsed and developed at the 10th Intergovernmental Meeting in 2002 (COP Decision UNEP(OCA)/CAR IG.22/8.I.1), followed by the 2008 Guidelines for the Operations of the RACs and RANs, adopted by COP Decision UNEP(DEPI)/CAR IG.28/4.IV.1 (13th Intergovernmental Meeting, 2008), which these Guidelines now supersede.

Communication Guidance: The following guidance applies to RACs' and RANs' communications with countries and external partners and is referenced, as appropriate, in these guidelines:

- **Official correspondence with national governments** on matters relating to the obligations under the Convention or its Protocols, or on matters of public policy, shall be copied to the relevant National Focal Point.
- **Technical and scientific communications** between a RAC or RAN and national or international experts, research institutes, academic bodies or other technical partners may be conducted without routing through or copying NFPs. These exchanges are part of the normal technical operations of the RAC or RAN and need not involve national oversight.

This distinction takes into account the diversity of the institutional arrangements of Contracting Parties and RAC Host Governments.

RACs and RANs are encouraged to demonstrate proactive transparency and regularly share information with CCS and national focal points, as appropriate, to strengthen national ownership, policy coherence and alignment with national priorities.

14. RACs and RANs are designated by COP decisions that define their mandates, thematic focuses, scope of activities and institutional mechanisms.

15. RACs may, as appropriate, enter into Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) or Letters of Intent (LoI) with Host Governments or institutions to formalize cooperation. Such mechanisms are recommended when RACs operate within formal institutional structures. Where a Host Government has committed to providing core financial support or in-kind support to a RAC, a formal Memorandum of Understanding or equivalent agreement with CCS is deemed appropriate, to ensure legal clarity and mutual accountability. These agreements do not necessarily have to comply with all UNEP administrative standards, provided that transparency is maintained and that the agreement is in line with the COP Decision designating the RAC.

16. RANs are less formal institutions and can be appointed directly by a COP Decision without formal agreement. Their Terms of Reference should clearly define the coordinating relationships with the relevant RAC and/or CCS, the roles of the participating institutions, and the governance arrangements, in order to avoid ambiguity, overlap or conflict of responsibilities.

17. Where RACs or RANs implement specific project activities, contractual arrangements may be entered into with CCS, institutions or donors to ensure implementation and monitoring in accordance with donor or UNEP requirements.

18. In the event of disagreement between CCS and a Host Government or Institution regarding the interpretation or application of these Guidelines, the dispute may be referred to the relevant COP for advice and decision.

Part II – Regional Activity Centres (RACs)

1. Objectives

19. The RACs support the implementation of the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols by:

- Providing scientific and technical advice to the Contracting Parties;
- Supporting CCS in preparing documentation for reporting to COPs and STACs.
- Facilitating technology transfer, on voluntary and mutually agreed terms, capacity -building and training, including through the development of guidelines, manuals and tools to support implementation at the national level;
- Raising public awareness and serving as a repository for data, knowledge and best practices;
- Monitoring emerging environmental challenges and advising the CCS and Contracting Parties on issues that warrant a regional response, including those that have not yet been formally addressed by the COP.

2. Functions

20. Each RAC is expected to perform the following functions within its mandate:

- Implement and promote the activities of the work plan as well as national and/or regional projects approved by the COP or otherwise authorized under the RAC's Work Plan;
- Inform and coordinate with respective National Focal Points (NFPs) in advance on activities requiring national implementation or involving compliance with obligations under the Convention and its Protocols. This does not imply a general obligation for systematic supervision by NFPs of or participation in the technical activities of the RAC (see Principles of Communication, Section IV);
- Prepare and provide biennial reports to CCS for consideration by the STACs and COPs;
- Facilitate networking with other relevant RACs, RANs and regional and global bodies;
- Mobilize technical and/or financial resources and build partnerships with donors, academia, the private sector and civil society;
- Support communication, translation and the preparation of awareness-raising materials in the official languages of the region – English, French and Spanish.

3. Designation, Modification and Dissolution

21. Proposals for the designation of RACs may be submitted by a Contracting Party for consideration by the COP. These Proposals should follow the template set out in Annex II and demonstrate the applicant's technical competence, institutional and financial viability, and alignment with the priorities of the Convention.

22. RACs can be designated in three configurations:

- **Single institution model:** an institution or a unit of it acts as a RAC with dedicated staff;
- **Consortium Model:** several institutions form a common body coordinated by a lead agency;
- **Inter-protocol model:** a RAC serves multiple Protocols or themes, as decided by the COP.

23. CCS reviews submissions against these criteria and makes recommendations to the COP for further consideration.

24. RACs may be dissolved by a decision of the COP, on the proposal of a Contracting Party, the CCS, or the relevant Host Government or Institution, following procedures agreed between the CCS and the Host Government or Institution.

4. Governance and Operations

25. RACs operate in accordance with national legislation and their own institutional governance systems, while respecting COP decisions and CCS guidance. Each RAC operates within a governance framework that reflects its specific institutional context.

26. Each RAC is encouraged to develop:

- **A six-year Strategic Plan** with a mid-term review, in line with the strategies approved by the COP;
- **A Biennial Work Plan and Budget**, detailing activities, expected results and resource allocation;
- **A Biennial Progress/Status Report**, including financial and technical updates.

27. In the field of communication, the guidance set out in Section IV applies.

28. RACs are invited to ensure institutional continuity by putting in place appropriate transfer of authority procedures for staff changes and by ensuring the archiving of documents.

29. CCS may convene periodic coordination meetings of RAC Directors to take stock of progress and identify synergies with other work of CCS.

30. RACs are encouraged to promote knowledge transfer through regional training workshops, peer-to-peer exchanges and internships for early career professionals.

5. Financial provisions

31. RAC activities are mainly funded by contributions from Host Governments, grants and donors. The Host Governments or Institutions bear the primary responsibility for the costs of operating the RACs. It is not expected that they will necessarily provide all the funds necessary for the implementation of relevant COP Decisions and/or all activities not funded in the biennial Work Plans. CCS is not responsible for the costs of operating the RACs. Similarly, these costs are also not covered by the Caribbean Trust Fund (CTF), unless authorized by the COP. CCS, RACs and the Host Government will collaborate to mobilize regional and international resources to complement the contributions of Host Governments and to support the equitable participation of Contracting Parties in the activities supported by the RACs.

32. The CCS may facilitate transfer of funds to the RACs in accordance with UNEP's financial rules and subject to approved COP Decision and Work Plan and Budget

33. RACs must maintain transparent accounting systems and submit to audits in accordance with national and donor requirements.

34. RACs are encouraged to mobilize resources through partnerships and project proposals in coordination with CCS, as well as on their own initiative, in accordance with their terms of reference and approved strategic plans.

35. Financial and progress reports are submitted to CCS every two years and/or as required by specific grant agreements.

Part III – Regional Activity Networks (RANs)

1. Objectives

36. In coordination and consultation with the RACs concerned, the RANs may promote additional scientific and technical collaboration, peer review and knowledge exchange among experts and institutions to support the implementation of COP Decisions and the approved biennial work plans of the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols. The purpose of the RANs is to complement the role of the RACs, without duplication and/or overlap. A clear delineation of roles and responsibilities between each RAN and its reference RAC is to be reflected in the RAN's mandate.

37. The objectives of the RANs, as they relate to the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols, are to:

- Facilitate additional networking among institutions and specialists working on issues related to programmes, specific themes, cross-cutting issues or protocols;
- Strengthen scientific capacity and regional assessments;
- Promote the exchange of good practices, training and collaboration in research;
- Support data management, knowledge sharing, and innovation;
- Contribute to technical and scientific information for COPs, STACs, Working Groups and CCS;
- Contribute to the development and dissemination of technical products;
- Strengthen synergies with relevant global initiatives and other Regional Seas Programmes, as appropriate;
- Promote participation across linguistic, geographical and institutional boundaries.
- Other activities to support the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols.

2. Functions

The RANs complement the technical functions of the RACs by engaging broader communities of individual experts and institutions and providing support on activities not covered by CCS and/or the RACs. They are not expected to implement approved Work Plans and/or COP Decisions.

38. RANs may:

- Contribute to scientific, technical and socio-economic research for the implementation by Contracting Parties of their obligations under the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols, including approved workplans;
- Provide support technical capacity support in the implementation of regional projects;
- Support the preparation of technical documents in support COP Decisions and based on the needs of RACs, Working Groups. Following review, these documents may be submitted to STACs for further consideration;
- Serve as peer review groups for regional assessments, guidelines or projects;
- Manage databases, newsletters and communication channels to promote collaboration;
- Provide technical advice to CCS, relevant Working Groups and/or RACs as requested;
- Promote joint projects, workshops and training opportunities;
- Encourage partnerships with universities, NGOs and the private sector;
- Contribute to capacity-building activities that support monitoring and evaluation.

3. Designation

39. RANs may be designated, modified or dissolved by a decision of the COP, on the proposal of a Contracting Party or the CCS. Before the COP considers any RAN proposal, the RAC competent in the thematic area of the proposed RAN is invited to provide a technical review of the proposal. This review is forwarded to CCS and may be included in relevant COP documentation. This ensures that the expertise of the RACs guides the establishment of networks operating in related fields and helps to avoid any potential overlap with the existing functions of the RACs.

40. The work of RANs may be limited to specific technical topics such as marine litter, nutrients, coral reefs or protected areas and may support the work of Convention and one or more protocols depending on the experts and organizations involved..

41. In the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR), organisations that are, or could become, participants in RANs show very diverse levels of structuring and professionalisation. Without adequate technical coordination by RACs, there is a risk of overlapping activities or inappropriate roles. The RAC-first coordination model reflected throughout these Guidelines helps facilitate coherence and coordination, prevent duplication, and provides a quality assurance function proportionate to the level of formalisation of each RAN.

42. Each RAN designates a competent RAC as the primary coordinating entity, responsible for serving as the primary liaison with CCS and facilitating administrative and technical communication. Where there is no RAC competent in the thematic area(s) of the RAN, one or more reference institutions may be designated to fulfil this coordinating role, in consultation with CCS. In all cases, the respective roles and responsibilities of the RAC (or the reference institution) and CCS are clearly defined in the RAN's Terms of Reference to avoid ambiguity, overlap or conflict of roles.

43. The membership criteria and governance of each RAN are defined in its Terms of Reference and may be endorsed or approved by the STAC, the COP and/or CCS. The governance structure integrates the relevant RAC or reference institution concerned in order to ensure technical monitoring, to allow for coherence with the RAC activities and to avoid duplication.

44. The CCS maintains a register of active RANs, their reference institutions and the RACs responsible for their coordination.

4. Membership and Participation

45. Membership in the RANs is voluntary and is based on technical expertise, institutional affiliation, and a commitment to contribute to the objectives of the network.

46. Members may include:

- Public bodies and technical services;
- Regional and national research institutes;
- Universities and academic institutions;
- Non-governmental organizations and community groups;
- Private sector partners with relevant experience;
- International or regional organizations working in related fields.

47. The lists of members and their contact information are maintained by the coordinating entity and shared with CCS.

5. Governance and Operations

The operations of each RAN may vary depending on the size, structure, and level of formalization of each network. The integration of the RAC into the governance of the RANs helps to ensure technical oversight, ensure coherence with the priorities of the Convention and its Protocols and avoid duplication of activities or use of resources.

48. Each RAN may provide the STACs and/or COPs with an overview of the activities proposed for a biennium. These activities should contribute to the implementation of CCS's approved workplan and COP Decisions and be in line with COP priorities.

49. The coordinating entity must:

- Facilitate regular communication and virtual or face-to-face meetings;
- Coordinates activities, publications and outputs, as required;
- Submit biennial reports to the relevant RAC provided the RAC is not the coordinating entity and/or CCS on work related to the CCS's biennial Work Plan and COP Decisions;
- Copied correspondence to CCS: in the case of official correspondence with national governments on matters relating to obligations under the Convention or on matters of public policy. Technical communications with experts, research institutes and technical partners are not required to go through NFPs (see Section IV).

50. RANs may have varying legal personalities. The aspects of their work under the Convention and its Protocols are coordinated by the RAC concerned as the lead coordinating entity; in the absence of a RAC involved, coordination is provided by CCS. The division of coordination responsibilities between the RAC and CCS is specified in the Terms of Reference for the RAC.

51. The results produced by RANs, in collaboration with CCS and/or the RACs, are reported as such.

52. CCS may convene joint RAC-RAN meetings to enhance collaboration and avoid duplication.

6. Funding

53. The activities of the RANs can be supported by contributions from members, donors and participating institutions. Members of a RAN are expected to self-finance their participation through their own institutional resources or project funding, unless otherwise provided for in the Terms of Reference.

54. CCS does not fund the operations of the RANs unless explicitly authorized by the COP or if they are linked to externally funded projects.

55. RANs are encouraged to mobilize co-financing and in-kind contributions for their Work Plans and to identify sustainable sources of support.

56. Project funding mobilized and/or provided by the CCS to RANs to support the implementation of the approved biennial Work Plan and Budget and COP Decisions is documented and communicated to the CCS, the STACs, and the COPs. Other related activities that support the overall objectives of the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols are reported by RANs to RACs and the CCS for further reporting to the COP, as appropriate.

Part IV – Reporting, Evaluation, Branding and Communication

This Part sets out the common reporting, evaluation, branding and communication requirements applicable to both RACs and RANs.

1. Reporting and Review

57. RACs and RANs will use standard templates for technical and financial reporting. A sample template is provided in the Annex for further discussion.

58. Each RAC shall provide, and each RAN shall prepare for submission via its coordinating RAC or CCS, a Biennial Report summarizing:

- (a) Progress in the implementation of approved Work Plans;
- (b) Key results, impacts and lessons learned;
- (c) Financial expenditure and resource mobilization; and
- (d) Challenges, risks and adjustments proposed for the next biennium.

59. Reports shall be submitted to CCS in English, French or Spanish, as appropriate, no later than three months prior to the relevant STAC meeting, as scheduled by CCS.

60. CCS and RACs consolidate reports for reporting to Working Groups, STACs and/or COPs, as appropriate.

61. CCS may request additional status updates as required, particularly for externally funded projects implemented by RACs and RANs within the framework of approved two-year Work Plans.

62. For RANs specifically, reports are prepared by the RAN and follow the order RAN ⇒ RAC/CCS ⇒ STAC ⇒ Protocol and/or Convention COP, ensuring RAC technical advice is incorporated before submission to the Protocol COPs and, where appropriate, the Convention COP. Working Groups may also be invited to contribute to the review of RAN results.

63. The relevant STAC reviews the reports of RACs and RANs prior to their submission to the COPs, and makes recommendations on the technical quality, relevance and opportunities for synergy between the RACs, RANs and external partners.

64. The COP may adopt decisions on the basis of STAC recommendations, including revisions to the terms of reference or Work Plans of RACs or RANs.

65. CCS shall ensure that all COP Decisions are appropriately tracked and the role of RACs and RANs in their implementation is reflected in reports to the Bureau and Contracting Parties.

2. Evaluation

66. The assessment of RACs and RANs will be carried out according to the criteria and indicators listed in Annex III.

67. Unless otherwise decided by the COP, evaluations are conducted every four years and include criteria relating to technical capacity, programme implementation, financial sustainability, knowledge management and regional balance. For RANs, the evaluation framework is adapted to the network's functions, size, structure and level of formalisation, and additionally takes into account member engagement, knowledge outcomes, effectiveness of collaboration and inclusiveness; evaluation requirements shall not impose a disproportionate burden on small or informal networks.

68. Evaluations serve both accountability and learning purposes — they allow performance to be assessed while identifying areas for improvement. Each assessment should include:

- (a) A review of institutional effectiveness and efficiency;
- (b) An analysis of financial sustainability and donor coordination;
- (c) An assessment of the contribution to COP-approved goals and regional impact; and
- (d) Recommendations to build capacity and compliance.

69. Independent external evaluations will be carried out at least every four years, subject to availability of funding.

70. The results of evaluations are reviewed by the STAC and communicated to the COP to inform decisions on the continuation, modification or adjustment of RACs and RANs.

3. Branding, Visibility and Communication

71. The use of UNEP, CEP or Cartagena Convention Secretariat logos by RACs or RANs requires prior consultation with CCS.

72. Publications, websites and social media platforms should acknowledge UNEP, the Cartagena Convention Secretariat, national and/or regional partners, and the donors concerned, in accordance with branding guidelines, where available.

73. RACs and RANs are encouraged to ensure that results and data generated are publicly available and consistent with UNEP's principles of data sharing and attribution.

74. RACs shall maintain bilingual or trilingual versions of their core communication materials and official web pages linked to the website of the Cartagena Convention, making use of artificial intelligence translation tools where helpful. All such translated output must be carefully verified for accuracy.

75. RANs are encouraged to maintain appropriate mechanisms — including but not limited to online communication platforms, newsletters and/or working groups — to share information on projects and activities. CCS and/or RACs may provide expertise, technical support and/or visibility to RAN activities through CCS's website, and RAN members are encouraged to participate in joint regional events and trainings organized by RACs or CCS.

76. CCS maintains a dedicated webpage listing active RACs and RANs, their host institutions, reference entities and contact details.

77. CCS may issue communications guidelines to ensure consistency in its corporate identity and communications.

Part V – Transitional and Administrative Provisions

- 78.** These Guidelines supersede previous versions adopted by the COP.
- 79.** Existing RACs and RANs shall continue to operate in their current manner until their compliance with these Guidelines is formally verified.
- 80.** Within twelve months of the adoption of the COP, CCS conducts a comparative review of existing RACs and RANs to identify the adjustments needed for full harmonization, while taking into account operational experience and proven results. This review takes into account the ability of RACs and NFPs to absorb any new administrative requirements and proposes proportionate and feasible provisions.
- 81.** The COP shall review the status of all RACs and RANs following this assessment and decide on any amendments or adjustments.
- 82.** The COP may approve interim RANs or RANs pending the endorsement of these Guidelines by Contracting Parties..
- 83.** In the event that a RAC or RAN is temporarily unable to fulfill its mandate due to exceptional circumstances beyond its control, CCS may, in consultation with the Host Government or Institution, propose temporary arrangements to the COP for consideration and decision.
- 84.** These guidelines will be subject to a full review no later than eight years after the date of their adoption, or earlier if requested by the COP. The CCS shall conduct this review and present the results to the COP.
- 85.** These Guidelines shall remain in force until amended or replaced by a subsequent decision of the COP.

Annex I – Indicative Thematic Areas

86. Thematic areas supported by RACs and RANs may include, but are not limited to:

- **Land-based marine pollution:** Water quality control, water and wastewater management, nutrient, plastics and agrochemical management;
- **Biodiversity Conservation:** Protected areas, restoration of coastal and marine ecosystems, migratory species and management of coastal ecosystems;
- **Oil spills and Emergency Response:** Preparedness, contingency planning and regional cooperation;
- **Ecosystem-Based Management:** Coastal zone planning, marine spatial planning, blue economy, nature-based solutions for marine and coastal ecosystems and communities, and resilience initiatives;
- **Data and Knowledge Management:** Digital platforms, databases and open -access information systems;
- **Public Awareness and inclusiveness:** multilingual education, communication and awareness-raising;
- **Capacity Building and Technology Transfer:** Training, innovation partnerships and institutional strengthening, conducted on voluntary and mutually agreed terms;
- **Sustainable Financing and Partnerships:** Donor engagement, resource mobilization and project implementation.

Annex II – Information Required for RAC proposals

87. Proposals for the designation of a RAC must include the following information:

1. Institutional Information

- Name and address of the proposed institution and its national institutional arrangement
- Letter of support from the Host Government or national empowered body.
- Contact details of the proposed Director or Coordinator.

2. Governance and Legal Framework

- Organizational structure, including management bodies and hierarchy of responsibilities.
- Declaration confirming legal capacity to operate as a RAC under national law.
- Description of institutional autonomy and decision-making processes.
- If applicable, Copies of Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) or Letters of Intent (LoI) concluded with Host Governments or Institutions defining the terms of cooperation.

3. Human Resources and Technical Capacity

- Staffing and qualifications of staff and consultants.
- Description of relevant technical expertise and institutional experience.
- Facilities, laboratories and equipment available.
- Multilingual communication capacity and strategy.

4. Financial provisions

- Core contributions and in-kind support from the Host Government or partners.
- Estimated budget for two bienniums, indicating the funds expected from donors and those intended for projects.
- Financial reporting, auditing and accounting mechanisms.
- Statement as to whether the proposal is for a full institutional RAC or a partially staffed RAC.

5. Programs and Operational Terms

- Overview of planned activities, expected results and compliance with the strategies approved by the COP.
- Coordination mechanisms with CCS and, where appropriate, with NFPs on issues related to national obligations.
- Description of the partnerships envisaged with other RACs or regional organizations.
- Language skills and translation skills.

6. Risk monitoring, assessment and Management

- Indicators to monitor performance and the achievement of results.
- Risk analysis and mitigation strategies.
- Proposed approach to ensure data transparency, open access and knowledge sharing.

7. Sustainability Plan

- Long-term sustainability strategy, including potential sources of funding.
- Plans for staff development, succession and institutional continuity.
- Identification of potential challenges and proposed mitigation measures.

Annex III – Evaluation Framework

88. Evaluations are accountability and learning tools designed to assess the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of RACs and RANs. Evaluations will be conducted every four years. For RANs, the requirements and evaluation criteria are proportionate to the size, structure and level of formalisation of the network. The same evaluation framework is not applied in the same way to RACs and RANs. CCS may issue guidance notes to evaluators regarding the application of the criteria to different types of entities.

Evaluation Criteria and Indicators

Criterion	Illustrative Indicators (RAC / RAN)
1. Technical Capacity	Expertise of staff; adequacy of facilities and infrastructure; ability to deliver technical outputs. For RANs: breadth and depth of expert membership and access to specialised knowledge.
2. Programme Implementation	Timely delivery of activities consistent with endorsed or approved Work Plans; achievement of expected results, as defined by the targets and indicators in the approved Work Plan; adaptability to new priorities. For RANs: evaluation addresses whether the RAN provides expertise, peer review or other network functions, as defined in its Terms of Reference — not whether it directly implements programme activities in the same manner as a RAC. These are distinct roles and are assessed accordingly.
3. Governance and Management	Clarity of coordination roles; transparency and accountability mechanisms proportionate to institutional form. For RANs: governance assessment accounts for the varying institutional arrangements and structures of networks in the Caribbean. Full RAC governance criteria do not apply to informal or semi-formal networks. Assessment is proportionate to the level of formalisation.
4. Collaboration and Partnerships	Cooperation with other RACs and RANs; engagement with national, regional, and international partners.
5. Communication and Outreach	Visibility of outputs; stakeholder engagement; multilingual communication in the Convention's official languages.
6. Financial Sustainability	Diversity of funding sources; quality of financial reporting; host contributions. For RANs: this criterion is adapted to recognise that members typically self-finance their participation. Assessment focuses on the adequacy of in-kind and member contributions. This criterion does not penalise informal networks that rely on voluntary participation.
7. Knowledge Management and Data Sharing	Accessibility, quality, and interoperability of data and information products; open data practices.
8. Participation	engagement across language groups and subregions; attention to SIDS and continental States; meaningful engagement of indigenous and local communities where relevant to mandate.

9. Regional Balance and Relevance	Geographical representation in projects and activities; alignment with regional priorities as identified by the Contracting Parties.
10. Impact and Results	Evidence of policy uptake, replication, or measurable improvement in environmental management.
11. Consistency with Reporting and Communication Guidelines	Timely submission of reports to the CCS; adherence to branding guidelines. For RANs: Consistency is assessed only with respect to official correspondence on obligations under the Convention — not technical or scientific communications.
12. Efficiency of Resource Use	Efficient use of available resources relative to outputs achieved. For RANs: This criterion is applied in a manner appropriate to scientific and environmental coordination bodies and does not apply commercial performance metrics. The CCS may issue guidance notes for evaluators on the application of this criterion.

89. Each evaluation report should include findings, lessons learned and recommendations.

Rating scale: Very satisfactory • Satisfactory • Needs Improvement • Unsatisfactory. The evaluators apply criteria relating to the mandate, resources and institutional form of the entity being evaluated. Criteria 2, 3, 6, 11 and 12 include specific adaptations to the RANs, as shown in the table above. The weighting of the criteria may be adjusted by CCS in consultation with the STAC prior to each assessment cycle.

Annex IV – Evaluation Model

90. The following model may be used for consistency in the assessments of RACs and RANs.

1. General Information

- Name of the RAC or RAN.
- Institutional Arrangements
- Date of designation and last valuation.
- Names and affiliations of reviewers.

2. Summary of results

- Main achievements since the last COP.
- Main challenges encountered.
- Financial balance sheet and state of viability.

3. Evaluation by criterion

Assess each of the 12 criteria in Annex III in relation to the mandate and institutional form of the entity. Apply adaptations to the specific criteria for the RAN, as appropriate.

- Technical capacity and performance.
- Programme implementation (or network functions for RANs).
- Governance and management.
- Collaboration and partnerships.
- Communication and awareness.
- Financial sustainability (adapted to RANs in accordance with Annex III).
- Knowledge management and data sharing.
- Inclusion and participation.
- Regional balance and relevance.
- Impact and results.
- Compliance with reporting and communication protocols.
- Resource use efficiency.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

- Summary of the overall rating (Very satisfactory/satisfactory/Needs improvement/Unsatisfactory).
- Specific recommendations for improvement.
- Recommendation for maintenance, modification or discontinuation. A recommendation of discontinuation is communicated to the COP for a formal decision on dissolution.

5. Action items

- Action to be taken by RAN/RAC, CCS and COP.
- implementation and reporting schedule.

Annex V – Information Requirements for RAN Proposals

91. Proposals for the designation of an RAN must include the following information:

1. Institutional and Thematic Context

- Proposed title and thematic orientation of the RAN.
- Rationale and added value of regional cooperation.
- Support from at least one Contracting Party.
- A RAC operating in the relevant thematic area can also provide support.

2. Buy-in and coordination

- The RAC designated to provide coordination or, in the absence of a competent RAC, the proposed agency(ies) to coordinate the coordination, with their contact information. The Terms of Reference specify the modalities for coordination with CCS.
- Preliminary list of participating institutions and experts.
- Geographical and linguistic distribution of members.
- Description of governance and communication arrangements, including the role of the RAC or coordinating institution in technical oversight.
- Description of communication procedures. Official correspondence with national governments on matters relating obligations under the Convention is copied to CCS; however, technical communications with experts and institutions do not need to be copied to NFP, according to communication principles articulated in Section IV Section IV.
- Statement describing how the RAN will manage potential conflicts of interest between coordinating institutions and expert members, as well as mechanisms for disclosing relevant affiliations or funding.

3. Program and Activities

- Initial two-year Work Plan indicating priorities, expected results and coordination mechanisms.
- Description of commonalities with ongoing regional initiatives.

4. Resources and Support

- Sources considered for financial or in-kind contributions.
- Description of any existing support from donors or institutions.
- Indication of sustainability and profitability measures.

5. Expected Results

- Paperwork to be produced, workshops, research reports or datasets.
- Proposals for collaboration with RACs, STACs or global networks.
- Indicators to assess effectiveness and participation.

Annex VI – Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
COP (Conference of the Parties)	The decision-making body of the Cartagena Convention.
CCS (Cartagena Convention Secretariat)	The UNEP-administered Secretariat responsible for coordination, administration, and implementation of the Convention and its Protocols.
CEP (Caribbean Environment Programme)	The regional programme, administered by UNEP, that provides the institutional framework for the CCS.
RAC (Regional Activity Centre)	A financially autonomous institution designated by COP Decision to coordinate and carry out specific technical and scientific activities supporting the Convention and its Protocols.
RAN (Regional Activity Network)	A collaborative network of institutions designated by COP Decision to promote knowledge exchange, research, and technical cooperation, functioning primarily under the coordination of a designated RAC.
STAC (Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee)	Technical body providing scientific and policy advice to a specific Protocol COP.
NFP (National Focal Point)	Government representative designated to communicate with the CCS on matters related to the Convention and its Protocols.
Host Institution / Government	The entity providing administrative, financial, or logistical support for a RAC or RAN.
MoU (Memorandum of Understanding)	An instrument outlining the terms of cooperation between the CCS and a Host Government or Institution. Whether legally binding depends on the intent of the parties and the content of the MoU.
LoI (Letter of Intent)	An expression of interest or commitment by a host or partner institution.
CTF (Caribbean Trust Fund)	Voluntary fund supporting implementation of the Cartagena Convention.
ToR (Terms of Reference)	The foundational governance document for a RAN defining its mandate, membership, coordination arrangements, and operating procedures.
Coordinating Entity	For a RAN: the primary institutional point of contact with the CCS, ordinarily a designated RAC. Where no relevant RAC exists, a coordinating institution may fulfil this role.
Work Plan	Biennial plan of activities developed by a RAC or RAN, approved or endorsed by the COP Decision or delegated body
Strategic Plan	A medium-term (typically six-year) framework developed by a RAC outlining its priorities, resource plans, and alignment with COP-approved strategies.
SIDS (Small Island Developing States)	Small island and low-lying coastal developing countries, a category of particular significance in the Wider Caribbean Region given their vulnerability and limited administrative capacity.
Evaluation	A systematic assessment of performance, sustainability, and relevance conducted periodically, serving both accountability and learning purposes.
Strategy	A medium-term framework or plan endorsed or approved by the COP.

Annex VII – Indicative Structure for the Mandate of a RAN

This Annex provides an indicative structure for the mandate of a Regional Activity Network (RAN). The said mandate is the main governance document of a RAN. It is prepared by the proposing Contracting Party or CCS, in consultation with the coordinating RAC, and submitted to the COP or their delegated body for review, recommendation, endorsement and/or approval. These terms of reference must be concise, proportionate to the level of formalisation of the RAN and revised periodically.

1. Name and main theme

- Official name of the RAN.
- Thematic areas covered.
- Link to the Cartagena Convention protocols and strategies approved by the COP.

2. Mandate and objectives

- Missions and objectives.
- Distinction between the functions of the RAN and those of the coordinating RAC.
- Alignment with CCS's biennial Work Plan and Cartagena Convention and Protocol COP priorities.

3. Reference Entity

- Name of the coordinating RAC (primary) or, if there is no competent RAC, Name of the coordinating institution(s).
- Responsibilities of the coordinating entity vis-à-vis the CCS and the Convention and/or Protocol COPs or delegated bodies
- Links between the reference entity and the members of the RAN.

4. Membership

- Eligibility criteria to become a member.
- Membership application and approval Procedure.
- Members' rights and responsibilities.
- Conflict of interest management procedure.

5. Governance and Decision-Making

- Structure of the body responsible for steering or coordinating the network, including the involvement of the RAC.
- Frequency and format of meetings.
- Established Decision-making process

6. Working methods

- Working Language(s).
- Communication platforms and tools.
- Procedures for the production and dissemination of results.

7. Reporting and Evaluation

- Biennial reports submitted to CCS/RAC following the RAN chain $\Rightarrow$ CCS/RAC $\Rightarrow$ CCS $\Rightarrow$ STAC $\Rightarrow$ COP.
- Evaluation cycle and criteria for this RAN (as per Annex III).

8. Financial provisions

- Modalities of participation of members (self-financing unless otherwise specified).
- Any funder or project funding agreement.
- Reporting requirements for the financing of the COP-approved workplan.

9. Modification and Revision

- Procedure for amending the Terms of Reference (requires endorsement or approval by the COP).
- Planned review of the Terms of Reference (recommended every four years).