

SPA

P R E S E R V I N G O U R F U T U R E :

Protecting Marine Biodiversity in the
Wider Caribbean Region





The people of the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR) depend on the area's coastal and marine resources for their economic, social, and cultural well-being.

Two of the region's major economic activities, tourism and fisheries, are dependent on these resources, which are disappearing and degrading at an alarming rate. This degradation is due to unsustainable practices such as overfishing, poorly planned or regulated coastal development, and pollution, exacerbated by global pressures like the impacts associated with climate change.

The Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife Protocol (SPAW Protocol) of the Cartagena Convention provides a wide-reaching mechanism to address this socio-economic and ecological dilemma.

What is SPAW?

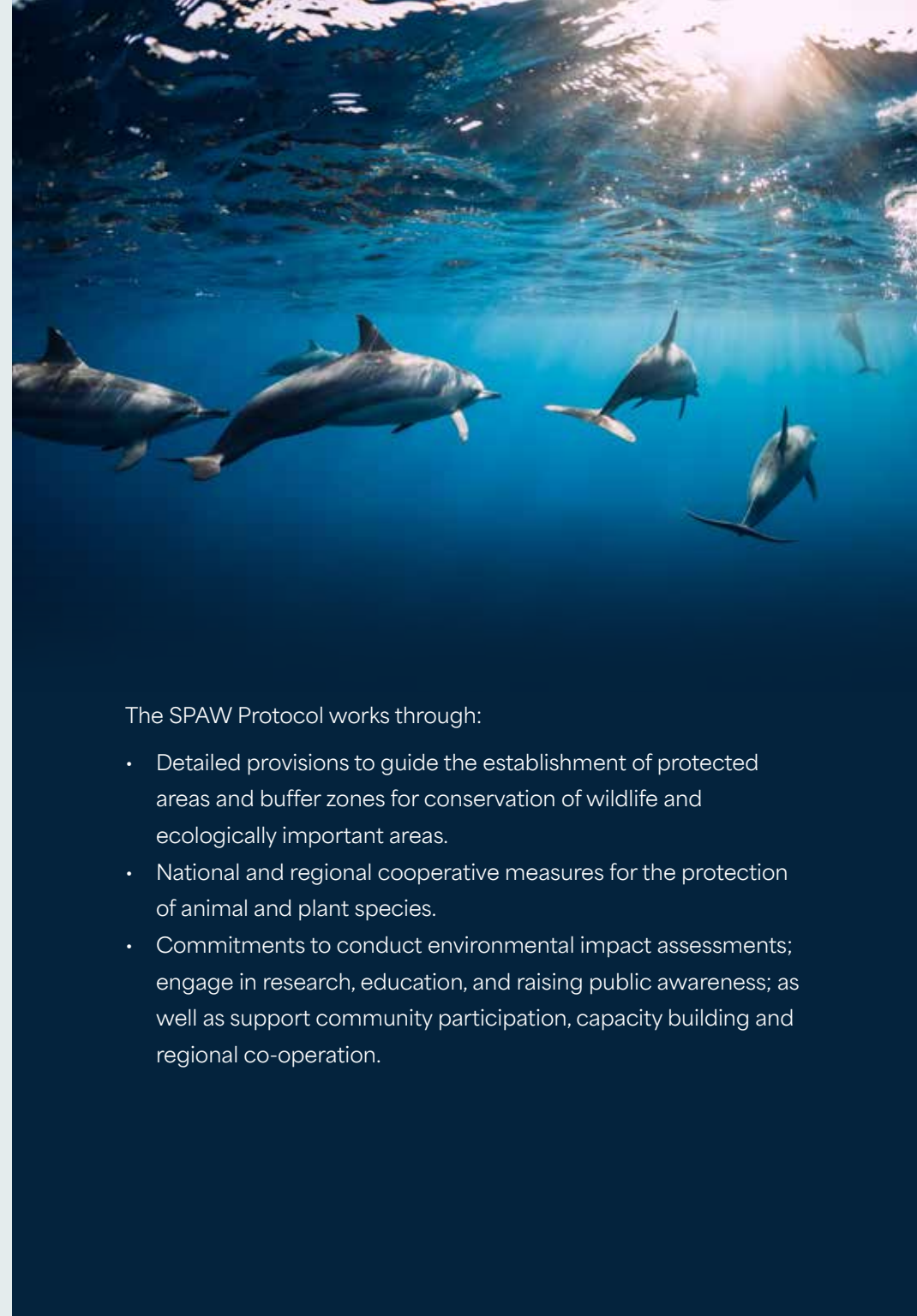
The Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region (Cartagena Convention, 1983) is the only region-wide environmental treaty that protects critical marine and coastal ecosystems, while promoting regional cooperation and sustainable development.

In April 1990, Parties to the Cartagena Convention adopted the SPAW Protocol, a regional agreement for biodiversity management and conservation in the WCR. The SPAW Protocol came into force in June 2000, when the ninth Contracting Party ratified it.

The SPAW Protocol is one of three protocols under the Cartagena Convention, alongside:

- The Protocol Concerning Co-operation in Combating Oil Spills, and
- The Protocol Concerning Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities (LBS).

The Regional Coordinating Unit (UNEP-CAR/RCU) of the Caribbean Environment Programme (CEP) serves as the Secretariat for the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols and is based in Kingston, Jamaica.



The SPAW Protocol works through:

- Detailed provisions to guide the establishment of protected areas and buffer zones for conservation of wildlife and ecologically important areas.
- National and regional cooperative measures for the protection of animal and plant species.
- Commitments to conduct environmental impact assessments; engage in research, education, and raising public awareness; as well as support community participation, capacity building and regional co-operation.

What are the objectives of SPAW?

Recognizing the dependency of the WCR on its coastal and marine resources, the SPAW Protocol:

- **Safeguards Sensitive Habitats**
Protects, preserves, and sustainably manages critical ecosystems such as coral reefs, mangroves, and sea grass beds and promotes their value to ecological health and economic well-being.
- **Protects Endangered and Critical Species**
Undertakes conservation measures to protect threatened and endangered species of plants and animals, as well as measures to prevent species from becoming threatened or endangered and to ensure recovery and restoration.

How does the SPAW Protocol work?

After the adoption of the SPAW Protocol, a Regional Programme was established to address priority issues related to the Protocol, the Cartagena Convention, and the Caribbean Environment Programme (CEP). This programme has evolved over the years, becoming more effective and participatory. Currently, the

SPAW Programme provides support to Contracting Parties to the Cartagena Convention and SPAW Protocol, CEP Member Governments, and other regional partners in several key areas:

- Monitoring and management of critical habitats, including mangroves, seagrass beds, and coral reef ecosystems, with coordination through the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI).
- Establishment of regional networks of marine protected areas to facilitate information sharing and collaborative problem-solving.
- Strengthening protected areas through technical assistance, training, capacity building, and strategies for revenue generation.
- Development of guidelines and recovery plans for the conservation of species.
- Promotion of best practices and training to encourage sustainable tourism within the public and private sectors.
- Integration with other Protocols of the Cartagena Convention, including the Protocol Concerning Cooperation in Combating Oil Spills in the Wider Caribbean Region and the Protocol Concerning Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities (LBS Protocol).
- Education and public awareness campaigns to promote species and ecosystems conservation and sustainable management.
- Monitoring and responding to emerging issues, such as the influx of Sargassum.

Why should countries join SPAW?

SPAW is the only legal instrument for the WCR that protects critical ecosystems and species while encouraging sustainable economic growth. Cooperation among all countries in the WCR is essential to achieve sustainable growth without jeopardizing the well-being of future generations.

Near 166 million residents of the Caribbean live in coastal communities and much of the economy is dependent on the coastal resources for tourism, as well as subsistence and commercial fishing. As many as 33 million international tourists support local economies, representing US \$60 billion for the region. For example, the Caribbean is host to 60% of the world's leisure divers.

While this economic growth benefits the area, the Caribbean's natural resources are disappearing at an astounding rate. For example, 55% of fish stocks in the Caribbean are considered over-exploited, while the coral cover in the Caribbean reefs has declined from 50% to 10% in the last three decades.

Over the past two decades, 1,200 protected areas were established, but only 30% are managed effectively. Proper SPAW implementation can preserve ecosystems and ensure long-term economic viability through sustainable fishing and tourism.



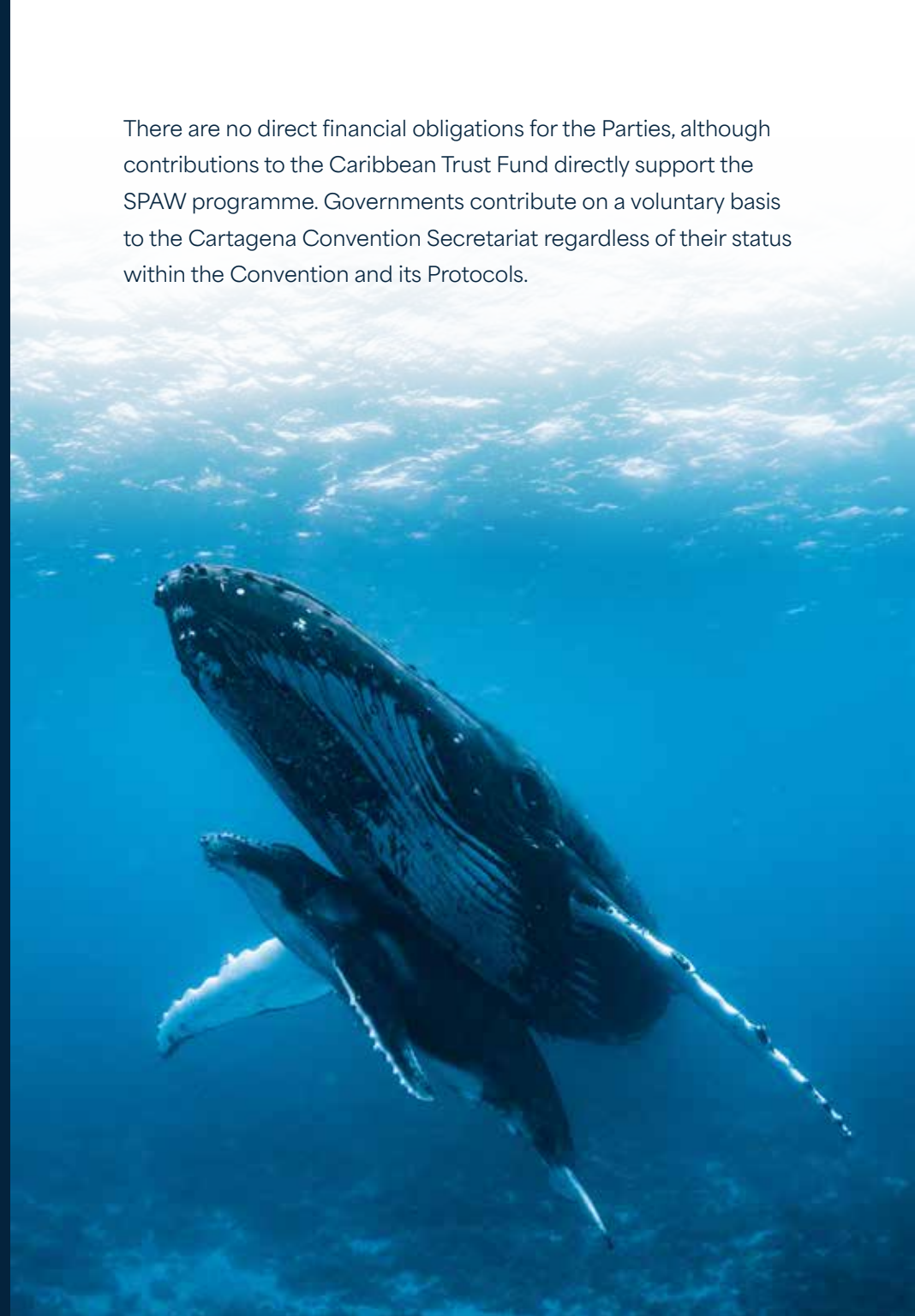
How does SPAW assist Governments?

Becoming a Contracting Party to the SPAW Protocol provides several benefits to participating countries. The SPAW Programme activities and other regional cooperative opportunities will:

- Provide direct assistance for the management of the use of coastal and marine resources.
- Demonstrate to tourists, donors and the international community the country's commitment and dedication to biodiversity conservation.
- Provide opportunities for partnerships and coordination on technical assistance, research, education, and capacity building on coastal and marine resource initiatives.
- Build linkages with environmental agreements applicable to the region and offer guidance for their implementation.
- Access funding from donors, projects implemented by the Secretariat, and other relevant initiatives.
- Offer technical assistance and expertise through the SPAW Regional Activity Center (RAC), established in 2000 in Guadeloupe to assist with the implementation of SPAW activities at the request of the Contracting Parties.

The SPAW Protocol was negotiated by and for the Governments of the WCR to reflect local and regional priorities and concerns.

There are no direct financial obligations for the Parties, although contributions to the Caribbean Trust Fund directly support the SPAW programme. Governments contribute on a voluntary basis to the Cartagena Convention Secretariat regardless of their status within the Convention and its Protocols.



What is the relationship of SPAW to other environmental treaties?

The Cartagena Convention Secretariat implements collaborative actions with several global environmental treaties and regional organizations. The governments of the Caribbean recognize SPAW as a key mechanism that assists with the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). While SPAW and the CBD are distinct agreements, they collaborate constructively to achieve common objectives. Coordinated actions and initiatives between the secretariats of the Cartagena Convention and the CBD effectively support Caribbean countries.

Cooperative actions and joint projects have been implemented to support Caribbean nations in collaboration with other global initiatives related to SPAW activities. These include the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention), the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (IOC-UNESCO).

SPAW also collaborates with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI), and ICRI's Global Coral Reef

Monitoring Network (GCRMN). The SPAW-RAC coordinates the Caribbean node of the GCRMN.

SPAW, along with these other global agreements and initiatives, shares similar objectives. Joint activities maximize resources, reduce overlap and duplication, and enhance communication and coordination among governments for greater beneficial impact.

How does a Government join SPAW?

Any State in the WCR that is a Party to the Cartagena Convention may join the Protocol by ratification or accession. Ratification is available to those countries that signed the Protocol before 1991, and accession is the mechanism available to countries that are not signatories. To ratify or accede, the Government's Ministry of Foreign Affairs must obtain a certified copy of the SPAW Protocol from:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia
Division of International Co-operation
Calle 10 No. 35-52
Palacio de San Carlos
Bogota, Colombia

For current information on Parties to SPAW and a copy of the SPAW Protocol and its Annexes, search UNEP/CEP web page: unep.org/cep/



Protecting endangered species & sensitive habitats

The Wider Caribbean Region's plant and animal species represent the greatest biodiversity concentration in the Atlantic Ocean Basin. In the region, habitat loss or modification threatens 75% of all species.

Additional threats to plant and animal species include over-exploitation and habitat degradation due to unsustainable practices such as overfishing, unplanned coastal development, and pollution. These challenges are further compounded by the devastating impacts of climate change.

THE CARIBBEAN SEA

The physical environment of the Caribbean Sea (over four million km² with deep water basins, estuaries, oceanic islands and varied bottom topography as well as shallow offshore sand banks and coral reefs), provides a diverse range of conditions and habits that suit a variety of species.

THE CARIBBEAN ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

The Caribbean Environment Programme (CEP) supports member countries with the implementation of the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols. Under UNEP's framework, CEP was created by 28 member countries of the region in 1981 to promote regional co-

operation and coordination for the protection and management of the region's coastal and marine resources.

These countries border the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico, from as far north as the eastern coast of Florida in the United States to as far south as French Guiana. The Convention area includes the island nations and territories of the insular Caribbean, and Mexico, Central America, and the north coast of South America.

SPECIES PROTECTED BY SPAW

One year after the adoption of the SPAW Protocol, the Parties to the Cartagena Convention established lists of marine and coastal species requiring protection through three Annexes to the Protocol:

- **Annex I:** Endangered plant species
- **Annex II:** Endangered animal species
- **Annex III:** Protected plants and animals to be maintained at a sustainable level

To guide decision-making, a Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) was established by the Protocol. This committee is composed of government-designated experts, as well as experts from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and scientific institutions.

The STAC plays a critical role in providing recommendations to the Contracting Parties on key issues, such as the listing of species and marine protected areas, the implementation of the Protocol's obligations, and contemporary regional challenges like the influx of sargassum. The STAC serves as a platform for governments,

NGOs, and other experts to collaborate and reach consensus on biodiversity issues relevant to the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR).

Recognizing the dynamic nature of ecosystems and the evolving needs of species protection, the SPAW Protocol allows for the inclusion or removal of species and protected areas based on specific criteria developed by the Parties for this purpose.

Fish: Excess nutrients and pesticides degrade coral reefs, making near-shore environments unsuitable for some fish. Over-harvesting and pollution deplete fish stocks faster than they can recover from natural population growth.

Sea Turtles: All six species of sea turtles in the Caribbean are endangered. Incidental bycatch in fishing gear, as well as over-exploitation, especially of adult females on nesting beaches and collection of eggs, are largely to blame.

Manatees: The West Indian manatee faces threats from boats and poachers, as well as habitat loss from coastal development

Coral Reefs: Pollution from industry and agriculture, coastal erosion, sewage, and the over-exploitation of fisheries are major threats to coral reefs and the valuable species and resources they sustain. Additionally, the impacts of climate change, such as rising sea temperatures, ocean acidification, and increased frequency of storms, are exacerbating the vulnerability of coral reefs.

Spiny Lobsters: Human pressures, such as over-harvesting, take a particular toll on many commercial species.

Dolphins and Whales: Hundreds of thousands of dolphins and whales die worldwide each year in fishing nets. The intentional take of some whales and dolphins continues in the Region. For migratory species that cross national boundaries, protection is critical.

Mangroves and Seagrass Beds: Mangroves and seagrass beds are being altered and destroyed by construction, dredging, and anchoring, threatening the biodiversity that these ecosystems sustain, which contributes to the health, beauty, and economy of the Caribbean region. For example, mangroves provide nurseries for many important commercial fisheries species, such as lobster and conch. As mangrove areas are destroyed by development, coastlines become more vulnerable to erosion, storms, and hurricanes.



PHOTO CREDITS

SEA TURTLE: DEREK; SEAWEED: BRADEN COLLUM;
DOLPHINS: WONDERFUL NATURE; IGUANA:
STÉPHANE BRÄCKEN; HUMPBACK WHALES: SEAN;
GROUPER: SUEGRIES; MANATEE: AUSTIN

