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Eighteenth Meeting of the Contracting Parties to
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**TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED STATE OF CONVENTION AREA REPORT ON
MARINE POLLUTION AND MARINE HABITATS**

For reasons of economy and the environment, Delegates are kindly requested to bring their copies of the Working and Information documents to the Meeting, and not to request additional copies.

Towards an integrated State of Convention Area Report on marine pollution and marine habitats

1. Background

This information document is being presented to the 7th Conference of Parties to the Land Based Sources of Marine Pollution Protocol (LBS COP7), the 13th Conference of Parties to the Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife Protocol (SPAW COP13) and the 18th Conference of Parties to the Cartagena Convention (Cartagena Convention COP18) in response to the following Recommendation of the 7th Scientific Technical and Advisory Committee Meeting to the LBS Protocol (LBS STAC7).

The Recommendation was:

Recommendation V(3)

“That the Secretariat provide additional information to LBS COP7, SPAW COP13 and Cartagena Convention COP18 regarding how an integrated State of Convention Area Report (SOCAR) on marine pollution and marine habitats could be developed, including possible engagement with the State of Marine Ecosystems and Economies (SOME) Working Group and other experts, where appropriate and within the scope of the Convention.”

2. Context

2.1 Reporting Requirements under the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols

Article 16(2)(a) of the Cartagena Convention calls on Contracting Parties to periodically assess the state of the environment within the Convention Area. Additionally, Article 12 of the Protocol Concerning Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities (LBS Protocol) requires Contracting Parties to submit reports to the Secretariat containing information on the environmental status of the Convention Area.

2.2 Establishment of Working Group(s) to support development of the State of Convention Area report on Marine Pollution (SOCAR).

Noting the above, Member States at the 14th Intergovernmental Meeting (IGM) on the Action Plan for the Caribbean Environment Programme and 11th Meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP) to the Cartagena Convention, agreed to establish an Interim Working Group to advance efforts related to environmental monitoring and assessment. This group was tasked with using the Caribbean Environment Programme Technical Report No. 33 (CEP TR 33) as a baseline for improving effluent reporting and assessing water quality conditions under the LBS Protocol (Decision 3).

Subsequently, Decision 3 of the 1st LBS COP expanded the mandate of the Interim Working Group to include the development of the first State of Convention Area Report (SOCAR) on Marine Pollution as per Article 12 of the LBS Protocol.

By the 3rd LBS COP, Contracting Parties formally acknowledged the need for greater integration between the AMEP and SPAW sub programmes. Decision 8 of that LBS COP3 highlighted that such integration could be achieved through the development of SOCAR and a complementary State of Marine Habitats Report. Together, these two reports would support obligations under Article 16(2)a of the Cartagena Convention.

Following resource mobilization efforts, the Secretariat benefitted from financial support from the UNDP GEF CLME+ and the GEF CReW projects to develop the first SOCAR on Marine Pollution. The UNDP GEF CLME+ project also financed the development of the first State of Marine Habitat Report, coordinated through the SPAW sub-programme. This State of Marine Habitat report, while not a reporting requirement for the SPAW Protocol, was considered important to enabling a comprehensive view of the State of marine environment and resources of the Wider Caribbean Region. This report focused on compiling existing data and information about the three major marine habitats – coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrass beds many of which were being directly impacted by marine pollution. These reports demonstrated clear linkages between land-based sources of pollution and the health of coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrasses, underscoring the need for an integrated assessment framework.

This was the first time that comprehensive reports of the State of Marine Pollution and the State of Marine Habitat of the Wider Caribbean Region had been developed within the framework of the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols and were considered flagship reports for the region.

During the development of these two reports, the UNDP GEF CLME+ Project was concurrently preparing for the development of the first State of Marine Ecosystems and Associated Socio-Economies (SOME) report for the Caribbean. This report was expected to focus on three transboundary issues identified as part of the transboundary diagnostic assessment done under the UNEP GEF CLME Project – marine pollution, habitat degradation, and unsustainable fisheries – as well as the socio-economic importance that key sectors such as tourism and fisheries play in the Wider Caribbean Region.

Given the mandate of the Cartagena Convention for Marine Pollution and Marine Biodiversity, it was agreed that the findings from SOCAR on Marine Pollution and State of Marine Habitat would directly contribute to SOME as a ‘building block’. This approach was further endorsed by the 4th LBS STAC which recommended that SOCAR’s development align with SOME’s methodological frameworks using a Driver, Pressure, State, Impact, Response (DPSIR) approach.

The OEWG’s role for the development of the SOCAR Report on Marine Pollution was to provide technical guidance on the scope of the report, periodically review and comment on the draft sections of the report, and provide verification, when necessary. A data sub-group was also

established specifically to discuss more technical aspects of the report including proposed pollution parameters, ranges and limits, and how best to display the findings of the report.

2.3 Future development of State of Convention Reports on Marine Pollution and of the Wider Caribbean region.

In 2019, at LBS COP4, Contracting Parties formally adopted SOCAR through Decision 7, recognizing it as:

“A major periodic and authoritative regional assessment of the state of the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR) marine environment with respect to land-based sources of pollution (LBS) and their ecological and human impacts. SOCAR is intended to inform decision-making and stimulate actions and investments to reduce and eliminate LBS pollution in the WCR over the long term.”

That same year, at the 15th Cartagena Convention COP, Decision 3 led to the establishment of a new Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on Monitoring and Assessment to support the LBS Protocol and SOCAR development building on the experiences of the Interim Working Group that was established specifically for the development of SOCAR on Marine Pollution.

Contracting Parties were invited to formally notify the Secretariat of their interest in participating. The OEWG was also tasked with developing its own Terms of Reference and establishing subgroups to address concerns raised during meetings of the LBS STAC, LBS COP, and other Convention-related gatherings.

One of the Recommendations of the first SOCAR on marine pollution was the need for the Secretariat to continue to develop periodic “State of” reports and to consider development of state of integrated assessment reports, seen as a best practice in other Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans such as the Barcelona Convention, OSPAR and HELCOM. This would also facilitate input and/or reporting to other regional and/or global ocean related assessments.

As outlined in the proposed AMEP and SPAW 2026–2027 Work Plans, the Secretariat is now seeking to advance with a new, more integrated iteration of SOCAR during the upcoming biennium. This updated SOCAR is expected to assess not only marine pollution but also the status of key marine habitats in the Wider Caribbean Region.

3.0 Proposed Recommendations for the further development of Assessment Reports, Role of Working Groups and linkages with other regional efforts such as SOME.

3.1 Development of an Integrated State of Convention Area report on marine pollution (LBS and Oil Spills Protocols) and marine habitat (SPAW Protocol)

The Open-Ended Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment, established under Decision 3(1) of the 15th COP, is empowered to form thematic subgroups to address concerns raised by Contracting Parties.

Noting the foregoing, the 18th Cartagena Convention COP may wish to request that the OEWG establish a sub-group to support the development of the integrated State of Convention Area report on marine pollution and marine habitats. This sub-group would be open to all Contracting Parties from the Cartagena Conventions and its protocols and have representation from both the LBS and SPAW RACs and RANs, and regional experts, as necessary. The subgroup should ensure that biodiversity conservation and pollution reduction are treated as equally weighted pillars of the integrated SOCAR. The subgroup's activities could include the following:

- Defining the objectives and scope of the integrated SOCAR.
- Discussing and agreeing on the methodological framework to be utilized for the integrated SOCAR.
- Reviewing the recommendations of the focused subgroups.
- Ensuring alignment with SOME E's methodological framework.
- Meeting regularly to monitor progress and review SOCAR draft content.

Once the SOCAR subgroup has identified the scope and objectives of the integrated report, Contracting Parties may wish to consider recommending the establishment of focused subgroups such as:

- A Pollution Data Subgroup to guide data analysis for SOCAR under the OEWG.
- A SPAW Subgroup to identify and assess key marine habitats and their ecological status.

These subgroups could jointly propose a minimum set of core indicators for pollution and biodiversity/ecosystem health to ensure comparability and regional consistency

Given the data limitations encountered during the development of the first SOCAR, it is crucial to identify, early in the process, potential partner organizations that could provide supplementary data on coastal water quality, and the ecological status of key coastal habitats.

In addition to producing a comprehensive technical report, it is suggested that the integrated SOCAR on marine pollution and marine habitats outputs include policy briefs and communication products tailored for decision-makers and civil society to maximize political visibility and impact.

3.2 Establishment of mechanism for informing other Regional and Global Assessments including SOME E.

Based on the previous mandates for greater integration between SOCAR and SOME E, the Secretariat is also exploring opportunities for engaging with the SOME E development process under the Ocean Coordination Mechanism (OCM) within UNDP GEF PROCARIBE+ Project. This is a follow up to the previous UNDP GEF CLME+ Project. It is further noted that the OCM functions also include the periodic assessment of and reporting of the state of marine environment

and associated economies, as well as the identification of overlaps and the assessment of complementarity of efforts to strengthen existing regional efforts.

Noting the above, and to facilitate alignment with the SOMEE development process, it is further recommended that a representative from the OCM Project Coordination Unit (PCU) be invited to join and participate in meetings of the SOCAR Subgroup. To promote cross-fertilization of ideas, it is also recommended that the Lead of the SOCAR Thematic Subgroup participate in meetings of the SOMEE Working Group.