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World Oceans Day Editorial: Inspired by Nature, Sustained by Action



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

This year's World Environment Day theme — Inspired by Nature. For Climate. For Our Future. — could not be more fitting for the Wider Caribbean. In our region, nature is not backdrop. It is infrastructure. Mangroves buffer our coastlines from storms. Seagrass meadows sequester carbon and sustain fisheries. Coral reefs protect shorelines and anchor tourism economies worth billions. The Caribbean Sea is, in every meaningful sense, our most critical climate asset.

Three days later, World Ocean Day sharpens that message further. The UN 2026 theme — "REIMAGINE: Beyond the World We Know, A New Relationship with Our Ocean" and the Action Network theme Strong Marine Protected Areas for Our Blue Planet both speak directly to the work the Cartagena Convention Secretariat and its partners have been advancing across the region.

Through our Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) Protocol, we have worked to expand and strengthen Marine Protected Areas (MPA) networks, deepen regional coordination, and build the frameworks that translate commitments into results on the water. That work continues — and its relevance has never been greater.



Healthy Mangrove Plants

Courtesy of Noel Lopez

Geopolitical shifts and financial pressures are creating real uncertainty for multilateral environmental governance. The Cartagena Convention is not immune to those pressures. But they also clarify why a strong, well-resourced regional framework matters. When global systems are under strain, regional solidarity becomes the foundation on which progress depends. The Caribbean Sea does not stop at national borders — and neither can our response to the threats it faces.

As we observe these two important moments together, I urge our Contracting Parties and partners to consider the concrete steps that will determine our collective impact: the ratification of outstanding Protocols, a strong and unified commitment to the recent decisions from our 18th Conference of Parties to the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols (COP18), and a new opportunity for the Secretariat to the Parties to the Convention to develop a new strategy. **Special Feature**
Rebuilding the Guanahacabibes Reef, One Fragment at a time we have built are only as strong as the investment and political will behind them.

Nature has given the Caribbean a remarkable foundation. Our shared responsibility is to protect it.

"Celebrating 40th Anniversary of the Entry into force of the Cartagena Convention and Oil Spills Protocol."

Read the Full Op-Ed on our website



A view of the thriving coral sections replanted by community volunteers in Guanahacabibes.

Off the western tip of Cuba, where the Caribbean Sea meets the Gulf of Mexico, lies one of the region's most significant marine protected areas. Guanahacabibes National Park stretches across more than 100,000 hectares of land and sea — a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve where dense forest meets turquoise shallows and, beneath the surface, coral reefs that have sustained fishing communities and coastal ecosystems for generations.

But those reefs are under pressure. Ocean warming triggers bleaching events that can kill coral tissue in weeks. Hurricane seasons grow more intense. Coral disease spreads faster across weakened, fragmented colonies. The structural complexity that makes a reef a habitat — the arches, cavities, and branching forms that fish depend on and coastlines shelter behind — takes decades to build and can collapse in a season.

In 2022, a small team of marine biologists, trained community divers, and local residents decided that waiting was not an option. Working within the protected area, they established the "Laberinto" coral nursery: a carefully managed network of underwater growing frames where reef-building coral fragments are cultivated, monitored, and eventually returned to the sea floor. What began as a restoration project has grown into something larger — a community conservation network with the skills, knowledge, and commitment to support long-term reef recovery in one of Cuba's most important marine areas.



Community Volunteers rebuild the coral nursery in the Guanahacabibes National Park



Community Volunteers hard at work during the coral rebuild.

The CCS Role / Regional Response

The work in Guanahacabibes did not happen in isolation. It is part of a regional effort to build the practical capacity that Caribbean protected areas need to respond to accelerating climate impacts — an effort supported by the SPAW Regional Activity Centre (SPAW-RAC) through its Small Grants Programme.

Cuba is a Contracting Party to the Cartagena Convention and its Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW Protocol), which provides the regional legal framework for protecting marine habitats and species of ecological and economic significance across the Wider Caribbean. Guanahacabibes sits within that framework as a designated SPAW protected area and is one of 38 protected areas listed under the SPAW Protocol, making the restoration work there a direct expression of the Protocol's mandate to conserve and restore degraded Caribbean marine ecosystems.

The SPAW-RAC Small Grants Programme channelled support into training — covering both sexual and asexual coral restoration techniques and equipping participants with a broader, more durable base of practical skills. Divers, marine biologists, and community members learned to collect coral fragments, maintain nursery structures, monitor fragment growth, and execute outplanting operations on degraded reef sites.

The CaMPAM Train the Trainers Programme also played a key role in regional Marine Protected Areas (MPA) networking and knowledge exchange, helping disseminate these conservation results and strengthen the capacities of Guanahacabibes National Park managers through training and peer-learning initiatives

Working alongside the Guanahacabibes National Park, the SPAW-RAC team led awareness campaigns on social media and through partner platforms extending the reach of the work beyond Guanahacabibes itself, strengthening public understanding of reef conservation and climate resilience across the region.

The UNEP Cartagena Convention Secretariat, through the SPAW Protocol and its regional networks, supports this kind of capacity-building as a core element of Caribbean marine conservation. Healthy, well-managed MPAs are not just biodiversity assets — they are nature-based infrastructure that protects coastlines, sustains fisheries, and supports community livelihoods. The Guanahacabibes model demonstrates what becomes possible when regional frameworks, scientific expertise, and local commitment operate together.



The coral infrastructure established during the rebuilding process at the national park.

"Coral restoration is not simply about growing corals; it is about helping reefs recover their ecological functions and resilience.

In Guanahacabibes, every fragment we maintain and outplant represents an investment in the future health of our reefs, the biodiversity they support, and the communities that depend on them."

— Dr. Dorka Cobian Rojas, Head of research and monitoring, Guanahacabibes National Park

Outcomes / Lessons Learned

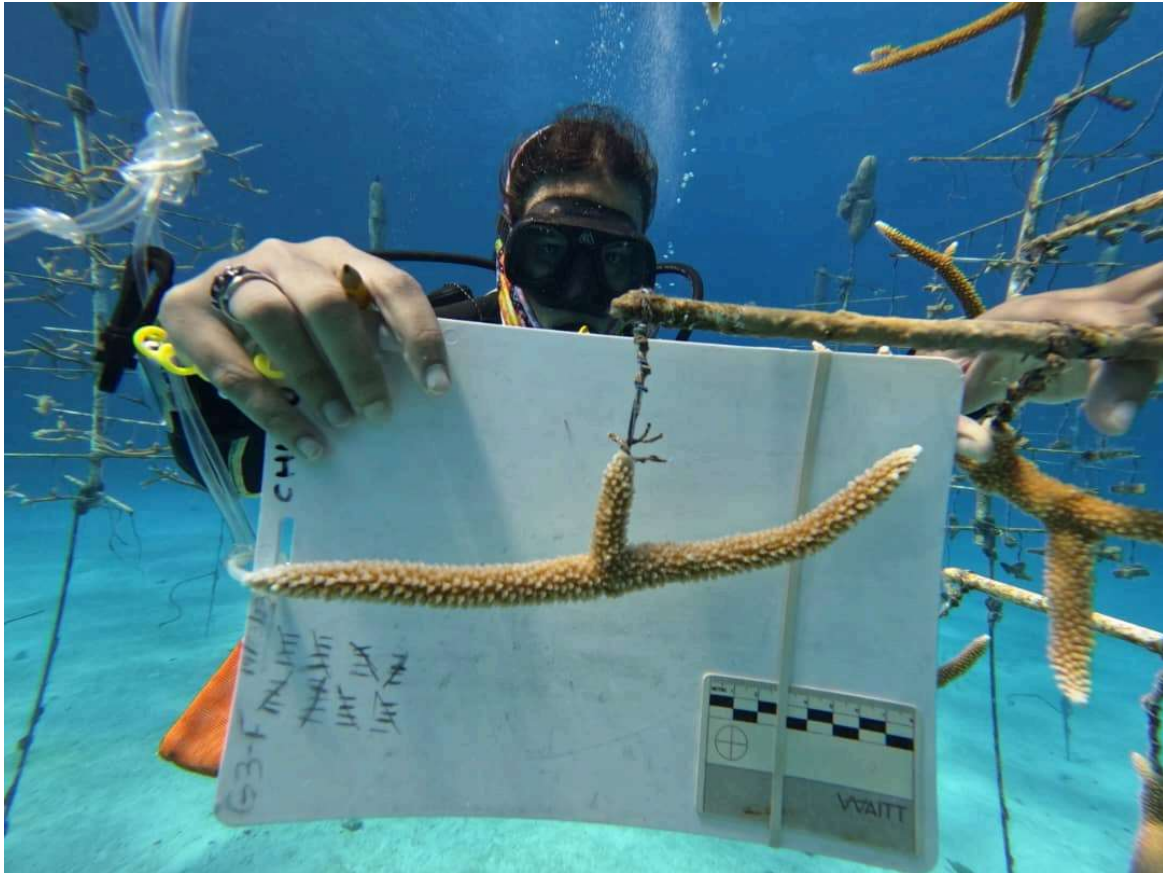
Since 2022, the Laberinto nursery has grown and outplanted fragments of three key reef-building species — *Acropora cervicornis*, *Orbicella faveolata*, and *Diploria labyrinthiformis* — across degraded reef sites within Guanahacabibes.

To date, 3,000 coral fragments have been cultivated and outplanted across 5 reef sites within Guanahacabibes, with 30 divers, biologists, and community members trained in restoration techniques.

Monitoring data collected from both nursery and outplanting areas continue to inform management decisions within the protected area, supporting a more evidence-based approach to conservation planning across Guanahacabibes.

The lesson from Guanahacabibes is that reef recovery is not solely a scientific problem — it is a community challenge. And communities, given the right training and the right framework of regional support, are capable of meeting it. The model offers a replicable approach for other Caribbean MPAs facing similar pressures, particularly as the region works toward the 30×30 goals of the Global Biodiversity Framework.

One coral fragment at a time, the future of these reefs is being written.



[Read More of this Story on our website](#)

[Read Similar stories in the Regional Seas Story Map](#)

News for the Quarter

SPAW Sub Programme — Marine Biodiversity

Secretariat Joins Caribbean Civil Society in Regional Ocean Governance Dialogue



Participants at the Regional Ocean Dialogue, pause for a group photograph.

Our Secretariat participated in a regional ocean dialogue convened by the Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense (AIDA) in the Dominican Republic on May 6 and 7, as part of its "30 Year Ocean Legacy" project. The dialogue brought together regional organisations and experts to exchange perspectives on ocean governance, marine conservation, and legal and institutional capacities across the Wider Caribbean.

We highlighted the importance of strengthening synergies among civil society, governments, and regional frameworks such as the Cartagena Convention and the SPAW Protocol — advancing more integrated, equitable, and resilient approaches to ocean governance for the region.

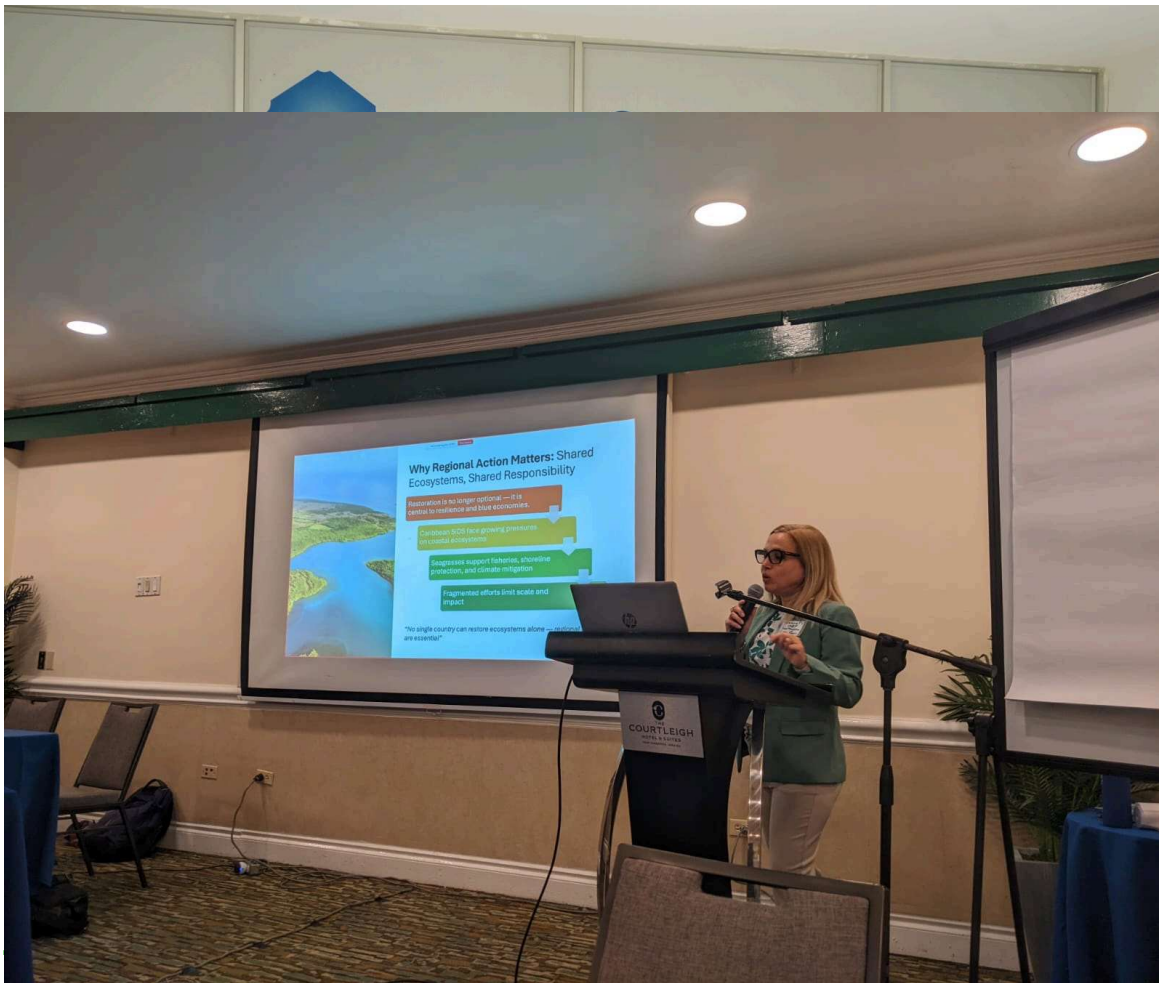
Caribbean Experts Advance Climate-Smart Marine Spatial Planning at Colombia Training



Participants share in a breakout session during the meeting.

The Secretariat participated in the IOCARIBE Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) Task Team Meeting and Regional Training on Biodiversity-Inclusive and Climate-Smart Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), held in Santa Marta, Colombia from May 11-13. Susana Perera Valderrama, our SPAW Programme Manager participated in discussions on advancing MSP across the Wider Caribbean, including collaboration under the UNDP GEF PROCARIBE+ project, ecosystem-based management, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilience.

The meeting strengthened capacity-building and science-policy integration among regional experts and institutions, supporting more coordinated and biodiversity-inclusive ocean governance approaches across Latin America and the Caribbean



Susana Perera Valderrama, Marine Biodiversity Sub-programme Officer makes a presentation at the workshop.

Regional experts convened in Kingston, Jamaica on 5–6 February 2026 for a workshop on seagrass restoration across the Wider Caribbean, convened under the Cartagena Convention and SPAW Protocol in partnership with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) through the Sustainable Blue Economies Technical Assistance Platform.

Participants developed regional guidance for restoration practice, explored links between seagrass ecosystems and blue economy opportunities, and reviewed voluntary carbon market mechanisms to support restoration at scale. Jamaica's National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA) presented national regulatory frameworks, and case studies illustrated how restoration can be integrated into coastal decision-making — moving the region from isolated projects toward coordinated, policy-aligned action.





Participants interact during a breakout session during the workshop.



Caribbean Coral Reef Monitoring Network Strengthens Regional Science and Data-Sharing

The Secretariat continued to support regional coral reef monitoring, scientific cooperation, and data-sharing through the Caribbean node of the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN), coordinated by the SPAW Regional Activity Centre (SPAW-RAC) and regional partners.

The most recent outcome of this collaboration is the publication of the latest Caribbean GCRMN Status Report, which provides a comprehensive regional assessment of coral reef health, trends, and drivers of change, supporting informed conservation and management decisions across the Wider Caribbean Region. These efforts contribute to improved understanding of coral reef condition, resilience, and ecosystem change across the Wider Caribbean — providing the scientific foundation for evidence-based marine spatial planning, biodiversity governance, and implementation of global ocean and biodiversity commitments. Caribbean reef cover and its USD 6.9 billion annual contribution to regional economies underscore the urgency of sustained monitoring investment.

Status and Trends of Caribbean Coral Reefs: 1970-2024

Caribbean Coral Reef Monitoring Network Strengthens Regional Science and Data-Sharing

The Secretariat is inviting our Contracting Parties to submit nominations of protected areas for inclusion in the SPAW Protocol's Protected Areas List. In accordance with STAC 11 Recommendation II (1), Parties are encouraged to submit nominations within the first year following each SPAW Conference of the Parties. With the next STAC tentatively scheduled for June/July 2027, the Secretariat strongly encourages submissions before July 2026 to allow adequate time for review. Nomination guidelines are available through the [SPAW-RAC Protocol's](#) [Guidelines for the SPAW List](#). The guidelines support the region's legally grounded MPA network and directly supports global 30×30 commitments.

Make your nominations here

Assessment and Management of Environmental Pollution (LBS and Oil Spills Protocols)



Delegates at the close-out meeting of the GEF CREW+ project held in Panama City

The GEF Caribbean Regional Fund for Wastewater Management (CREW) + Project Close-Out Meeting convened on 21 April 2026 in Panama City, bringing together representatives from 18 countries across Latin America and the Caribbean alongside regional partners, youth leaders, academia, and development institutions. Opening remarks from implementing agencies International Development Bank and the United Nations Environment Programme, co-executing agency Organization of American States, and Panama's Vice Minister of Environment underscored the region's continued commitment to sustainable wastewater management.

Laverne Walker, Marine Pollution Sub-programmmme Officer highlighted the project's decade-long contributions to Land-Based Sources of Marine Pollution (LBS) Protocol implementation through policy reform, capacity-building, and investment-ready solutions. Sessions examined pathways from project outcomes to long-term governance and financing, with Emerging Water Leaders amplifying youth perspectives throughout.



Attendees during a fieldtrip hosted during the close-out ceremony



Partners and organizers pose for a group shot during the ceremony

For the full story, read: [A Decade of Work, a Region Transformed](#)

Secretariat Advances Regional Pollution Reduction Through Workshops and Coastal Management Support

The Secretariat continued to strengthen implementation of the Regional Nutrients Pollution Reduction Strategy and the Regional Marine Litter Management Strategy across the Wider Caribbean, delivering targeted workshops on Land-Based Sources of Marine Pollution (LBS) Protocol implementation and supporting national wastewater and pollution prevention initiatives.

Efforts included promoting integrated watershed and coastal management approaches, facilitating knowledge-sharing among governments and regional institutions, and advancing capacity-building across 18 countries under the GEF CRW+ project. These activities contributed to practical action on untreated wastewater, nutrient pollution, plastics, and sedimentation — major ongoing pressures on Caribbean coastal and marine ecosystems.

Caribbean Ocean Data Gaps Take Centre Stage at Landmark Anguilla Workshop



Secretariat Advances State of the Convention Area Report Process and Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Agreement Readiness to Strengthen Regional Ocean Governance

The Secretariat continued development of the State of the Convention Area Report (SOCAR), the region's flagship integrated environmental assessment, strengthening science-policy coordination and monitoring of marine pollution, biodiversity, ecosystem health, and governance trends across the Wider Caribbean.

A shot of participants attending the Seabed Habitats Stakeholder Workshop in Anguilla

The Secretariat also supported regional dialogue and readiness efforts related to ratification. Fragmented, outdated, and incompatible ocean data is leaving Caribbean marine ecosystems under-protected and under-managed — a challenge confronted directly at the EMODnet alongside promotion of sustainable Blue Economy development in support of Small Island Seabed Habitats Caribbean Stakeholder Workshop, held in Anguilla from 22–24 April 2026.

Developing States (SIDS) and a Convention Secretariat Effort to Advance the Secretariat's 2026-2030 Regional Strategy, policies, and governance. The Secretariat's path toward a connected, decision-ready Caribbean marine knowledge base. The Secretariat was identified as a key institution for harmonising data systems, coordinating regional initiatives, and building capacity in marine mapping. Our Caribbean Environment Information System (CEIS) was highlighted as a potential platform to host and connect regional ocean

Projects in the Spotlight

Circular Cities Beyond Plastics

- **Sub-programme: Assessment and Management of Environmental Pollution (AMEP)**
- **Funder: Global Environment Facility**
- **Countries: Colombia, Panama and Jamaica. Six Cities : Barranquilla and Cartagena in Colombia, Kingston and Montego Bay in Jamaica, Colon and Panama City in Panama**
- **Status: Implementation**



Project Staff engage youth during outreach session

PROJECT UPDATE

During 2026, the project advanced the development of policy action plans and the identification of upstream and downstream circular economy pilot initiatives in participating cities, with technical support from the UNEP Industry and Innovation Unit.

Private sector consultations were completed in Colombia, engaging more than 80 stakeholders from across the plastics value chain and supporting the establishment of the Industry Roundtable (IRT) City Teams in Barranquilla and Cartagena. Similar consultations have now been completed in all three participating countries.

As part of its knowledge-sharing strategy, the Intercity Network continued fostering peer-to-peer learning through the webinar series “Accelerating the Circular Economy of Plastics in Cities.” With the addition of Buenos Aires, Quito, Puerto Varas, Puerto Montt, and Tulum, the network now brings together 13 cities committed to advancing circular solutions for plastics.



Children participate during one of the project's outreach sessions

IMPACT STAT:

Panama:

- 34 tons of plastics collected.
- +150 people involved on talks

Jamaica

- +600 pounds of marine litter collected

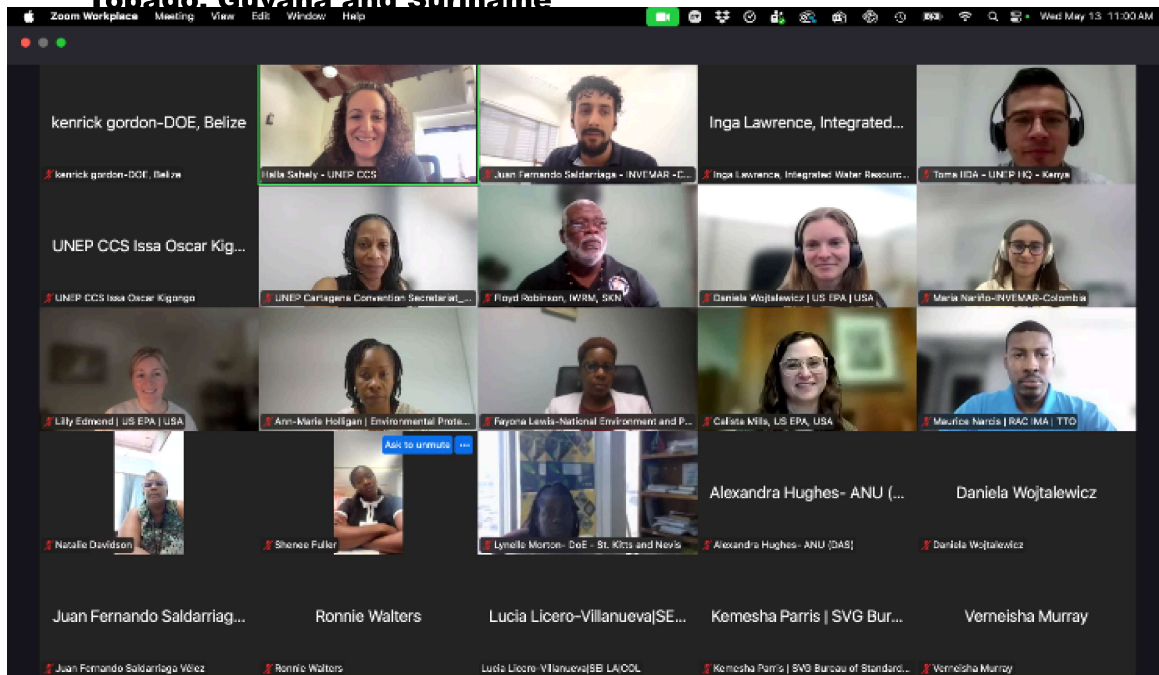


Joyful youth participants at the project's outreach sessions/

Capacity Development Project on Water Quality in Prevention of Marine Litter in the Caribbean Sea (the WMAF Phase II)

- : Sub-programme: Assesment and Management of Environmental Pollution (AMEP)
- Funder: US EPA

- **Executive Director of the Environment and Nuclear Safety (BNU)**
- **Countries: British Virgin Islands, St. Kitts and Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Suriname**



Participants of the PROMAR Columbia study tour in April 2026

IMPACT STAT

PROJECT UPDATE

Two engagement sessions were held, with 52 participants from countries and partner institutions.

PROMAR Partners Exchange Circular Economy Solutions in Colombia

Twenty-one representatives from the British Virgin Islands, Guyana, St. Kitts and Nevis, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago participated in a PROMAR Study Tour to Medellín, Colombia, from 20–23 April 2026. Organized by Co-implementer Adelphi and SOCYA— Phase I project partner the tour provided a valuable opportunity for South–South learning and exchange on circular economy approaches to reducing plastic pollution.

Data Corner

DID YOU KNOW?

Well-managed marine protected areas can accelerate coral recovery — by maintaining the fish populations that keep reefs clean.

Inside marine reserves, herbivorous fish populations recover. As parrotfish and surgeonfish populations rebound, they graze the macroalgae that would otherwise outcompete coral for space on the reef.

A global meta-analysis confirmed that MPAs increase the species richness of herbivorous fishes, which in turn enhances macroalgae removal and supports reef functioning. Caribbean evidence reinforces this: surveys of Bahamian reserves found that coral recovery rates were significantly higher inside protected sites than in unprotected areas, with macroalgal cover directly and negatively linked to coral rebound.

For the Wider Caribbean, where reef cover supports an estimated USD 6.9 billion in annual economic value, effective MPA management is one of the most powerful nature-based tools available.

SOURCE

- Topor, Z.M., Rasher, D.B., Duffy, J.E. & Brandl, S.J. (2019). Marine protected areas enhance coral reef functioning by promoting fish biodiversity. Conservation Letters, 12(4). <https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.12638>
- Mumby, P.J. et al. (2007). Marine Reserves Enhance the Recovery of Corals on Caribbean Reefs. PLoS ONE. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2799675/>
- GCRMN (2024). Status of Coral Reefs of the World: 2024.

Upcoming Events

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
August 25-27, 2026	SOCAR Working Group Meeting	Panama City, Panama

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
July 7-9, 2026	25th Large Marine Ecosystems Consultation Meeting (LME25) & 2nd Data and Information Management (DIM) Workshop, LME25	Paris, France

Deadline & Calls

Update Your Focal Point Information

The Secretariat maintains a directory of national focal points for the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols. To ensure communications and official correspondence reach the right contacts, Contracting Parties are requested to notify the Secretariat of any changes to focal point designations, contact details, or institutional affiliations.

Updates can be submitted to **unep-cartagenaconvention@un.org**



Share Your News for Future Editions of Seascope

Do you have a national initiative, project, or protected area update to share? [Watch Video Here](#)

The Secretariat welcomes contributions from Contracting Parties and regional partners for future editions of the *Seascope* newsletter. Submissions may include short updates (100–300 words), photographs with credits, or links to published reports and resources. Please send contributions to unep-cartagenaconvention@un.org with the subject line: *Seascope Submission*. [Click the link](#) to see new resources released this quarter.

SPAW Preserving our Future: Protecting Marine Biodiversity in the Wider Caribbean Region

Meet Our Staff

10 frequently asked questions about the Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA) Protocol

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](#): ...an instrumental in the day to day financial operations

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 (SPA) 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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