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## Interview with Chris Corbin- Coordinator, Cartagena Convention Secretariat (CSS)

*Chris Corbin Coordinator of the Cartagena Convention Secretariat discusses the role of the Secretariat, reflections on the past year—achievements and challenges and provides an outlook for the year ahead.*

**Mandate:** Supporting Caribbean countries to protect and sustainably manage coastal and marine resources through the Cartagena Convention, the only regional legally binding agreement for the Caribbean Sea.



*Christopher Corbin, Coordinator of the UNEP Cartagena Convention Secretariat and Caribbean Environment Programme*

### **What is the mandate of the CCS?**

Our mandate is to support countries of the Wider Caribbean Region to protect and sustainably manage the use of their coastal and marine resources.

This is being facilitated at the national and local levels in each country. However, importantly this is also being done at the regional level through cooperation, collaboration, and joint Decision-Making within the framework of the Cartagena Convention. This Convention is the only regional legally binding Multilateral Environmental Agreement (MEA) for the protection and development of the Caribbean Sea. The Convention entered into force or became legally binding in 1986 and currently 26 out of 28 Countries in the region are Contracting Parties.

Within the Convention, Governments also developed three technical protocols on Oil Spills, Marine Biodiversity (Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife – SPAW) and Marine Pollution (Land-Based Sources of Marine Pollution – LBS). These protocols identify specific areas of priority for our work as a Secretariat. Through these agreements, we support Governments to control, reduce and prevent marine pollution, and to protect, preserve and sustainably manage threatened and endangered species of flora and fauna. This is achieved through capacity building, institutional, policy and legislative reforms, technology transfer, and the development and implementation of management measures including establishment of marine protected areas.

### **How long have you been in this role and how has it been so far?**

I joined the Secretariat in September 2004 as the Programme Manager for our Marine Pollution Programme and was in that role for just over 18 years. In October 2022, I was promoted to Coordinator at the Secretariat, the position I now hold.

How has it been? Like everything in life - it has been a journey full of learning, challenges, achievements, and reflections. Most importantly in this role, it is how can we as a Secretariat, working with our Contracting Parties, navigate what is now a very uncertain global climate. The COVID-19 pandemic forced us to adapt our delivery of programmes, projects, and activities. And even now, with increasing environmental threats of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss, our core mandate and mission for safeguarding the Caribbean Sea, the lifeblood of this region, remains as relevant now as it was when the Convention first entered into force in 1986, almost 40 years ago.

The challenges we face highlight why our work is so critical and why we need to continue to work together to face and respond to those challenges. With careful planning and management of our natural resources, we can maximize on new economic opportunities associated with the Blue or Ocean-Based Economies. More integrated approaches and solutions that consider a greater “whole of society” approach will be essential. This ensures that the three pillars of sustainable development are truly integrated and that our critical, yet vulnerable coastal and marine resources are protected and maintained for future generations.

**Achievements:** Despite challenges, the Secretariat restructured governance systems, mobilized resources, and engaged youth. Notable milestones include the ratification of protocols by St Kitts and Nevis and the development of new strategies for resource mobilization and communication.

**Challenges:** Financial sustainability, technical capacity, and changing priorities. The Secretariat continues to engage with governments and partners to make incremental improvements.



***Clean Beaches, A Healthy Caribbean Sea***

*Through the Prevention of Marine Litter in the Caribbean Sea (PROMAR) project, volunteers in Guyana coordinate a beach clean-up. The project is coordinated through the Assessment & Management of Environmental Pollution (AMEP) Programme and under the Land-based sources of Marine Pollution Protocol. Photo courtesy of the Cartagena Convention Secretariat*

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**Mangroves** - Photo courtesy of Noel Lopez



The ratification of our Marine Pollution and Marine Biodiversity Protocols by the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis confirms the relevance and importance of our work.  
**All Smiles** - Team members of the UNEP Cartagena Convention Secretariat and the UNEP Caribbean Sub-Regional Office  
 I am also pleased by our more focused efforts to engage youth and identify new opportunities for partnerships and support.

**During the period under review your governance framework has been strengthened. What were some of the major challenges you encountered and how did you overcome/Please share what accounted for this and the main features of the emerging framework?**

Our challenges are not that different from many other UN organizations or Government agencies working on environmental issues. Financial Sustainability, Technical Capacity, provided several recommendations on how we could enhance our Governance Framework. Changing National and Regional Priorities by Governments and the donor community. While This review was initiated to address some of our deficiencies as a Secretariat. Some ways of we have not overcome these, importantly we recognize they exist and continue to engage doing business when we were first established in 1986 were no longer fit for purpose. The with Governments, with donors, and with partners to make incremental improvements. regional and global landscape has changed, environmental and developmental priorities have evolved and within the UN, there were calls for reforms including a need for greater efficiency I believe that as a Secretariat, we have to demonstrate the added value of work to the region. and direct support to countries to assist them in meeting their development goals. As a And to do that, we need to further develop and enhance our skills and expertise as Secretariat, we also needed to evolve and adapt, and the Functional Review provided a Road Secretariat to respond to the needs of our Parties. Map for that to take place.

The mandate is a huge one and as a small Secretariat, we must recognize what we can do Following the adoption by our Contracting Parties of many of these recommendations, I am best and where our mandate should be delivered through working with our partners. happy to say that we have been able to successfully implement many of them.

Firstly, we finalized our Medium-Term Strategy for the period 2023-2030 which aligns with many regional and global goals. We developed our first ever Resource Mobilization Strategy aimed at ensuring that we are on a more sustainable path not just for operational costs of the Secretariat but funding for our programmes and projects. Our Communications Strategy and Action Plan reflects a more strategic approach to outreach, communications, marketing and knowledge management. It provides a basis for targeting specific audiences, supporting fund raising, and for general education, awareness and behavior change activities. Our new Newsletter reflects this changed approach.

We have also more regularly engaged our Bureau of Contracting Parties, who have played a critical role in overseeing our work during this biennium. Their input and advice have been critical to ensuring we continue to respond to the needs of the region.

At an operational level, our new guidelines for the establishment of Regional Activity Centres and Regional Activity Networks (RACs and RANs) who provide direct support to our work reflect the importance of our partnerships and sets the platform for enhanced engagement with civil society and the private sector.

**The work of the CCS is very extensive. What adjustments have you made/are making to the team configuration to better handle the remit of the Secretariat?**

It is challenging. Not only is the current work extensive, but demands are also increasing. It becomes both about how we do more with less while continuing to respond to new emerging issues and threats. Within the Secretariat, it is also how can we become more efficient and effective in the delivery of our biennial work plan. This involves everything from how we organize and convene our meetings to how we develop and implement projects and activities. At the Secretariat, we are actively promoting a more integrated approach that maximizes the skill sets, experience, and expertise of our staff.

If we call for more integrated multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral approaches, then we need to demonstrate that type of integration across our programmes of marine biodiversity and

pollution. As we continue to strengthen existing partnerships and build new ones, our work will have a greater positive impact on the countries we serve.

We have a mechanism through which specialized Regional Activity Centres (RACs) provide technical support to countries. Through partnership arrangements with other regional agencies and partners, our Regional Activity Network (RANs) enables collaboration with Academic and Research Institutions, Government Agencies, NGOs and CBOs. These partners contribute to our core mandate of improved ocean governance. I am committed to continue to find ways to better engage them not just for consultative purposes but in implementing on-the ground solutions.

More regular interaction and engagement with our Government Focal Points and regional partners has been critical to ensure that we reduce overlap and duplication.

**What is your outlook for the year ahead? Do you think the changing global geopolitical landscape will impact the work of the CCS if so how if not why?**

**Outlook:** The Secretariat aims to adapt and engage new partners, including the private sector, and leverage digital technology and AI.

**Guarded optimism:** There is no doubt that this is not business as usual. The potential for many environmental issues to take a back seat is very evident and the role of global and even regional multilateralism is being questioned. Despite these challenges, there remains significant and continued political and financial support from our Contracting Parties, our donors and our regional partners.

For countries which border the Caribbean Sea, coastal and marine resources are the basis for their economies whether it be Tourism, Fisheries, Maritime Transportation, or new Blue Economy Opportunities. These opportunities will never be realized if we do not continue to control, prevent, and reduce marine pollution, if we do not continue to protect our coral reefs, mangroves, and sea grass beds, if we do not continue to establish and effectively manage marine protected areas and if we do not work together with a common vision.

That remains our core mandate. Our delivery model will need to change, we will need to continue to adapt and engage a different suite of partners including the private sector, we will need to discover how can we use digital technology and even Artificial Intelligence as part of our delivery model. Most importantly we all must speak in one voice, and as the Convention Secretariat, we are committed to continue to work with regional and global partners to achieve this.

***What do you see as your foremost priorities (top three) for the upcoming biennium?***

**Priorities:** Sharing best practices, securing financial contributions, and showcasing impacts of projects. We are part of a Regional Seas Family - some administered by the United Nations Environment Programme like us, and we all face similar challenges.

- One of my priorities is to have greater sharing of experiences, best practices, solutions and if needed, to be able speak as one voice on the global stage.

- A second priority is continuing to work with Governments to secure their continued financial contributions and to move forward with the full implementation of our new Resource Mobilization Strategy. We saw improvements in 2024 compared to 2023, but it is not yet at optimum level.
- And finally, while we have had many good projects, we have not always showcased the impacts and the many changemakers and champions at national and local levels. If we want to advocate for change and for safeguarding the Caribbean Sea, we must make better use of science to inform data and decision making. We must also demonstrate, showcase and celebrate our successes which can only inspire change and a new generation of ocean professionals.

Finally, as a Secretariat, we must continue to adapt and respond to the many new and emerging issues that threaten the Caribbean Sea and our livelihoods which depend on it. The impacts of Sargassum and Marine Invasive Species are just examples of the types of issues that we must be prepared to respond to not as individual countries but as a region because what impacts the Caribbean Sea impacts all of us.



*Sargassum influx in Barbados on East Coast road (north of Barclays park)- February 2, 2022. Photo credits unknown*

# St Kitts and Nevis Ratify Cartagena Convention Protocols

- **Protocols Ratified: Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA) and Land-Based Sources of Marine Pollution (LBS).**
- **Significance: Demonstrates commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainable development.**



*St Kitts Sea View - Photo credit - Derrick Miller courtesy of Pixabay*

The Federation of St Kitts and Nevis has ratified two protocols of The Cartagena Convention, the regional legal agreement which governs the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR). The protocols are the Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) and Land Based Sources of Marine Pollution (LBS). The ratifications took effect on September 26, 2024, and bring to 19 and 16 respectively the number of countries that have signed on to those two Protocols of the Convention. The Government was already a Party to the Cartagena Convention and its Oil Spills Protocol.

Welcoming the announcement, Chris Corbin, Coordinator of the Cartagena Convention Secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) said “the ratification of the Protocols on Marine Biodiversity and Marine Pollution by the Government of St. Kitts and Nevis demonstrates the continued importance of the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols and the role that it can play to support Governments of the WCR to respond to environmental challenges while taking advantage of new green and blue economy opportunities.”



*Honourable Dr. Joyelle Clarke, Ministry of Sustainable Development, Environment and Climate Action, St Kitts*

Dr. Joyelle Clarke, Minister of Sustainable Development, Environment and Climate Action, and Constituency Empowerment in St Kitts and Nevis, stated: "The Government of St Kitts and Nevis has prioritized development with sustainability, environmental stewardship, and biodiversity protection at its core. This is a significant step towards our transition to a Sustainable Island State where legislation and policy must support our ambitions for a protected, pollution-free environment. We must thank Christopher Corbin and the entire UNEP regional team for their support in moving us forward with the ratification of both protocols."



*Honourable Samal Duggins, Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources, St Kitts*

The Honourable Samal Duggins, Minister of Agriculture and Marine Resources, added: "The ratification of these protocols underscores our commitment to safeguarding our marine ecosystems, which are vital to our food security, livelihoods, and resilience against climate change. These actions reflect our dedication to creating a sustainable balance between development and the protection of our natural resources for generations to come."

Susana Perera Valderrama Programme Management Officer, of the SPAW Sub-Programme



The Cartagena Convention Secretariat is currently engaged in several projects that are *A potential PROMAR demonstration site in St Kitts-Photo courtesy of the Cartagena Convention Secretariat* Environment Facility (GEF) funded Caribbean Regional Fund for Wastewater Management + Project which seeks to implement innovative, technical small-scale solutions using an integrated water and wastewater management approach; and PROMAR which contributes to the reduction of

plastic pollution and litter entering the marine environment in the British Virgin Islands, Guyana, Suriname, St. Kitts and Nevis, and Trinidad and Tobago. This calls for the GEF funded Integration Water, Land and Ecosystems Management in Caribbean Small Island Developing States (IWECs) project which supports Caribbean Small Island Developing States and the Caribbean

## Caribbean and Latin American Cities Unite to Reduce Plastic Pollution and Transition to a Circular Economy

Intercity Network on Plastics Circular Economy Launched in Latin America

- **Kingston, Panama City, Colón, Barranquilla and Cartagena form part of the regional network**



### **Promoting Circular Economies**

*Delegates at the launch of the Intercity Network on Plastics Circular Economy in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in Cartagena, Colombia.*

Plastic pollution, including marine plastics, represents one of the main environmental challenges for Latin America and the Caribbean, impacting human health, ecosystems, and the regional economy. To address this problem, the GEF Project to Reduce Marine Plastics and Plastic Pollution in Latin America and Caribbean Cities through a Circular Economy Approach (GEF LAC Cities), in March 2025 launched the Intercity Network on Plastics Circular Economy in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in Cartagena, Colombia.

The cities of Barranquilla and Cartagena (Colombia), Kingston and Montego Bay (Jamaica), and Panama City and Colón (Panama) form part of this network that seeks to promote regional cooperation, share experiences and best practices as well as promote circular and sustainable approaches to address plastic pollution, including marine plastics. The Network plans to progressively expand to additional cities in the LAC over the coming years.

"This launch marks a milestone in joint efforts to tackle plastic pollution in Latin America and the Caribbean, driving a common vision and sustainable solutions at the local level for cities

in the region," said Jacqueline Álvarez, Chief of UNEP's Chemicals and Health Branch.

Dumek Turbay, Mayor of Cartagena, said: "Being part of the Intercity Network on Plastics Circular Economy is confirmation of our commitment to sustainability, which has been working through the "Cartagena City of Rights" Development Plan.

Our planning roadmap includes key initiatives such as strengthening organizations of recyclers and waste pickers implementing sustainable business models, driven by programmes that promote green jobs and the transition to a circular economy."

"With close collaboration with regional environmental authorities, we anticipate significant environmental actions, such as the protection of water resources, the protection of ecosystems and the promotion of sustainable practices, thus contributing to a more equitable future for all. These actions reinforce Cartagena's commitment to the circular economy and sustainable development." stated Turbay.

The network will be consolidated as a space for cities to collaborate in the implementation of circular economy strategies along the plastic value chain. With the support of the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) Cartagena Convention Secretariat, this platform will also foster partnerships with additional stakeholders, facilitating the implementation of action plans that can be replicated in other cities in the region to reduce plastic pollution.

"When the Cartagena Convention was adopted in 1983 and the Land Based Sources of Marine Protocol in 1999, urgent action was needed to reduce pollution from solid waste, including plastics. The launch of this Cities Network presents a change in approach. We can no longer only focus on improving collection and disposal of waste and plastics to prevent pollution. Circular Economy approaches are now viable and sustainable solutions that offer environmental, social, and economic benefits. We look forward to building on this network and replicating the lessons learned throughout the Wider Caribbean region," said Chris Corbin, Coordinator, Cartagena Convention Secretariat, Ecosystems Division, UNEP.

"In a few months we expect to have a finalized agreement with global scope that will align policy regarding the production and consumption of plastic products. As this process unfolds, we have a great opportunity to be a leader in this region and in the world in making progress against plastic pollution at the city level," stated Taylor Clayton, Regional Project Manager, GEF LAC Cities Project.

The launch event brought together key representatives from municipal and national authorities, as well as from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and UNEP. The meeting highlighted the relevance of regional collaboration as a fundamental pillar to implement sustainable solutions and address the environmental challenges posed by plastic pollution. Among the expected results of the network are the promotion of a harmonized regional agenda, the establishment of a coordinated approach to the plastics circular economy at city level, and strengthening capacity at local, national, and regional levels on circular solutions.

[Watch Full Video](#)

## Special Feature -Youth-Led Revolution: How the Bahamas Is Turning the Tide on Plastic Pollution

- **Initiative:** Bahamas Plastic Movement (BPM) led by Dr. Kristal Ambrose.
- **Impact:** Youth advocacy led to a national ban on single-use plastics.



*Beach Clean Up- A Plastic Warrior hard at work*

On a sun-drenched beach in Eleuthera, a group of Bahamian children sift through sand, not for shells, but for microplastics. These young "Plastic Warriors" are part of a groundbreaking initiative by the Bahamas Plastic Movement (BPM), proving that the fight against plastic pollution starts with education and ends with policy change.



*Dr Kristal Ambrose- Photo courtesy of the Bahamas Plastic Movement*

### **The Plastic Camp Model: Science, Art, and Activism**

Founded by Dr. Kristal Ambrose, a Goldman Environmental Prize winner, BPM's Plastic Pollution Education and Ocean Conservation Summer Camp is a tuition-free, immersive programme that transforms students into environmental leaders. Through hands-on activities: like beach cleanups, fish dissections (to study plastic ingestion), and "trashion" fashion shows; campers learn that plastic waste isn't just litter; it's a threat to their health, oceans, and future. The programme was supported by UNEP's EU ACP MEA III Project in collaboration with the Regional Node for Marine Litter – the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute.

Key elements of the camp's success include citizen science, where campers collect data on marine debris, contributing to global databases; art activism where they are involved in using discarded plastics to become murals, jewelry, and fashion, sparking community dialogue. They are even engaged in Policy Advocacy. They have lobbied ministers, drafted bills, and even secured a national ban on single-use plastics in 2020.

### **From Classroom to Cabinet: A Youth-Led Policy Victory**

In 2018, a delegation of 10 to 14-year-old campers marched into the office of The Bahamas' Minister of Environment. Armed with research, petitions, and a rallying cry ("We are the change, we're the solution, we can fix this plastic pollution"), they demanded action. Two years later, their efforts culminated in a nationwide ban on single-use plastics; a testament to the power of youth voices.

Jon Jon Pelecanos, who attended his first Plastic Camp at age two, embodies this legacy. Now 12, he leads beach cleanups and educates his community, proving that early

environmental education fuels lifelong activism.

### **Scaling Up: A Blueprint for Global Impact**

BPM's model is replicable, with a free training manual offering step-by-step guidance. For policymakers and educators, they are encouraged to empower youth as changemakers, merge science with storytelling and build cross-sector partnerships such as NGOs, businesses, and government. A must for systemic change.

Plastic pollution is a global crisis, but BPM's work shows that local action + youth leadership = transformative impact. As Dr. Ambrose says, "We're not just cleaning beaches, we're building a generation that refuses to accept a plastic-choked future."

## **Transforming Sargassum into Economic Opportunity**

- **2nd EU Sargassum Conference in Grenada.**
- **Joint Monitoring and Assessment Open Ended Working Group (OEWG) and Sargassum Working Group Meeting/Workshop in Trinidad and Tobago**
- **Focus:** Regional collaboration and policy alignment to manage sargassum impacts.

## **EU Sargassum Conference Urges Collective Action to Transform Sargassum into an Economic Opportunity.**



*Photo of Sargassum influx at Saint Lucia's Cannelles' beach March 2022- Photo courtesy of Jolien Harmsen*

Caribbean Representatives who attended the 2nd EU Sargassum Conference, held in Grenada, October 1 and 2, 2024, have called for a cohesive approach to address the problem of Sargassum in the region and to explore opportunities to transform it to an economic opportunity.



Honourable Dickon Mitchell, Prime Minister of Grenada



*Dr. Didacus Jules-OECS Director General*



Mr Felix Fernandez-Shaw, Director for Latin America and the Caribbean at the European Commission- courtesy of the Jamaica Information Service.

The high-level forum which addressed the challenges posed by Sargassum inundations in the region was co-chaired by Grenada's Prime Minister, Hon. Dickon Mitchell, OECS Director General Dr Didacus Jules, and Mr Felix Fernandez-Shaw, Director for Latin America and the Caribbean at the European Commission.

Ms. Susana Perera Valderrama, who represented the Cartagena Convention Secretariat, participated in a panel discussion coordinated by the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF), focusing on Sargassum governance in the Caribbean. She highlighted the critical role of the Cartagena Convention as the only existing legally binding framework dedicated to the protection and sustainable development of the marine environment in the Wider Caribbean Region. She emphasized that the Convention not only provides a basis to promote regional collaboration on managing Sargassum inundations but also has the potential to be further leveraged to enhance cooperation and policy alignment across countries in addressing

## **Sargassum Working Group Identifies Challenges and Opportunities**

Mr. Yoei de Vries, (former) Chair of the Bureau of the Cartagena Convention and (former) Focal Point for the Netherlands shared the need for a harmonized approach to Sargassum management across the region and praised the efforts of Caribbean governments in tackling this shared challenge. He noted the importance of integrating scientific research and community engagement into regional strategies, advocating for a multi-stakeholder approach that includes governments, NGOs, and the private sector. He emphasized that existing frameworks like the Cartagena Convention are essential tools for fostering regional cooperation.

The conference highlighted Caribbean governments' solid commitment and leadership in addressing Sargassum inundation issues. The Cartagena Convention remains dedicated to



*Meeting of Expert Minds - Sargassum and Joint Monitoring and Assessment Open Ended Groups tackle pressing marine issues*

**The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Cartagena Convention Secretariat in collaboration with the Regional Activity Centers (RACs) - Institute of Marine Affairs (RAC-IMA), Centre of Research and Environmental Management of Transport (RAC-CIMAB) and SPAW-RAC – hosted the Joint Monitoring and Assessment Open Ended Working Group (OEWG) and Sargassum Working Group Meeting/Workshop in Trinidad and Tobago on March 18-20, 2025.**

Building on previous work in the region, this joint hybrid workshop enhanced regional coordination and integration between the Marine Pollution (AMEP) and Marine Biodiversity (SPAW) sub-programmes of the Cartagena Convention to address the challenges posed by Sargassum inundations and nutrient pollution. It is the response to Decision 1 of the 6th LBS COP and Decision V of the 12th SPAW COP, which called for strengthening synergies between the LBS and SPAW Protocols, particularly on issues related to eutrophication, sargassum management, and marine biodiversity conservation.

### **Funding and Participants**

This meeting was funded by the Governments of France and the Netherlands and UNEP Headquarters through the Regional Seas Programme Coordination Project. It brought together over 60 key stakeholders, including members of the SPAW Sargassum Working Group and the OEWG of the LBS Protocol, as well as partners such as the ACS Commission, Caribbean Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM), and the European Union (EU). Representatives from the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and U.S. Department of State attended online in listening mode.

### **Presentation Focal Areas**

The meeting provided a comprehensive overview of sargassum influxes in the Wider Caribbean Region and their potential links to nutrient pollution, identified key data gaps and research needs to improve regional monitoring and assessment efforts. It also enhanced coordination between the SPAW and LBS Protocols, fostered enhanced collaboration between regional activity centres (RACs) and regional activity networks (RANs) to ensure more effective responses to these challenges.

## Outcomes

A key outcome of the workshop was the identification of joint activities for inclusion in both the Sargassum Working Group's Action Plan and the Monitoring and Assessment OEWG Work Plan, strengthening the integration of thematic linkages between nutrient pollution, eutrophication, and marine biodiversity conservation. Additionally, participants prepared a definition of sargassum inundation and outlined technical recommendations to be considered at the upcoming LBS and SPAW Scientific and Technical Advisory Committees (STACs), reinforcing regional strategies to mitigate nutrient enrichment, manage sargassum influxes, and enhance the resilience of marine and coastal ecosystems.

By aligning efforts under the Cartagena Convention, the meeting facilitated greater cooperation between regional and international partners, ensuring coherent policy development and technical collaboration.

The meeting also facilitated the strengthening of cross-sectoral linkages between nutrient pollution control and sargassum management which will contribute to more effective mitigation strategies, supporting the resilience of marine and coastal ecosystems across the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR).



*Sargassum influx in Petite Martinique, Grenada in June 2021- Photo courtesy of Akeisha Clarke*

## ***“Sargassum Inundation”.***

*Sargassum inundation is the massive accumulation of floating brown seaweed*  
**Promoting Marine Biodiversity Conservation**  
*drifts, pushed by ocean currents, wind, rising sea temperatures, and nutrient excess. While sargassum provides*  
**SPAW-RAC Advocates for Marine Biodiversity**  
*habitat for coastal areas*  
**Conservation**  
*health livelihoods, turning waters anoxic, harming marine life, and releasing toxic gases, trace metals and metalloids as it decays. These*



UNEP Cartagena Convention Secretariat and the SPAW-RAC advocated for the Cartagena Convention's work, specifically the SPAW Protocol, to enhance regional cooperation and share important insights on marine biodiversity conservation at the 77th Annual Meeting of the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI), held in Guadeloupe, French Antilles, November 4–8, 2024.

The Meeting served as a platform for strengthening ties and discussing strategies for protecting the region's rich marine ecosystems, which are increasingly threatened by human activity and climate change. It brought together a diverse group of marine conservation and fisheries experts.

### **Promoting the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biodiversity**

In a concerted effort to enhance regional cooperation for the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, the UNEP Cartagena Convention Secretariat participated in workshops held in October 2024 in Belize and Chile, which focused on the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement for the Caribbean and Latin America, respectively. The UN Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (DOALOS) organized both workshops which attracted experts, government officials, and representatives from various organizations who worked together to promote the implementation of the BBNJ Agreement.

At both events, Susana Perera Valderrama, the SPAW Programme Officer, presented how the Cartagena Convention and its protocols contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction and vice versa. The discussions underscored the importance of promoting synergies between the BBNJ Agreement and the Cartagena Convention and its protocols, demonstrating how an integrated approach can reinforce regional conservation efforts.

Representatives from UNEP's Caribbean Sub-regional Office and the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (ROLAC) also shared initiatives undertaken by UNEP to support member states in ratifying the BBNJ Agreement. The importance of close collaboration among countries was emphasized to ensure the effective implementation of the BBNJ, enabling more efficient management of marine resources.

## **Caribbean Regional BBNJ Conference Empowers NGOs**



*Photo of Programme Management Officer, Laverne Walker speaking at the conference- courtesy of the Cartagena Convention Secretariat*

Non-Governmental and community-based organizations were among those who benefitted from practical tools and strategies, empowering them to champion the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement (BBNJ) Treaty through impactful local campaigns and initiatives. This was a major outcome of the Caribbean Regional BBNJ Conference held

January 20, 2025 by The High Seas Alliance, in collaboration with the UNEP Cartagena Convention Secretariat and EarthEcho International.

At the forum policy makers, civil society organizations, youth, academics and indigenous communities, explored the pivotal role of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) in securing the future of the Caribbean's marine resources.

As a region deeply intertwined with the ocean economy and reliant on healthy marine ecosystems, participants benefited greatly from discussions on the BBNJ Treaty said Susana Perera Valderrama, Programme Management Officer

They received a comprehensive overview of the BBNJ Agreement, highlighting its implications and opportunities for the Caribbean's marine ecosystems and ocean economy. Youth, indigenous groups, and academics were equipped with tools to enable them to actively contribute to the treaty's advocacy and implementation efforts. The conference also facilitated knowledge exchange on strategies and best practices, fostering a deeper understanding of effective treaty ratification, implementation, and long-term ocean governance.

It equipped NGOs and community-based organizations with practical tools and strategies, empowering them to champion the BBNJ Treaty through impactful local campaigns and initiatives.



*Happy! Tamoy Singh Clarke, Programme Management Assistant, (c) shares a happy moment with other delegates at the conference.*

## **Small Grants Programme Strengthens Marine Conservation Across the Caribbean Buys Communities to a Sustainable Future**



**Reflections** Participants of the recent CAMPAM Trainer of Trainers programme- Photo courtesy of the Cartagena Convention Secretariat

The Caribbean Marine Protected Area Management Network and Forum (CaMPAM) initiative funded by the African, Caribbean, and Pacific Multilateral Environmental Agreements Phase 3 (ACP MEAs III) has made significant strides in marine conservation across the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR). The initiative implemented by the Cartagena Convention Secretariat, Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI), and the Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife Regional Activity Center (SPAW-RAC) has addressed critical environmental challenges such as marine litter and biodiversity loss in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and coastal zones.

**Beneficiaries of the Small Grants Initiative**  
**Cuba, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, St. Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**

The small grants programme of USD500,000 has empowered local communities and institutions by providing targeted support to enhance MPA management and reduce marine

litter.

The programme has helped to strengthen community participation for MPA resilience and reduce marine litter impacts in coastal ecosystems in Cuba; promote community based actions to prevent marine litter in coastal areas in the Dominican Republic, manage marine litter mitigation and promote environmental education about MPAs in Honduras, and strengthen MPA management through sustainable livelihoods and community action to control land -based pollution in Jamaica. In St Lucia the programme has facilitated the reduction of single- use plastics and promoted alternatives in coastal zones; whilst in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines it has strengthened local capacity for marine litter monitoring and reduction.

### **Celebrating 25 Years of SPAW Protocol Implementation**

As we observe the 25th Anniversary of the SPAW Protocol, the CaMPAM small grants initiative showcases real world actions advancing SPAW's mission; conserving marine biodiversity, strengthening protected areas, and fostering sustainable use of coastal and marine resources. Projects funded in Cuba, Jamaica and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines exemplify community-driven efforts to protect the WCR's rich natural heritage.

### **Integrated Approach to Marine Conservation**

This initiative demonstrates how environmental challenges are interlinked and that sustainable solutions require systems thinking. It also highlights the importance of supporting hybrid proposals that tackle biodiversity and pollution together. It reaffirmed the value of targeted, locally driven funding to improve marine conservation outcomes. It also strengthened institutional capacity, fostered community involvement, and advanced regional objectives under the SPAW and LBS Protocols of the Cartagena Convention.



*Interesting Exchange - Participants of the recent CAMPAM Trainer of Trainers programme share perspectives- Photo courtesy of the Cartagena Convention Secretariat*



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*A facilitator of the recent CAMPAM Trainer of Trainers programme- courtesy of the Cartagena Convention Secretariat*

## **CCS and IWLEARN host Preconference Workshop in Uruguay**

**Resource Mobilization, Proposal Development and Project Management Flagged for Special Focus**



**Round Table Talk**-Participants at the Pre-Conference workshop share experiences- Photo courtesy of the Cartagena Convention  
**Pre-Conference Deliberations** -Photo courtesy of the Cartagena Convention Secretariat

## Protecting Endangered Wildlife Species

Access to financing, resource mobilization, and training in proposal development and project management were flagged as areas for special focus for the intra-regional capacity training



Country representatives, project managers, representatives of intergovernmental organizations, representatives from non-governmental organizations from African, Caribbean and Pacific SIDS attended the workshop.

The Cartagena Convention Secretariat participated in the 33rd meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Animal Committee, which convened to address critical issues concerning the conservation and sustainable management of endangered wildlife species that are internationally traded. The meeting which took place in July 2024, brought together representatives from various countries, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders committed to effectively implementing the obligations of the CITES Convention



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Susana Perera Valderrama, the SPAW Programme Officer representing the Cartagena Convention Secretariat, emphasized the importance of promoting synergies between CITES and the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans. She outlined that the Cartagena Convention and its Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife Protocol (SPAW) are important regional legal frameworks and can be used to promote collaboration for the protection of endangered species and their habitats, particularly in marine ecosystems increasingly threatened by human activities and climate change.



Participants discussed several vital topics, including the status of threatened species, cooperation with other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and strategies for enhancing enforcement and compliance with CITES regulations.

The Cartagena Convention Secretariat is committed to support Governments in the Wider Caribbean Region engaged in initiatives and activities under CITES that jointly promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable use throughout the Wider Caribbean Region. As part of its ongoing efforts, the Cartagena Convention Secretariat will continue to engage with the CITES Secretariat and other related MEAs Secretariats to promote sustainable practices and effective governance that benefit both wildlife and marine ecosystems in the region.



Pictorial of protected species and the CITES Conference





*Mangrove Ecosystem - Photo courtesy of the Cartagena Convention Secretariat*

As we celebrated World Wetlands Day February 2, 2025, under the theme “Protecting Wetlands for Our Common Future,” we recognized wetlands' critical role in sustaining biodiversity, human well-being, and climate resilience. In the Caribbean, these ecosystems provide essential services such as water purification, flood regulation, carbon sequestration, and coastal protection while supporting many communities' livelihoods through fisheries, tourism, and agriculture.

Yet, despite their immense value, wetlands continue to face severe threats, including habitat destruction, pollution, overexploitation of resources, and climate change. Globally, it is estimated that over 35% of wetlands have been lost since 1970, and in the Caribbean, many wetland areas are rapidly deteriorating due to coastal development, rising sea levels, and increasing human pressures. This underscores the urgent need for stronger conservation efforts and enhanced collaboration at all levels.

Effective wetland conservation requires coordination at global, regional, and national levels. The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands provides a crucial framework for global wetland conservation and wise use. At the regional level, the Cartagena Convention and its SPAW Protocol (Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife) complement these efforts by fostering regional cooperation, establishing protected areas, and promoting the sustainable management of wetlands.

However, ensuring the long-term protection of these ecosystems in the Caribbean also requires stronger synergies with other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), a key priority promoted by the UNEP Cartagena Convention Secretariat. The Convention on

Biological Diversity (CBD) advances ecosystem-based conservation strategies, the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) protects migratory species that depend on wetlands, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) helps regulate trade in wetland-dependent species to prevent overexploitation. By enhancing collaboration across these agreements, we can achieve a more coordinated and effective approach to wetland conservation in the Caribbean.



*The American Crocodile - Photo courtesy of Noel Lopez*

### **The Importance of Wetlands for Caribbean Biodiversity**

Caribbean wetlands provide habitat for numerous species, many of which are listed under SPAW, CITES, and other international conservation agreements. Some notable examples include:

- **The West Indian Manatee (*Trichechus manatus*)** – Listed under both the SPAW Protocol Annex II and CITES Appendix I, this gentle marine mammal relies on mangroves and seagrass beds found in Caribbean wetlands for feeding and shelter. Its populations continue to decline due to habitat loss, boat collisions, and entanglement in fishing gear.
  - **The American Crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*)** – Protected under CITES Appendix I and SPAW Annex II, this species depends on coastal wetlands, mangroves, and brackish lagoons for nesting and feeding. Habitat destruction and illegal hunting remain major threats to its survival.
  - **The Caribbean Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*)** – A flagship species of Caribbean wetlands, this bird depends on saline lagoons and mudflats for feeding. It is listed under CMS and SPAW (Annex III) and protected in several Ramsar sites across the region.
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- **The Hawksbill Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*)** – Found in seagrass beds and coastal wetlands, this critically endangered species is listed under CITES Appendix I and the SPAW Protocol Annex II. Habitat degradation and illegal trade continue to



**" Accelerate Action for Gender Equity in Marine Conservation."** -Chris Corbin

*We celebrated International Women's Day on March 8 under the theme **Accelerate Action**. While this was an opportunity to celebrate the significant and continued contribution by women across multiple sectors, we should also remember that we must continue to actively work towards gender equity each day. We will not achieve accelerated action for our Sustainable Development Goals or our development agenda without the continued and importantly enhanced engagement and contribution by women at all levels - leadership, governance, research, science, advocacy and for the implementation of solutions on the ground.*



I reaffirm my commitment to protecting marine and coastal biodiversity in the Wider Caribbean Region. I work to promote sustainable ocean conservation, strengthen marine protected areas, and support regional cooperation for the preservation of our natural heritage and future generations  
Happy Women's Day!

Lucile Rossin - SPAW RAC Director



# HAPPY INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



International  
Women's Day

## **Over 70% of Secretariat Posts are held by Women**

*As Coordinator of the Cartagena Convention Secretariat, I am pleased to be part of that continued effort towards gender equity. None of the impacts we have achieved as a Secretariat since being established in 1983 would have been possible without the dedication and professionalism of the women who have worked at the Secretariat in varying positions whether it be in leadership, administration, finance, or science. Over seventy percent of our current Secretariat positions are held by women who also lead all our major technical programmes and projects. My work would not be possible without their leadership, support, and guidance.*



**I am proud to support local conservation initiatives through the SPAW RAC small grant programs. By empowering communities and organizations across the Wider Caribbean Region, we help drive concrete actions for the protection of marine and coastal biodiversity  
Happy Women's Day!**

Géraldine Conruth- SPAW RAC Deputy Director



# HAPPY INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



International  
Women's Day

*As we continue to respond to our mandate of – “Protecting our Caribbean Sea and Sustaining Our Future,” remember that many livelihoods from fisherfolk to marine professionals to tourism stakeholders depend directly on our coastal and marine environment – our Caribbean Sea. Women are often the major caretakers and advocates to ensure that these valuable, yet vulnerable coastal and marine resources are protected and/or used in a sustainable manner. Let's continue to celebrate International Women's Day - every day.”*



I am proud to play a role in safeguarding and restoring the Caribbean Sea and its precious marine ecosystems. A thriving ocean means a healthier planet and a more sustainable future for all. This International Women's Day, I celebrate the power of women in environmental stewardship and the collective action needed to protect our blue heritage. Happy Women's Day!

Danasha Gibbison-Team Assistant



HAPPY  
INTERNATIONAL  
WOMEN'S DAY



International  
Women's Day

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- **We are excited to announce that our [website](#) has been enhanced with new features-with hyperlinks!**
  - **[Meet our team](#) ...check out what they do and how they are making a difference in promoting cleaner seas for a more sustainable future.**
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## Upcoming Events

**Celebrating 25 Years of Marine Protection.**

The Cartagena Convention Secretariat **is celebrating** 25 years of the entry into force for our Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) Protocol under the theme **25 Years of Protection, A Lifetime of Impact.**

Learn more by visiting our website and following our social media pages

## **Wider Caribbean Nations Convene in Jamaica for Critical Summit on protecting the Caribbean Sea**



- *Eighteenth Meeting of the Cartagena Convention to Address Mounting Pressures of Marine Pollution, and Biodiversity Loss*

**Kingston, Jamaica October 1, 2025-** High Level Government Officials and technical experts from across the Wider Caribbean Region will gather in Kingston, Jamaica from October 13-16, 2025, for the Eighteenth Meeting of the Contracting Parties (COP18) to the Cartagena Convention. This pivotal biennial conference hosted by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) will include the Conference of Parties for the Land-Based Sources of Marine Pollution (LBS) and Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) Protocols. These meetings will set the strategic direction for regional efforts to tackle the escalating threats facing the Caribbean Sea.

According to Christopher Corbin, Coordinator of UNEP'S Cartagena Convention Secretariat, The Wider Caribbean Region, an area renowned for its rich marine biodiversity and economic reliance on coastal resources, is at a critical juncture.

"The marine environment is facing unprecedented pressures from land-based pollution, the ever-increasing challenge of plastic waste, massive influxes of sargassum, the intensifying impact of warming seas and coral reef bleaching, sea level and coastal erosion, ocean acidification, habitat and species loss. COP18 will serve as a crucial platform for the Convention Contracting Parties to reaffirm their commitment and forge a coordinated path forward to further safeguard these vital ecosystems."

COP18's main objectives are to review the implementation of the 2023-2024 work plan, approve a new strategic programme and budget for the 2026-2027 biennium, and make decisive resolutions on emerging environmental issues. Delegates will discuss proposals to advance the regional action plan for marine litter, strengthen measures to control pollution from land-based sources, enhance the network of specially protected areas and wildlife, and improve ocean governance frameworks to build a more resilient and sustainable blue economy.

Highlighting the urgency of the upcoming discussions Corbin added, "this COP is a critical call to action. We have the science and frameworks, but now we must accelerate implementation. Our focus will be on translating regional commitments into more tangible national actions that protect our shared marine resources for future generations. Collaboration is our greatest strength and by uniting our efforts we can build a more resilient and prosperous Wider Caribbean."

COP18 is expected to deliver a robust and adequately financed work plan for 2025-26, the potential adoption of new guidelines and action plans, particularly concerning sargassum management and plastic pollution and renewed political commitment to the Convention and its three Protocols on Oil Spills, Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) and Pollution from (Land -Based Sources).

"These outcomes will have far-reaching implications for the sustainable development of the region, directly impacting key sectors such as tourism, fisheries and shipping and contributing to the global agenda for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Life Below Water, "stated Corbin.

- [The Eighteenth Conference of Parties to the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region \(COP18\), 13-16 October 2025](#)
- [The Seventh Conference of Parties to the Protocol Concerning Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities \(LBS\) of the Wider Caribbean Region is scheduled for the 13th & 16th October 2025.](#)
- [The Thirteenth Conference of Parties to the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife \(SPAW\) of the Wider Caribbean Region is scheduled for the 14th & 16th October 2025.](#)

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### About the [United Nations Environment Programme \(UNEP\)](#)

*UNEP is the world's leading voice on the environment. It provides leadership and fosters partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.*

### About the [Cartagena Convention](#)

The Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR) or Cartagena Convention is a regional legal agreement for the protection of the Caribbean Sea. Adopted in Cartagena, Colombia in 1983 it entered into force in 1986. It is supported by three technical agreements or Protocols on Oil Spills, Specially Protected Areas, and Wildlife (SPAW) and Land Based Sources of Marine Pollution

(LBS). Currently 26 United Nations Member States in the Wider Caribbean Region have ratified the Convention.

**This Newsletter is a publication of the [Cartagena Convention Secretariat](#)**

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