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Thirteenth Meeting of the Contracting Parties (COP) to the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) in the Wider Caribbean Region

Kingston, Jamaica
14 & 16 October 2025

DECISIONS OF THE MEETING

The Contracting Parties:

Having convened the Thirteenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA) to the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region, held in Kingston, Jamaica, on 14 and 16 October 2025,

Recognizing the valuable technical and financial contributions of the Regional Activity Centres (RACs), Regional Activity Networks (RANs), Contracting Parties, and partner organizations in advancing the implementation of the SPA Protocol,

Acknowledging the outcomes and recommendations of the Eleventh Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee to the SPA Protocol (STAC11), the Seventh Meeting of the Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities (LBS) STAC, and the related Pre-COP consultations,

Emphasizing the importance of strengthening regional cooperation, governance, and resource mobilization to enhance effective implementation of the SPA Protocol, and to address emerging and cross-cutting environmental challenges,

Having reviewed the “Workplan for the Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA) Sub-Programme for the 2026-2027 Biennium” (UNEP (DEPI)/CAR WG.45/3 Rev.5);

The Meeting decides as follows:

DECISION I STATUS OF ACTIVITIES

1. RAC/RAN Guidelines

The Meeting decides to request the Eighteenth Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region (COP18) to:

- a) **Request** the Secretariat to provide an updated version of the RAC/RAN Guidelines by December 2025 aligned with the comments shared during the Pre-COP, as well as written comments submitted by delegates after the Pre-COP discussions.
- b) **Request** that an inter-sessional Open-Ended Convention Working Group be established by December 2025 to finalize the revision of the Region Activity Centre (RAC)/Regional Activity Network (RAN) Guidelines by March 2026.
- c) **Request** the Secretariat to share the final version of the RAC/RAN Guidelines with Contracting Parties inter-sessionally for final review and convene an extraordinary meeting no later than the end of 2026 for possible endorsement, pending available resources.
- d) **Request** that any new proposals for RACs and RANs in the short term be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by Contracting Parties.

2. Marine Mammal Regional Activity Network (MMRAN)

The Meeting decides to:

- a) **Acknowledge** with appreciation the expressions of interest received in support of the establishment of a MMRAN under the SPAW Protocol, and request those entities, as well as other interested organizations, to submit formal proposals outlining their envisaged contributions to the implementation of the SPAW Protocol and the implementation of the Action Plan for the conservation of Marine Mammals in the Wider Caribbean Region (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.43/INF.31) and their roles in the Network;
- b) **Request** the Secretariat, in coordination with SPAW-RAC, to review and consolidate all proposals once the submission process has been completed;
- c) **Request** the Secretariat to submit recommendations to Contracting Parties during the intersessional period for provisional endorsement of the consolidated proposals prior to the next intergovernmental meetings, pending their formal consideration by the relevant bodies of the Convention.

3. Working Groups

The Meeting decides to:

- a) **Note** the analytical findings in UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.9.
- b) **Request** the Secretariat, in consultation with RACs and Focal Points, to prepare an implementation plan for onboarding materials, expert skills registry, meeting lead-time standards, and language access (EN/ES/FR), subject to resources.
- c) **Request** the Secretariat and the RACs to support periodic in-person WG sessions when feasible and funds permit.

4. SPAW Consortium

- a) **Request** the Secretariat and SPAW-RAC to continue engagement with Civil Society Organizations, in particular through the SPAW Consortium.

DECISION II PROTECTED AREAS

The Meeting decides to:

1. **Establish** the SPAW Protected Area Managers Network, as proposed in document UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.12 Rev. 4, to enhance collaboration, knowledge exchange, and technical cooperation among SPAW-listed sites and other protected areas in the Wider Caribbean Region;
2. **Approve** the proposal from the Kingdom of the Netherlands to include Parke Marino Aruba in the SPAW List of Protected Areas;
3. **Endorse** the “Updated Procedure Through Which Contracting Parties Can Propose New Protected Areas to be Listed as SPAW Sites” (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.13 Rev.2), as a

framework to guide future nominations and ensure transparency and consistency in the SPAW listing process.

DECISION III SPECIES

The Meeting decides to:

1. **Request** the Species Working Group to develop conservation and management recommendations for the Silky Shark (*Carcharhinus falciformis*) and the Oceanic Whitetip Shark (*Carcharhinus longimanus*), to be presented to the 12th Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC 12).
2. **Request** the Secretariat to promote synergies with other relevant regional and global platforms and agreements that support the conservation of species relevant to the implementation of the SPAW Protocol and its work plan, including the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), where appropriate

DECISION IV SARGASSUM

The Meeting decides to:

1. **Request** the COP18 to endorse the Cartagena Convention Action Plan on Sargassum Inundation (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.27 Rev.3);
2. **Request** COP18 to mandate the Secretariat to oversee the preparation of an integrated State of the Convention Area Report, linking considerations on the status of marine pollution and marine and coastal ecosystems within the Convention Area, and including a dedicated chapter on Sargassum;
3. **Request** COP18 to establish a Cartagena Convention-level Sargassum Working Group to facilitate participation from the Contracting Parties of the Cartagena Conventions and the SPAW and LBS Protocols;
4. **Request** the Sargassum Working Group to support the implementation of the Cartagena Convention Action Plan on Sargassum Inundation, ensuring alignment with activities under the SPAW and LBS Protocols;
5. **Further request** the Sargassum Working Group to update the Sargassum White Paper, incorporating new data, best practices, and policy recommendations for consideration by the relevant STACs and COPs.

DECISION V SPA W 2026-2027 WORKPLAN

The Meeting decides to:

1. **Approve** the *Workplan for the SPA W Sub-Programme for the 2026–2027 Biennium* (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR IG. WG.45/3 Rev.5), as a framework to guide the implementation of the SPA W Protocol and its priority activities across the Wider Caribbean Region;
2. **Acknowledge** the support provided by the project "Blue Growth through Green Restoration: Cartagena Regional Seas Convention's Capacity Building on Seagrass Ecosystems" to the implementation of the SPA W Protocol and its 2026-2027 Work Plan.
3. **Request** the Secretariat to initiate the process for the consideration of the development of a SPA W Implementation and Compliance Mechanism through a concept note, that focuses on facilitative, nonpunitive, and cooperative arrangements for promoting implementation and compliance for consideration by the next meeting of the Contracting Parties;
4. **Recommend** that the Secretariat, with support from the SPA W-RAC as appropriate, propose activities that support the implementation of and compliance with the SPA W Protocol in a facilitative, nonpunitive, and cooperative manner to inform this process.
5. **Endorse** the joint draft workplan between the Secretariat under the SPA W Subprogramme and the International Whaling Commission (IWC) as contained in Annex 1 to UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.34.

DECISION VI COASTAL WETLANDS

The Meeting decides to:

1. **Encourage** Contracting Parties to consider **strengthening national frameworks** for the protection, restoration, and sustainable management of coastal wetlands, consistent with ongoing work under the SPA W Protocol and relevant global commitments, where appropriate;
2. **Encourage** Contracting Parties to consider **enhancing institutional arrangements and scientific capacity** to address existing knowledge gaps and improve data collection, assessment, and monitoring of these ecosystems;
3. **Request** the Secretariat, in collaboration with Parties and relevant partners, to review the Regional Strategy and Action Plan for the Valuation, Protection and/or Restoration of Key Marine Habitats in the Wider Caribbean (2021–2030) and **update it as needed** to reflect new priorities, scientific developments, and synergies with national and regional initiatives, before it is presented to the SPA W STAC12 for review and potential decisions.

DECISION VII STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

The Meeting decides to:

1. **Invite** Contracting Parties to consider:
 - a) **Participating** in regional collaborative frameworks, including the Neotropical Songbirds Collaborative Group (NSCG), and the Caribbean Wildlife Enforcement Network (CAR-WEN), by designating national focal points as appropriate;
 - b) **Participating** in governmental review of the draft Memorandum of Understanding to establish and operate the CAR-WEN as appropriate;
 - c) **Enhancing** collaboration with relevant organizations, including the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and others, to advance the identification, description, and management of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) and Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) within the Wider Caribbean Region in support of mutual goals of the SPAW Protocol, where appropriate;
 - d) **Mobilising** technical assistance and supporting planning and fundraising for priority national actions as appropriate.
2. **Request** the Secretariat, in collaboration with relevant partners, to:
 - a) **Facilitate** coordination among the aforementioned initiatives to maximize synergies, avoid duplication, provide and promote joint fundraising and implementation efforts;
 - b) **Facilitate** regular communication and coordination with the Caribbean Biological Corridor (CBC) to facilitate progress towards common objectives and jointly address emerging environmental issues within the scope of the CBC and the SPAW Protocol.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MEETING

Having convened the Eleventh Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) to the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) in the Wider Caribbean Region, Panama City, Panama, from 30 June 2025 to 3 July 2025,

The Meeting recommends,

RECOMMENDATION I STATUS OF ACTIVITIES

Having reviewed the documents on the RAC/RAN Guidelines, the Marine Mammals Regional Activity Network, the Functioning of the Cartagena Convention Working Groups and Recommendations and the SPAW Consortium

RAC/RAN Guidelines

1. The Secretariat **host a session with** Contracting Parties after SPAW STAC11 and LBS STAC7 and before COP13 of the SPAW Protocol, COP7 of the LBS Protocol, COP18 of the Cartagena Convention/IGM21, through a dedicated drafting group to revise the Updated Guidelines for the establishment and operation of Regional Activity Centres (RACs) and Regional Activity Networks (RANs) for the Cartagena Convention (UNEP(DEPI)CAR IG.24_CRP.9 Rev.4), with the goal of having a finalized, adoptable document ready for these meetings. The Secretariat will provide interpretation subject to the availability of funds.

Marine Mammals RAN (MMRAN)

1. Request the Secretariat to initiate a call for nominations for institutions interested in hosting and/or directing a (MMRAN) and work with Contracting Parties following IGM21/COP18 to elaborate next steps to develop a process to review and potentially approve a proposal during an intersessional period.
2. The Secretariat or SPAW-RAC **hold** a series of webinars on the revised marine mammal action plan adopted at SPAW COP12, and **invite** Contracting Parties, observers and others to present on relevant actions taken that support the implementation of the Action Plan and **identify** needs and responsibilities for further implementation of the action plan.

Working Group

Having reviewed the “Analysis of the Functioning of the Cartagena Convention Working Groups and Recommendations for Improvement” (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.9),

1. The Secretariat and/or SPAW-RAC, as appropriate, **develop** training materials for new working group members.
2. The Chairs of the working group **announce** meetings and deadlines well in advance and distribute meeting reports promptly.
3. The Secretariat and/or SPAW-RAC **continue** to provide interpretation for the Working Groups, as funding permits. Request for interpretation should be made 15 days in advance.
4. The Secretariat and/or SPAW-RAC, as appropriate, **organize** a listening session with Contracting Parties and experts to discuss barriers to participation in the working groups.

5. The Secretariat and/or SPAW-RAC, as appropriate, **create** a database of experts who would be willing to answer specific questions or otherwise contribute to specific working group tasks.
6. The Secretariat **encourage** Contracting Parties and **invite** observers to designate experts with scientific and/or technical competence to the working groups, in accordance with the Terms of Reference for the SPAW STAC *Ad Hoc* Working Groups.

SPAW Consortium

1. The Secretariat, in its engagement in the Ocean Coordination Mechanism (OCM), **note** that the SPAW Consortium has demonstrated how the effort of civil society can enhance regional collaboration, information sharing, and alignment of marine and coastal biodiversity initiatives.
2. Noting information paper UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.17 by the SPAW Consortium “Expanding Civil Society Participation in the Caribbean Environment”, the Secretariat **develop** a strategy for civil society engagement.

RECOMMENDATION II PROTECTED AREAS

Having reviewed the “Report of the STAC Protected Area Working Group” (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.10),

Having reviewed the “Updated Procedure through which Contracting Parties Can Propose New Protected Areas to be Listed as SPAW Sites” (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.13),

Having reviewed the “Report on the development of a regional support program for protected area managers in the Wider Caribbean Region” (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.12),

Having reviewed the SPAW Protected Area Managers Network (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.11),

Taking note of the request from Contracting Parties to provide comments and technical input on certain documents before they are presented to the Thirteenth SPAW COP (COP13) and Twenty-First Intergovernmental Meeting (IGM21) for consideration as appropriate,

1. Contracting Parties **propose** new protected areas to be listed under the SPAW Protocol within the first year following each SPAW Conference of the Parties.
2. The Secretariat and/or SPAW-RAC, as appropriate, **develop** a concise checklist covering the mandatory criteria for a protected area to be added to the SPAW List of Protected Areas, subject to the SPAW COP13’s **review** of the “Updated Procedure through which Contracting Parties Can Propose New Protected Areas to be Listed as SPAW Sites” (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.13), and the Protected Areas Working Group **provide** feedback before the draft checklist is presented to the SPAW STAC12.
3. The Secretariat and/or SPAW-RAC, as appropriate, **invite** Contracting Parties to provide comments by 21 July 2025, ensuring that all feedback is transparently reviewed and effectively

integrated and that the Secretariat and/or SPAW-RAC, as appropriate, **address** comments from Contracting Parties prior to submitting the documents to SPAW COP13:

- the “Updated Procedure through which Contracting Parties Can Propose New Protected Areas to be Listed as SPAW Sites” (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.13), and the “Report on the development of a regional support program for protected area managers in the Wider Caribbean Region” (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.12)
 - the SPAW Protected Area Managers Network (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.11)
4. The Protected Areas Working Group **develop** a proposal for a mechanism by which Contracting Parties would report information on protected areas within their jurisdiction that are on the SPAW List of Protected Areas for consideration at SPAW STAC12, and possible consideration at SPAW COP14. The proposal should take into account the relevant provisions of the SPAW Protocol, including Articles 15(2), 19, and 22(2)(e).
 5. SPAW COP13 **welcome** the proposal from the Kingdom of the Netherlands to include Parke Marino Aruba in the SPAW list of Protected Area.

RECOMMENDATION III SPECIES

Having reviewed the “Report of the SPAW STAC Species Working Group” (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.14)

Having reviewed the “Report on the conservation of Nassau Grouper (*Epinephelus striatus*)” (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.15),

Having reviewed the “Recommendation for conservation of Sawfish Survey” (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.16)

Having reviewed the “Report of conservation and management recommendations for the whale shark (uplisted in Annex II), Giant manta ray (uplisted in Annex II) and hammerhead sharks (annex III) in the wider Caribbean region (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.18)

1. SPAW COP13 **encourage** Contracting Parties to consider the recommendations in UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.15 in the context of national actions to promote the conservation of Nassau grouper and the Secretariat and SPAW-RAC, as appropriate and upon request, support Contracting Parties in their implementation.
2. Following the presentation by a sawfish expert on the species’ biology, ecology, and conservation needs (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.16), the Contracting Parties wish to **underscore** the critical importance of continuing efforts to prevent the extinction of sawfish in the region.
3. The Species Working Group **continue** to assist the Secretariat and SPAW RAC to support relevant Contracting Parties in implementing the recommendations for the conservation of sawfish in UNEP(DEPI) CAR WG. 43/INF.25.
4. SPAW COP13 **encourage** Contracting Parties to consider the recommendations in UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.18 in the context of national actions to promote the conservation and management of Whale Shark, Giant Manta Ray, and Hammerhead Sharks,

as outlined in and the Secretariat and SPAW-RAC, as appropriate and upon request, support Contracting Parties in their implementation.

RECOMMENDATION IV EXEMPTIONS

Having reviewed the “Report of the SPAW STAC Exemption Working Group” (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.19),

1. The Exemptions Working Group **develop** a prioritized list of recommendations to encourage Contracting Parties to report exemptions in a facilitative, non-confrontational manner. Such recommendations should focus on identifying activities that would support Contracting Parties by simplifying or streamlining reporting processes and raising awareness of reporting obligations under SPAW Protocol Article 11(2).
2. SPAW COP13 **consider** whether Curaçao can provide additional information to justify its proposed activity under the three categories of pertinence. If such information is submitted, the Exemptions Working Group and STAC12 may reassess the proposal. In this case, the STAC could conduct an intersessional review with support from the Exemptions Working Group.
3. SPAW COP13 **request** that Curaçao submit a post-assessment report outlining how the decision of non-pertinence will be integrated into the planning and implementation of the proposed beach enhancement project.
4. Contracting Parties are encouraged to **utilise** the adopted reporting format for Article 11(2), as appropriate, to ensure consistency and completeness in exemption submissions.
5. Parties are encouraged to consider reporting exemptions prior to the commencement of the proposed activity, as appropriate and when practicable.

RECOMMENDATION V SARGASSUM

Noting the impact of Sargassum inundations on communities, the economy, biodiversity and species,

Having reviewed the “STAC Sargassum Working Group Updated Action Plan Proposal and Sustainable Financing Resources” (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.27),

Having reviewed the “Contracting Parties needs related to managing Sargassum influx and how such influx may affect their implementation of obligations under the SPAW Protocol and Cartagena Convention, as well as the LBS Protocol-Survey analysis” (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.26),

Having reviewed the “Report of the STAC Sargassum Working Group” UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.25),

Taking note of the “Report of the Joint Monitoring and Assessment Open Ended Working Group and Sargassum Working Group Meeting/Workshop” (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.31), including the description of “Sargassum inundation” therein,

1. The Secretariat and/or SPAW-RAC, as appropriate, **invite** Contracting Parties to provide comments on the “STAC Sargassum Working Group Updated Action Plan Proposal and Sustainable Financing Resources” (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.27) by 21 July 2025, ensuring that all feedback is transparently reviewed and effectively integrated, and call for an intersessional meeting, if needed, and the Secretariat provide interpretation depending on availability of funds.
2. The Sargassum Working Group be at the level of the Convention Parties to facilitate participation by both the SPAW and LBS Protocols Contracting Parties.
3. The Secretariat **provide** additional information to SPAW COP13, LBS COP7 and IGM21/COP18 regarding how an integrated State of the Convention Area Report could be developed, beginning with a dedicated chapter on Sargassum. The terms of reference of this report should include:
 - The proposed institutional mechanisms and coordination processes required for its development;
 - The roles and responsibilities of relevant stakeholders;
 - A suggested timeline and methodology for compiling and validating the report; and
 - The process for presenting the final report to the Contracting Parties for review and endorsement.
4. The Secretariat **provide** additional information regarding how a Convention-level working group on Sargassum could operate, including how it could be tasked and how any products it may develop could be considered by the governing bodies of the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols.

RECOMMENDATION VI SPAW 2026-2027 WORKPLAN

Having reviewed the Draft Workplan as contained in UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/3,

Draft workplan for 2026-2027 biennium

1. The Secretariat **prioritise** activities that support the implementation of the SPAW Protocol and identify resources for same.
2. The Secretariat and/or SPAW-RAC, as appropriate, **invite** Contracting Parties to provide comments on the “Draft Workplan for the Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) Sub-Programme for the 2026-2027 Biennium” (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/3) by 21 July 2025, ensuring that all feedback is transparently reviewed and effectively integrated.
3. The Small Grants Programme (SGP) be maintained and further strengthened to expand its reach and impact, recognizing its value in supporting implementation of SPAW objectives.

Compliance

1. The Secretariat **conduct** a systematic assessment of Contracting Parties' needs and challenges related to compliance with the SPAW Protocol, to inform targeted support and resource allocation.
2. The Secretariat **develop** and **deliver** tailored capacity-building activities to strengthen national abilities to implement and report on SPAW Protocol obligations effectively.
3. The Secretariat **prepare** and **distribute** a clear, practical checklist outlining SPAW Protocol obligations to guide Parties in self-assessment, planning, and reporting processes.

International Whaling Commission (IWC)

1. SPAW COP13 **consider** the draft workplan between SPAW and IWC as stated in UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.34.