

Summary of Pre-COP Discussions on RAC/RAN Guidelines

Introduction

Following the adoption of the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols, Contracting Parties recognized the importance of establishing **Regional Activity Centres (RACs)** to support implementation obligations. The initial guidelines, developed in 2008, aimed to harmonize the establishment and functioning of both RACs and **Regional Activity Networks (RANs)**. Notably, the Cartagena Convention remains the only Regional Seas Programme that includes RANs.

The document **UNEP(DEC)/CAR.IG.24/CRP.9 Rev 4 – Updated Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of RACs and RANs** revises the 2008 guidelines, aligning them with recent UNEP marine policy developments. This update responds to Decision V on Governance from the Seventeenth Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention.

The revision process was undertaken through a consultancy commissioned by the Secretariat in 2024, which included consultations with existing RACs, RANs, and National Focal Points. The updated guidelines were presented to **SPAW STAC 11** and **LBS STAC 7** for review. Recommendations I(1) from SPAW STAC 11 and I(2) from LBS STAC 7 requested that the Secretariat convene a virtual Pre-COP to further review and revise the guidelines ahead of the COPs.

The **Pre-COP**, held on 17–18 September 2025, served as an informal forum for delegates to express concerns, clarify issues, and propose edits to the document. This summary outlines the key discussions and recommendations from that meeting.

Approach

During the Pre-COP, the Secretariat presented the five thematic sections of the guidelines. Delegates provided feedback both on the overarching themes and specific paragraphs. The RAC sections were reviewed first, followed by the RAN sections. The thematic areas found both in the RAC and RAN sections included:

- Purpose
- Objectives
- Functions
- Process for Designating or Redefining RACs/RANs
- Functioning

Summary of Discussions

Regional Activity Centres (RACs)

Definition

- The definition section contains inconsistencies and excessive detail. It should be streamlined, with non-essential information deleted or relocated to more appropriate sections.

Objectives and Functions

- These sections overlap significantly and should be merged.
- A maximum of 3–4 strategic objectives should be clearly defined.
- Some listed functions are supplementary or beyond the expected scope of RACs.
- Functions should focus on specific activities RACs are expected to undertake.

Designation and Redefinition Process

- The language used appears legally binding and should be revised for clarity.
- The guidelines lack reference to existing RACs and how they may be affected once the revised guidelines are in place.
- Separate processes and criteria should be outlined for existing versus new RACs.
- Proposals for new RACs should be assessed based on their alignment with defined objectives and functions.
- Clarification is needed on who should submit proposals (governments or institutions).
- The guidelines should reflect different RAC models, such as:
 - Full organizational support (e.g., SPAW RAC)
 - Partial personnel allocation (e.g., RAC IMA)

Functioning

- The section is ambiguous and needs clearer language.
- Communication procedures and processes with National Focal Points require clarification.
- Terminology inconsistencies should be addressed.
- The agreement between the Secretariat and RACs should be based on submitted proposals.
- Clearly distinguish between the nature of different agreements – Host, Legal Contractual, MoUs etc.
- Process of Monitoring and Evaluation of RACs
- Expectations of RACs in terms of additional support to the Secretariat e.g. translation

Regional Activity Networks (RANs)

Discussions on RANs largely mirrored those on RACs, with emphasis on streamlining and clarification.

Key points included:

- Definitions of RACs and RANs lack clear differentiation.
- Objectives and functions of RANs require revision.

- Clarification on branding and the use of logos.
 - Clarification on the term RAN, RANs and RAN Organization.
 - The role of the coordinating institution is unclear.
 - Clarification is needed on whether RANs are designated by thematic or programmatic area.
 - Clear definition of COP responsibility versus that of the Secretariat in the work of the RACs and RANs.
 - The added value of RANs to the Secretariat should be better articulated, especially in comparison to other partnership arrangements.
 - The approval process for RANs may differ from that of RACs and should be clearly defined.
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Next Steps and Way Forward

Delegates were invited to submit written comments to the Secretariat to support the revision process. While efforts will be made to advance the revisions before the COPs, it is unlikely that the updated document will be available in all three languages in time.

Some Contracting Parties proposed the establishment of an **inter-sessional Working Group** to finalize the revisions. The revised guidelines would then be submitted inter-sessionally to the COP for review and endorsement by the Contracting Parties.