

Cartagena Convention Secretariat (CCS)

Regional Strategy for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region 2026–2030

Summary of Comments Received and Secretariat Responses

Prepared for the Virtual Intersessional Meeting of National Focal Points, 18–19 August 2026

15 July 2026

1. Purpose of this Document

This document accompanies the Regional Strategy 2026–2030, circulated in both a clean version and a version showing all reviewer comments and the Secretariat’s responses. It provides Contracting Parties with a concise overview of the scope and nature of the comments received during the review process, and how each category of comment has been addressed, without requiring a paragraph-by-paragraph review of the comments file.

Comments were received from a number of Contracting Parties and other reviewers over the course of the review process, together with a series of quality-assurance checks conducted by the Secretariat itself, including a verification of decision-related terminology against the actual text of COP 18 Decisions (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR IG.49/4). In total, 94 individual comments and responses are recorded in the comments file, representing 50 distinct issues raised; every issue has received a substantive response, whether by way of a textual amendment or a clarifying explanation.

Section 2 below summarises this work by theme, without attributing individual comments to their source, since a number of reviewers raised closely related points and the value of this overview lies in the pattern of issues raised and how they were resolved. Section 3 sets out additional substantive comments which raise genuine policy or programmatic questions rather than drafting issues – including several where a Secretariat proposal, such as a new or revised indicator, would need to be put to Contracting Parties rather than adopted unilaterally. The Secretariat considers these should be put to Contracting Parties for direct discussion and guidance at the Intersessional meeting, together with the Secretariat’s reflection on each. As with Section 2, individual comments are not attributed to their source.

2. Overview of Comments Received and How They Were Addressed

The table below groups the comments received into themes, rather than listing all 94 individually. Full detail, including the specific wording of each comment and the Secretariat’s reply, remains available in the comments version of the Strategy.

Theme	Nature of comments	Status	How addressed
Decision-verb accuracy against actual COP 18 Decisions	Comments, together with a Secretariat self-check against the text of COP 18 Decision UNEP(DEPI)/CAR IG.49/4, flagged repeated use of “adopted” and “endorsed” where the actual Decision uses “approved” (Work Plans and Budgets, Decision I.1) or “noted” (Resource Mobilization Strategy and the Communications and Knowledge Management Strategy, Decision III).	Resolved	A full proofing pass was conducted against the actual wording of COP 18 Decisions. “Approved” is now used consistently for Work Plans and Budgets throughout the document (Foreword, §1.2, §2.3, §2.4, Roadmap introduction, Conclusion). The Resource Mobilization Strategy and the Regional Knowledge Management and Communication Strategy now correctly read as “noted” by Contracting Parties rather than “adopted” or “endorsed.”
Terminology and institutional naming	Comments requested updating CLME+ references to PROCARIBE+ where appropriate; replacing “arrears” with “unpaid/outstanding (voluntary) contributions” to match how Contracting Parties’ own contributions are consistently described as voluntary in the IGM decision record; and removing an incorrect claim that Contracting Parties “act collectively through” the Secretariat, RACs, RANs and NFPs.	Resolved	PROCARIBE+ added to the List of Acronyms. CLME+ retained specifically where it refers to the historical project name. Financing sections standardised on “unpaid/outstanding voluntary contributions.” The inaccurate “act collectively” framing was removed from the Theory of Change section.

Theme	Nature of comments	Status	How addressed
Heading and cross-reference accuracy	A heading was found to read “General Principles and Approaches” despite an earlier comment specifically objecting to the content being characterised as “principles”; and language suggested the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committees report directly to the Convention COP rather than through the Protocol structure.	Resolved	Heading corrected to “General Approaches.” Reporting-chain language adjusted to reflect the STACs report to the Protocol STACs, and to the Protocol or Convention COP as appropriate.
Status and endorsement language for the list of regional strategies and action plans	Comments noted that not every instrument in the list of regional strategies and action plans referenced in §2.3.1, the Conclusion, and elsewhere was formally “endorsed” or “adopted” by the COP – some were only noted, and others predate COP 18 entirely. A related comment questioned whether every instrument was truly “led by the relevant RACs and RANs.”	Resolved	Language throughout was generalised to avoid a single uniform verb: the text now recognises that “some of these have been formally approved or endorsed through COP Decisions while others will be used by Parties and/or the Secretariat, as appropriate, to guide future actions.” The blanket claim that all instruments are led by RACs/RANs was similarly qualified. A related check confirmed that the Cartagena Convention Action Plan on Sargassum Inundation had been omitted from the Annex II list of regional strategies and action plans despite being referenced in the main text; it has been added.
Scope: linking external frameworks and obligations back to the Convention	Several comments observed that references to external obligations, commitments, or global processes (e.g. under SPAW) did not make a sufficiently clear link back to the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols, risking a reading that the Strategy extends the Secretariat’s mandate beyond the Convention itself.	Resolved	Language adjusted at each instance to make the link to the Convention and its Protocols explicit, including in the SPAW Protocol coordination bullet under Strategic Objective 2.
Drafting precision: dangling sentences, duplication, and unclear references	A sentence describing regional and sub-regional frameworks ended mid-thought with a dangling comma and no continuation; a paragraph on partnerships appeared to be accidentally duplicated; isolated comments asked “what does this mean?” against unclear passages; and a comment questioned an unnecessary qualifying phrase limiting a reference to frameworks “developed with Secretariat input.”	Resolved	The incomplete sentence was simplified and completed. The duplicated paragraph was reworded to remove the repetition. Unclear passages were rewritten to link back explicitly to the surrounding text, and the unnecessary qualifying phrase was removed.
Framing of hazards and technical scope clarifications	A comment noted that oil spills and harmful algal blooms are of anthropogenic rather than strictly marine origin; another requested clarification on the intended scope of “law enforcement” under the Convention and its Protocols.	Resolved	The hazards passage was reworded to remove the marine-origin framing and add a reference to associated public health implications. “Law enforcement” was replaced with language describing compliance with national Convention and Protocol obligations through national systems and reporting.
Indicator and output-level precision	Comments recommended splitting a bullet that conflated voluntary CTF contributions with implementation of other obligations into two concepts, and recommended deleting a Roadmap output row (“Strengthen regional coordination on ocean governance”) on the grounds that the proposed indicator – number of joint initiatives – does not reflect effectiveness	Resolved	The financial-commitments bullet was reviewed and is considered adequately covered by the Resource Mobilization Strategy at this level of detail. The ocean-governance output row was removed from the Roadmap; the underlying priority area is retained in the Strategic Objective 4 narrative as a cross-cutting activity, rather than a stand-alone output.

Theme	Nature of comments	Status	How addressed
	and the activity is inherently cross-cutting rather than output-specific.		
Communications and reporting refinements	A comment recommended that shared information be tailored to different audiences (fishers, scientists, decision-makers) to ensure messages are delivered effectively; another asked that any changes to national reporting templates be carefully considered by the COP(s) given that templates are structured around specific Convention and Protocol obligations.	Resolved	Tailoring of communications products to different audiences is now reflected in Strategy Objective 3. The Monitoring and Evaluation section was adjusted to make clear that any amendment to national reporting templates is a matter for Contracting Parties to decide, subject to the Strategy's adoption or approval.
Background section precision and supporting citations	Comments requested a citation for background statistics on the Wider Caribbean Region; queried the use of "surface" rather than "area" in describing the region's extent; recommended adding "among" to a comparison of the region's States as being the largest and smallest in the world; and noted that a referenced strategic-directions framework is global in scope rather than region-specific. A related comment recommended, and specific document reference numbers were added for, two companion strategies mentioned in the Foreword.	Resolved	"Area" is now used in place of "surface"; "among" was added to the largest/smallest States comparison; the strategic-directions reference was clarified as a global framework; supporting reference was added for the background statistics; and document reference numbers (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR IG.48/INF.7 and UNEP(DEPI)/CAR IG.49/INF.10) were added to the Foreword for the two companion strategies concerned.
Confirmations and clarifying questions requiring no textual change	A small number of comments asked a clarifying question about which part of the Strategy addresses a given topic, or confirmed existing national alignment with specific provisions (for example, in relation to national contingency plans and oil spill protocol arrangements), without proposing any textual amendment.	Noted	Each was acknowledged directly; since no textual change was requested or required, these are considered closed.
Consistency of terminology for recurring climate stressors	A comment observed that "variable ocean temperatures and ocean acidification" was used as a specific formulation in some places, while a generic "changing environmental conditions" or a differently-worded "warming seas and ocean acidification" appeared elsewhere, and recommended applying one formulation consistently.	Resolved	"Variable ocean temperatures and ocean acidification" is now used consistently at all five instances across the Foreword, §2.1, the Theory of Change section, and the Conclusion.

All twelve themes above are considered fully resolved in the current draft. The substantive comments discussed in Section 3 below remain outstanding and should be treated as requiring a decision or further input from Contracting Parties at the Intersessional meeting.

3. Additional Substantive Comments for Discussion at the Intersessional Meeting

The comments below raise substantive policy or programmatic questions that go beyond textual drafting – touching on the Strategy's objective structure, indicator design, and the scope of cooperation with external conventions and frameworks. Rather than resolve these unilaterally through drafting choices, the Secretariat considers that they are better placed before Contracting Parties for direct discussion and guidance at the Intersessional meeting. Each comment is reproduced below, followed by the Secretariat's reflection on how it relates to the overall approach taken in this revision.

3.1 Structure of Strategic Objective 4: Governance and Financing

Comment received

It would seem that they are two different and equally important objectives, the first on governance and the second on financing. In governance, it should be addressed how these national legislative and policy frameworks are going to be strengthened (data generation, capacity building programs, exchange of experiences, etc.), and in financing, how these alliances are going to be sought and strengthened (strengthening country readiness to receive investments, etc.).

Secretariat reflection: This is a genuine structural question about the architecture of the Strategy, not a wording issue. Strategic Objective 4 has moved through several formulations over the course of this revision – originally framed narrowly as Sustainable Blue Economies, then broadened to Governance, and now combining governance, circularity and financing under a single objective. The comment correctly identifies that governance and financing are substantively distinct workstreams with different actors, instruments and success measures, and that combining them risks under-specifying both. The Secretariat has not resolved this by further drafting, since the choice between a single combined objective, two separate Strategic Objectives, or treating one or both as cross-cutting themes is a structural decision for Contracting Parties. This is recommended for direct discussion and decision at the Intersessional meeting.

3.2 Indicator design for marine litter prevention (Strategic Objective 1)

Comment received

To avoid focusing solely on remedial measures when tracking waste collection and recovery initiatives, and to also include an indicator on waste prevention, we would like to see one such indicator as the reduction in the amount of bulky waste found in certain areas, for example, during these initiatives.

Secretariat reflection: This is an important and well-founded point: the current indicators for marine litter emphasise collection and recovery rather than prevention. When the indicator framework was crafted, the Secretariat deliberately favoured qualitative and process-type indicators, since many of the more quantitative measures proposed are not routinely tracked at the Secretariat level but depend on country-level monitoring and specific projects. The Secretariat is prepared to propose a quantitative prevention indicator along these lines, but adding one commits Contracting Parties to a specific monitoring burden that should be agreed rather than assumed. This is recommended for discussion and decision at the Intersessional meeting.

3.3 Species, habitat and protected-area indicators and scope (Strategic Objective 2)

Comment received – priority species indicator wording

This does not appear to be an indicator for assessing whether the action has been achieved. Instead, we would like to see instead: “Good conservation status of priority species” or “Favorable trend in the status of priority species populations.”

Secretariat reflection: This is a fair technical critique of the current indicator, which was considered internally to be broadly appropriate, but the specific alternative wording proposed has not yet been reviewed with the Secretariat’s biodiversity focal point. The Secretariat intends to finalise this wording in consultation with the SPAW technical team and propose it for Contracting Parties’ consideration, and notes it here so that Parties are aware the current wording is not yet settled.

Comment received – clarification of “area under effective coastal zone management”

We would like to see clarification on what is understood by “area under effective coastal zone management.”

Secretariat reflection: This indicator is believed to correspond to a related global indicator (used, for example, in Regional Seas or SDG-related reporting), but this has not yet been confirmed. The Secretariat will verify the precise definition and methodological source with its technical focal points and propose a clear definition, and is flagging the point here rather than asserting a definition that has not been confirmed.

Comment received – strengthening MPA network protection level and consistency

In addition to this activity, we would like to see an activity focused on strengthening the protection level and the consistency of the MPA network.

Secretariat reflection: This is a substantive and reasonable addition to the Strategic Objective 2 priority areas. The Secretariat has not added this activity unilaterally, since it has resource and prioritisation implications for the SPAW

sub-programme's work plan. The Secretariat is prepared to propose specific language for Contracting Parties' consideration, with the understanding that this represents an expansion of planned activity under SO2.

Comment received – methodology for MPA effectiveness scoring

We would like to see clarification on how this score is computed, as several methods to compute such a score exist. Have there been any evaluations done regarding the MPAs created through the SPAW protocol?

Secretariat reflection: This is an important point, and work in this area is genuinely needed. Some prior work exists on MPA effectiveness, and this could become a proper indicator if Contracting Parties agree that work should be initiated to link it with established regional procedures and reporting. The Secretariat has not selected or endorsed a specific methodology unilaterally, since doing so would commit the region to a particular evaluation approach without Parties' agreement, but is prepared to bring options forward for consideration.

Comment received – linkage with the Inter-American Convention on sea turtles

We would like to see linkage with the Interamerican turtle convention in the context of this activity.

Secretariat reflection: This is a useful suggestion, but not all Contracting Parties to the Cartagena Convention are Parties to the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles, which makes a direct textual link difficult without over-stating a commitment that does not apply uniformly. A more general reference to cooperation with relevant regional and global conventions in support of work under the SPAW Protocol may be a better formulation. The Secretariat is prepared to propose such language, but considers the precise scope of such cooperation is best confirmed with Contracting Parties rather than drafted unilaterally.

Comment received – effectiveness of the joint-initiatives indicator

The number of joint initiatives is not an indicator of how effective those partnerships are in terms of supporting Contracting Parties with strengthening SPAW Protocol implementation.

Secretariat reflection: The Secretariat agrees with this point: a count of joint initiatives is, at best, a starting point for assessing partnerships, not a measure of their effectiveness. The Secretariat is prepared to propose a genuine effectiveness measure, but doing so requires input from Contracting Parties on what "effective" should mean in this context and how it could practically be assessed and reported, given that much of the underlying activity is delivered through partners rather than the Secretariat directly. This is recommended for discussion and guidance at the Intersessional meeting.