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(SPA)W) in the Wider Caribbean Region

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**PANAMA COASTAL WETLANDS AND NDC CONCEPT NOTE**

## PANAMA COASTAL WETLANDS AND NDC CONCEPT NOTE

Coastal wetland ecosystems – mangroves, seagrasses, and salt marshes — host some of the richest biodiversity on the planet, acting as refuge for wildlife and nurseries for juvenile fish, including species important for local communities and livelihoods. These ecosystems are also a powerful nature-based solution to climate change. Sometimes referred to as “blue carbon” ecosystems, these coastal wetlands are some of the most efficient carbon sinks on the planet, storing carbon at three-to-five times the rate of terrestrial forests. They also provide essential benefits to frontline communities and livelihoods as they adapt and become more resilient to the impacts of a changing climate - stabilizing shorelines and serving as a buffer from storms.

Yet coastal wetlands are among the most threatened ecosystems on the planet. Over the past 50 years, development, pollution, and other threats have destroyed half of the world’s mangroves, and an estimated 7% of seagrass meadows are lost globally every year. In Latin America and the Caribbean, coastal wetlands are threatened by anthropogenic factors including development, agriculture, and unsustainable fishing practices.

Protecting, restoring and sustainably managing these blue carbon coastal wetlands is one powerful step that Parties to the Cartagena Convention can take in both mitigating and adaptation to climate change, safeguarding communities and the blue economy on which they rely. Measurable efforts to coastal wetland conservation can also form an accepted contribution to fulfilling countries’ commitments to international treaties, including within Nationally Determined Contributions to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and National Biodiversity Strategy Action Plans to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity.

Panama is already taking such steps. In 2024, Panama submitted its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the Paris Agreement, including ambitious commitments to coastal wetlands and peatlands:

- Fully mapping the extent of seagrass and coral reefs ecosystems as well as updating and strengthening the Wetlands Action Plan by 2027.
- Establishing a monitoring system for seagrass and coral reef ecosystems by 2028.
- Increasing and/or restoring 1,800 hectares of mangroves by 2028.
- Ensuring that at least 50% of the nation’s mangrove ecosystems are integrated into the National System of Protected Areas (SINAP) by 2026. Additionally, Panama will evaluate and improve effective mangrove management at the national level by 2027; and to the extent of the support acquired, achieve the protection and effective management of at least 50% of the mangroves within SINAP by 2028.
- Mapping the extent of peatland ecosystems and conducting a first-time assessment of peatland carbon stocks within Panama by 2027.
- Completing an update of the national wetland inventory with a focus on coastal wetlands, which will include an evaluation of their biodiversity and the ecosystem services they provide, by 2030.

Panama is already making strides to implement these commitments. With support from the PROCARIBE+ project and in close collaboration with Panama’s Ministry of Environment and national research partners, The Pew Charitable Trusts will support mapping of the full extent of seagrass ecosystems on the Caribbean coast of Panama by early 2027. This work will also strengthen enabling conditions for sustainable financing and will serve as a foundation for replication and scaling, with best practices shared across the region to enhance conservation and financing efforts.

Panama is encouraged to see other parties to the Convention outlining similar efforts, and taking action, on their coastal wetlands, including within their NDCs, including Belize, Jamaica and Costa Rica.

As a committed Party to the Cartagena Convention and a regional leader in advancing ocean and coastal

resilience, Panama calls on all Parties to strengthen their national policy frameworks—particularly their NDCs, National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), and commitments to the Ramsar Convention—to enhance the sustainable management, conservation, and restoration of coastal wetlands.

Doing so will strengthen national agendas by aligning commitments to various conventions to achieve streamlined regional goals. Furthermore, by providing a directive under the Cartagena Convention, Parties will strengthen regional cooperation and amplify their individual and collective impact in their efforts to preserve and restore the benefits to people, nature, and climate provided by these vital ecosystems.

As such, and in line with the Cartagena Convention’s mission to address and reduce marine pollution and protect and preserve the marine environment and consistent with previous COP indicators related to the integration of coastal wetlands into national management strategies and planning processes, Panama urges Parties to the Convention to prioritize the design and implementation of NDCs for the conservation, restoration, and sustainable management of coastal wetland ecosystems.

Panama proposes that this shared vision be clearly outlined and expressed at the upcoming Conference of the Parties (COP), signaling regional leadership and unity in advancing coastal wetlands conservation.