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Eleventh Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) to the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA) in the Wider Caribbean Region

Panama City, Panama,  
30 June – 3 July 2025

**REPORT OF THE MEETING**

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## ACRONYMS

AIDA	Inter-American Association for Environmental Defense
AWI	Animal Welfare Institute
CaMPAM	Caribbean Marine Protected Areas Managers Network and Forum
CAR-WEN	Caribbean Wildlife Enforcement Network
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CCS	Caribbean Cetacean Society
CEP	Caribbean Environment Programme
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
COP	Conference of Parties
CTF	Caribbean Trust Fund
CWOP	Caribbean-Wide Orca Project
CYEN	Caribbean Youth Environment Network
EU	European Union
FDPI	Foundation for Development Planning, Inc.
GCRMN	Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network
GEF	Global Environment Facility
ICRO	International Coral Reef Observatory
IGM	Intergovernmental Meeting
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
IWC	International Whaling Commission
LBS	Protocol Concerning Land-Based Sources of Pollution
MEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreement
MMAP	Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Mammals in the Wider Caribbean Region
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPA	Marine Protected Area
NGO	Non-Government Organizations
PA	Protected Area
RAC	Regional Activity Centre
RAN	Regional Activity Network
SPAW	Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife in the Wider Caribbean Region
SII	Sustainable Innovation Initiatives
STAC	Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNOPS	United Nations Office of Project Services
US	United States
WCR	Wider Caribbean Region
WWF-NL	World Wide Fund for Nature – The Netherlands

## INTRODUCTION

1. The Conference of Plenipotentiaries on Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA) in the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR) held in Kingston, 15 to 18 January 1990, adopted the SPA Protocol to the Cartagena Convention, which entered into force on 18 June 2000. Article 20 of the SPA Protocol established the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC). This Article indicated that each Party shall appoint a scientific expert appropriately qualified in the field covered by the Protocol as its representative on the Committee, who may be accompanied by other experts and advisors appointed by that Party. Article 20 also indicated that the Committee may also seek information from scientifically and technically qualified experts and organizations.
2. In light of the above, and in keeping with Decision No.1 of the First Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA) (COP1) (Havana, Cuba, 24-25 September 2001) and Decisions of COP11 (virtual, 27 July 2021), this Meeting is being convened by the Secretariat to the Cartagena Convention in Panama City, Panama, in hybrid format, 30 June –3<sup>rd</sup> July 2025.
3. The proposed objectives of the Eleventh Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC11) to the SPA Protocol were to:
  - i. Review the status of Activities of the SPA Subprogramme for 2023-2024(2025), including activities of the Regional Activity Centre for SPA (SPA-RAC) in Guadeloupe.
  - ii. Review the updated submission of Parke Marino Aruba, proposed by the Government of Aruba, to be included in the list of protected areas under the SPA Protocol and make recommendations to SPA COP13.
  - iii. Review the reports for Exemptions under Article 11(2) of the SPA Protocol submitted by Contracting Parties and make recommendations for adoption by SPA COP13.
  - iv. Review the updated Sargassum Working Group Action Plan; and
  - v. Develop the 2026-2027 Work plan of the SPA Subprogramme for subsequent approval by SPA COP13 and the Twenty-first Intergovernmental Meeting on the Action Plan of the Caribbean Environment Programme, and Eighteenth Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region in October 2025, respectively.
4. The nineteen (19) Contracting Parties to the SPA Protocol were invited to the Meeting to nominate their respective representatives to be part of the SPA STAC11 in keeping with Article 20 of the Protocol. Other member Governments of the Caribbean Environment Programme (CEP), United Nations agencies and non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations were invited to participate as Observers. The provisional list of participants was prepared during the Meeting and presented in document UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.2.

## AGENDA ITEM 1: OPENING OF THE MEETING

5. The Meeting was opened by Susana Perera Valderrama, Programme Management Officer, SPA Sub-Programme of the Cartagena Convention Secretariat, Ecosystems Division on Monday, 30 June 2025, at 9:00 a.m. (UTC-5) in Panama City, Panama. It was also held virtually via the Zoom platform.
6. Ms. Perera Valderrama welcomed participants and acknowledged the donors, namely, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the European Union (EU), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) which managed to mobilize support through the UNEP Marine and Freshwater Branch in Headquarters, and the Governments of France and the Kingdom of the Netherlands, who had seen the value in supporting the programme and its activities through projects such as those promoting Marine Protected Areas Conservation and emerging environmental issues.
7. Ms. Perera Valderrama invited Mr. Oscar Vallarino Bernat, Deputy Minister of Environment of Panama

to welcome participants on behalf of the Government of Panama and to deliver opening remarks.

8. Mr. Bernat welcomed delegates and highlighted the meeting's critical timing following the recently held UN Oceans Conference. He stressed the importance of the SPAW Protocol in addressing urgent challenges like habitat loss, fish at risk and the expansion and strengthening of mechanisms for effective management through cooperation and concrete measures. He advocated for marine governance based on scientific evidence, noting the meeting will inform decision-making at the upcoming COP and guide regional policies. Mr. Bernat emphasized that including communities is vital to ensure commitments are effective. He concluded that this technical meeting would help to overcome gaps and is a step towards a more structured regional framework for ecosystem recovery. He thanked everyone for their attendance and participation.
9. Ms. Perera Valderrama thanked Mr. Bernat for his thoughtful opening remarks and for the generous support of the Government of Panama in hosting this important meeting.
10. Ms. Perera Valderrama invited Mr. Christopher Corbin, Coordinator of the UNEP Cartagena Convention Secretariat, to deliver welcome remarks on behalf of the Secretariat.
11. In a virtual welcome marking the SPAW Protocol's 25th anniversary, Mr. Corbin thanked Panama for hosting the meeting and praised partners for their contributions. He highlighted the critical moment for ocean health, acknowledging successes, like new protected areas listings, and challenges such as sargassum inundations. Mr. Corbin emphasized a strategic shift from simply counting outputs to measuring real-world impacts on ecological health and community livelihoods. He outlined key meeting priorities, welcomed Saint Kitts and Nevis as a new Contracting Party, and concluded with an urgent call for financial sustainability through timely contributions to ensure the Protocol's continued effectiveness.
12. Ms. Perera Valderrama thanked Mr. Corbin for his opening remarks and his continued leadership in advancing the objectives of the SPAW Protocol and the broader work of the Cartagena Convention.
13. She also acknowledged and commended the hard work and dedication of the Contracting Parties, Regional Activity Centres (RACs), volunteers, experts, donors, working group members, and committed colleagues from UNEP and the Caribbean Environment Programme (CEP), as well as all those whose efforts made the meeting possible.

## **AGENDA ITEM 2: ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING**

### **2.1 Rules of Procedure**

14. The Meeting agreed to apply *mutatis mutandis* the Rules of Procedure for the Meetings of the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the WCR (Cartagena Convention). Rule 26 pertaining to quorum. (See Reference Document UNEP, 2012).
15. The Contracting Parties were asked to indicate their presence. 16 Contracting Parties (12 in person and 4 online) indicated their presence during the agenda item of the meeting (See Annex IV for list of participants).

### **2.2. Election of Officers**

16. The Secretariat received nominations from the representatives of Contracting Parties for the role of President, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President and Rapporteur for the Meeting as follows:

President:	Digna Barsallo De Leon (Panama)
1 <sup>st</sup> Vice-President:	Bruno Lazzarini (France)
2 <sup>nd</sup> Vice-President:	Thyra Balboarda (The Kingdom of the Netherlands)
Rapporteur:	Randel Thompson (St Kitts and Nevis)

17. The Secretariat asked the Contracting Parties if there were any objections to the nominations for the Bureau. There were no objections; the Bureau was endorsed by acclamation.

### 2.3 Organization of Work

18. English, French and Spanish were the working languages of the Meeting and simultaneous interpretation was provided using the Zoom platform. The Working Documents were made available in all the working languages. The Provisional List of Documents of the Meeting was presented in UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.1.
19. The Secretariat proposed convening the Meeting in a hybrid format, (with participants attending in person and online), in plenary sessions, the assistance of breakout groups, if necessary, which may be established by the President. No simultaneous interpretation will be available for breakout groups. Participants were reminded that, given the length of the Meeting, breaking into working groups may not be feasible. Participants were therefore expected to be prepared, having reviewed all working documents as appropriate, to provide concrete inputs at the time of discussion.

### AGENDA ITEM 3: ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

20. The Meeting was invited to adopt the Provisional Agenda of the Meeting, prepared by the Secretariat based on inputs received from the Contracting Parties during preparations for the Meeting, on relevant recommendations and decisions from previous STAC and COP Meetings of the SPAW Protocol, as well as on emerging issues of relevance to the marine biodiversity of the Wider Caribbean. The Provisional Agenda proposed by the Secretariat was presented in UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/1. There being no objections, the agenda was adopted.

### AGENDA ITEM 4: STATUS OF ACTIVITIES OF THE SPAW SUB-PROGRAMME FOR 2023-2024 (2025), INCLUDING THE ACTIVITIES OF THE REGIONAL ACTIVITY CENTRE FOR SPAW (SPAW-RAC) IN GUADELOUPE

21. The President invited Ms. Perera Valderrama of the Cartagena Convention Secretariat, Ecosystems Division to present the “Draft Status of Activities of the SPAW Sub-Programme for 2023-2024 (2025)” (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.4 Rev.1)
22. Ms. Perera Valderrama provided a brief overview of the objectives of the SPAW Sub-Programme and gave an update on the status of the five thematic areas of work and activities as well as major outputs.
23. She revealed that the SPAW Protocol, which celebrates its 25th anniversary of entering into force on June 18, 2000, now has 19 Contracting Parties, with Saint Kitts and Nevis being the latest to join in 2024. The work plan for 2023-2024 was extended through 2025. Discussions for ratification are ongoing with nine other countries.

### Thematic Areas & Key Activities

24. The work plan was structured around five thematic areas:
25. **Programme Coordination:** This area focused on promoting the ratification of the SPAW Protocol, aligning activities with the needs of Contracting Parties, and overseeing daily operations. The UNEP Cartagena Convention Secretariat and SPAW-RAC managed these activities. Key activities included implementing major projects such as the ACP MEAs Phase III, GoM LME Project, and PROCARIBE+. They also strengthened partnerships with organizations and other MEAs including CBD, CITES, CMS,

IAC and IWC, and supported the ratification of the BBNJ treaty.

26. **Strengthening of Protected Areas:** The objectives were to improve protected areas (PA) management, build capacity for marine protected areas (MPA) effectiveness, and promote sustainable financing. She highlighted the following major projects:
- a. **ACP MEAs III (2021–2025):** Establishing a regional network of SPAW-listed PAs and building capacity through workshops.
  - b. **Gulf of Mexico LME Project (2023–2025):** Strengthening MPA networks and standardizing monitoring protocols for coral reefs.
  - c. **PROCARIBE+ Project (2025–2027):** Creating new MPAs in Colombia, strengthening existing MPAs in Colombia and the Dominican Republic, establishing fishery reserves in the Dominican Republic and implementing capacity-building activities through the CaMPAM Training of Trainers (ToT) on MPA management.
27. **Guidelines for PAs and Species Management:** Key activities included simplifying the listing procedure for SPAW PAs and reviewing national exemption reports.
28. **Conservation of Threatened and Endangered Species:** Activities included strengthening marine mammal monitoring and advancing the formalization of WIDECAST as a Regional Activity Network (RAN).
29. **Conservation and Sustainable Use of Coastal and Marine Ecosystems:** Key activities involved coordinating the Caribbean node of the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network and expanding the SPAW Sargassum Working Group to develop an updated Regional Sargassum Action Plan.

### Implementation Status

30. **SPAW COP12 Decisions:** All 8 decisions were reported as 100% complete. These included the adoption of the work plan and budget, approval of new protected areas and species listings, and enhanced regional collaboration on Sargassum.
31. **SPAW STAC10 Recommendations:** 96% of recommendations were completed except for the elaboration of parrotfish conservation guidelines which were not initiated due to a lack of response from the experts of the Species Working Group.

### Challenges and Future Deliberations

32. Ms. Perera Valderrama cited the main challenges as delays in payments to the Caribbean Trust Fund (CTF), lack of compliance, and reporting by some countries, low expert participation in Working Groups, insufficient communication from some focal points, and limited technical capacity and resources in some countries.
33. She suggested topics for deliberation including the endorsement of RAC/RAN Guidelines, mandates related to BBNJ, compliance mechanisms, and the regional coordination of the Sargassum action plan.
34. The President thanked Ms. Perera Valderrama for her presentation and invited Contracting Parties followed by Observers to provide comments on the presentation.
35. **Panama** welcomed the presentation by the SPAW Programme Officer hailing the commitment shown by the Secretariat and SPAW-RAC to work with all activities in the action plan. He thanked all attendees and acknowledged the work of the Secretariat. He expressed Panama's interest in the SPAW Sargassum Working Group especially given the increase in Sargassum in recent times. He expressed the wish to have further discussions and forge agreements that would allow his country to develop resources to address the issue.

36. The President invited Juliana Chavez Chaparro, Senior Consultant, to deliver the presentation on the Revised Legal and Governance Structure for a new Marine Mammal RAN and Updated Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of the Regional Activity Centres and Regional Activity Networks for the Cartagena Convention.

**‘Revision of the 2008 Guidelines for establishment and operation of RACs and RANs of the Cartagena Convention’ (UNEP(DEPI)CAR IG.24\_CRP.9 Rev.4)**

37. Ms Chaves-Chaparro, presented to the STAC for consideration and approval the process and text of the Draft updated Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of the Regional Activity Centres (RACs) and Regional Activity Networks (RANs) of the Cartagena Convention. They were drafted in consultation with CCS, focal points, RACs, RANs and all relevant actors in an open workshop to enhance the harmonization and synergetic action of these centres and networks, which are instrumental to the implementation of Cartagena Convention and its protocols.

**Revision of the legal and governance structure for a new Marine Mammal RAN (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.8)**

38. Ms Chaves-Chaparro, presented to the STAC the Revision of the legal and governance structure for a new Marine Mammal RAN for the WCR, considering the revised definition, role and operationalization of the RACs in the proposed draft guidelines. The revised document was drafted in consultation with the relevant stakeholders and revised after open consultation. The document responds to Decision II (1) of the (COP12), proposing an inclusive and distributed RAN governance model to enhance the science-societal action towards the implementation of the 2023-2028 Action plan for the conservation of marine mammals in the WCR.
39. She outlined the legal and governance structure for this Marine Mammal RAN, which aims to enhance the conservation of marine mammals in the region. First proposed in 2021, the RAN aims to strengthen conservation and facilitate collaborative data sharing, while supporting the Marine Mammal Action Plan. This second draft proposal follows open consultations in April 2025.
40. The network is designed to be intersectoral, inclusive and adaptable, with strong coordination capabilities to address emerging challenges. It would be hosted by an independent institution with relevant expertise in the WCR. Its establishment is considered timely and beneficial for several reasons.
41. It is seen as crucial for biodiversity and ecosystem conservation, with strong support across science, policy, and society. Furthermore, it is expected to foster regional visibility and integration in global dialogues and build on momentum from the 2023 BBNJ agreement and the 2023-2028 Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Mammals in the WCR.
42. The expert emphasized the right momentum and called for urgent action to approved both documents.
43. The President expressed appreciation for the presentation and advised that comments would be received later after all presentations related to the work plan.
44. The President then invited Dr. Olga Koubrak, consultant, to provide an analysis of the ‘Functioning of the Cartagena Convention Working Groups’ (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.9); for LBS and SPAW Protocol and the way forward.
45. Dr. Koubrak revealed that the primary goal of the analysis was to assess the existing governance and function of the Working Groups (WGs) under the Cartagena Convention and to provide recommendations for improvement. The study concluded that the Working Groups have made significant contributions to the work of the Cartagena Convention.
46. She cited notable achievements such as: (i) the LBS WGs contribution to the State of the Convention Area

Report (SOCAR); and (ii) SPAW WGs development of criteria and recommendations for listing species and protected areas, as well as creating guidelines for exemption reports.

47. She proposed that the institutional structure should be streamlined, access to expertise be expanded, and greater efforts be made to enhance engagement and collaboration.
48. The President expressed appreciation to Dr. Koubrak for the presentation.
49. The President invited Susan Millward of the Animal Welfare Institute and Co-Founder of the SPAW Consortium to present 'The expansion of civil society participation in the Caribbean Environment Programme' (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.17)
50. The Presentation focused on the objectives and SPAW Consortium's activities for the 2023-2025 period. Launched in October 2023, the SPAW Consortium is an independent alliance dedicated to supporting the implementation of the SPAW Protocol. Its primary mission is to empower NGOs and civil society by creating a coordinated regional platform for sharing best practices and increasing participation.
51. Since its creation, the Consortium has grown to ten members across seven countries and has developed a comprehensive work plan for 2024-2025. Key accomplishments included significant outreach efforts, close collaboration with the Cartagena Convention Secretariat and SPAW-RAC, and providing critical policy input on protocol guidelines, marine mammal conservation, and impact indicators. The Consortium also advanced its mission through capacity-building, hosting a virtual forum for 32 participants in April 2025, and advocating for increased civil society involvement. The group emphasizes its productive and open collaboration with the Secretariat, which has been vital to its progress in contributing to the Cartagena Convention.
52. The President expressed appreciation for the presentations.
53. The President invited Contracting Parties followed by the Observers to provide feedback to the presentations starting with the 'Status of Activities for the SPAW Sub Programme 2023-25'.
54. The delegates expressed warm appreciation to Panama for hosting the Meeting and congratulated St. Kitts and Nevis on ratifying the SPAW and LBS protocol. Delegates also thanked the Secretariat and SPAW-RAC for their significant work in coordinating the meeting, and that the presentations were well received.
55. **Colombia** advised that they are working towards the ratification of the LBS Protocol. They are also eager to have a more representative and equitable participation in the affairs of the Convention.
56. **The United States (US)** commended the Secretariat and SPAW-RAC for their comprehensive overview and biennium efforts and thanked the Government of France for its support of SPAW-RAC. While acknowledging the depth and breadth of work achieved, they expressed concern about a disproportionate emphasis on implementing other conventions and external projects, fearing it might detract from direct support for the SPAW Protocol.
57. They appreciated that other conventions and projects may have similar objectives, and some of these collaborative efforts may come with funding and expressed **concern that a proliferation of projects and tasks will detract attention and limited resources from SPAW's essential fundamental work.** They emphasized the importance of **focusing on concrete actions to enhance the implementation of the Protocol**, including COP decisions for SPAW's success, promising more specific suggestions during the discussion on the work plan and budget (Agenda Item 9).
58. The United States appreciated the presentation on the proposed updates to the RAC/RAN Guidelines. They noted the extensive nature of the changes, requested further clarification on the rationale for the proposed changes and **identified potential legal issues.** Given the Convention-level applicability of

these guidelines, they suggested that any updates should be discussed in a working group established at the COP. While supporting the creation of a Marine Mammal RAN in principle, they stressed the need for clarity on the final revised RAC/RAN Guidelines before proceeding, to avoid misalignment. As an interim measure, they proposed a webinar series by the Secretariat or SPAW-RAC on the Revised Marine Mammal Action Plan, inviting presentations from Parties and observers to maintain momentum and identify needs.

59. **The United States** acknowledged the ongoing discussions at the Convention level regarding working group engagement and welcomed the analysis of their functioning. They identified lack of participation as the main impediment and supported recommendations to enhance engagement, including training materials for new members. They encouraged Working Group Chairs and SPAW-RAC to announce meetings and deadlines in advance, promptly distribute reports, and continue providing interpretation (funding permitting). They also supported organizing a listening session with Contracting Parties and creating a database of experts. However, they do not support re-opening the Terms of Reference for the SPAW Working Groups, which were recently approved after long negotiations, prioritizing short-term actions and continued assessment instead.
60. **St Lucia** thanked the Secretariat for its comprehensive presentation on the status of activities and their efforts to advance the objectives of the Convention and the protocol. They also lauded the achievements of the SPAW- RAC, their emphasis on technical assistance, capacity building, and stakeholder engagement.
61. **Cuba** thanked the Secretariat on an excellent report and indicated their availability to enhance scientific and technical exchange as well as to support the regional framework. They highlighted their involvement with the PROCARIBE+ project and hailed the progress in the evaluation of blue carbon in marine seagrasses and mangroves to mitigate climate change.
62. **Grenada** greeted all attendees and expressed appreciation for the invitation to the Conference. They acknowledged the great work done and the major interventions regarding Sargassum, marine coastal zones, the mitigation and protection of marine and coastal ecosystems. They looked forward to more capacity building opportunities. They also welcomed St Kitts and Nevis to the membership and expressed their commitment for close collaboration with everyone.
63. **Venezuela** praised the activities taking place within the framework of the Convention and the SPAW Protocol despite the challenges. They advised that Venezuela had undertaken several activities which had contributed to their compliance. New MPA Projects were underway, and they are working on finalizing a national climate change adaptation plan.
64. **The Kingdom of the Netherlands** expressed support for the creation of a Marine Mammal Regional Activity Network. They suggested the recommendation for the formal designation of a MMRAN at SPAW COP13 and that the nomination process be transparent and formalized. They called on all parties to support the initiative. They looked forward to working together for a successful SPAW COP13.
65. **Barbados** welcomed the assessment of the functioning of the Working Groups and highlighted that different groups of experts had contributed significantly to the advancement of the work of the Protocol. They opined that synergies in operations could be better achieved via official and individual participation.
66. **Belize** cited the work being done as impressive and congratulated all parties involved. Having reviewed the work plan, they suggested closer collaboration on some activities such as coastal restoration.
67. **St Kitts and Nevis** thanked all parties for congratulations on their ratification of the SPAW Protocol and indicated that they looked forward to working with everyone to advance its objectives.
68. **The Secretariat** thanked everyone for their remarks and their contribution to the SPAW Protocol. They advised that there was much more that could be achieved as a team and encouraged parties to submit their national reports which would facilitate a fulsome report to the COP.

69. **France** advised that it supports stricter protection for marine mammals in Caribbean waters, given its historic commitment to the Agoa sanctuary in French waters. It supports in principle the establishment of a Marine Mammal RAN, with a point of vigilance concerning the governance of its structure, which must be transparent, institutionalized, and based on consensus from the perspective of regional cooperation. France also supports the establishment of a RAN insofar as it is unifying and inclusive.
70. They advised that it was in favor of establishing a strategic partnership between the Cartagena Convention and the International Whaling Commission. France supported the information document submitted by the Cartagena Convention Secretariat on the Implementation and Compliance Issues within the SPAW Protocol (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.7) and its efforts to improve the implementation and applicability of the Convention. France also supported the work plan of the Secretariat and SPAW-RAC, as well as the projects carried out by SPAW-RAC that contribute effectively to the implementation of the Protocol.
71. **Colombia** expressed appreciation for the meeting which served as a forum for dialogue. They wanted to be a part of the group to expand this information. They also advised that they were open to whatever modalities so long as they properly reflect geographical and linguistic representation.
72. The President invited Ms. Juliana Chaparro (Consultant) to provide further clarification on the new Marine Mammals RAN and processes for its establishment.
73. **Ms. Chaparro** clarified the process, stating that the idea was to review guidelines, coordinate legal structure and governance and reporting, ensuring coherence. She outlined the proposed structure of the RAN and the process for nomination which could be initiated and supported by a CP. She provided an overview of the RAN, proposed activities, personnel, budget, and timelines. She stated that approval for a new network could be formed within the next two years dependent on the next COP and that the Secretariat would take the necessary steps to formalize the nominations and the process.
74. **The Observer Lightkeepers Foundation** thanked the Secretariat and the Contracting Parties for allowing Observers to participate. Regarding marine mammal protection, they supported the recommendation for the creation of a Marine Mammals RAN which would help given the threats to these species. They expressed hope that work could be done ahead of COP to this end.
75. **The Observer FDPI** suggested the separation of the two issues (the revised guidelines and Marine Mammals RAN formation). They proposed that Parties agree to the formation of the Marine Mammal RAN, giving two years to coordinate rather than waiting for new guidelines, to initiate a structure with resources that can be approved at the next COP.
76. The Secretariat invited Lucile Rossin, SPAW-RAC Director, to present their status of activities for 2023-24.
77. **Ms. Rossin** reported on the implementation of its Strategic Plan, focusing on internal improvements and enhancing service quality and the 2023-2024 budget and expenditures,
78. The organization is advancing major projects like CAMAC on marine megafauna and SARGCOOP2 on sargassum while improving internal payment systems. Key knowledge-building efforts include these projects and the GCRMN-Caribbean Report on coral status. Regionally, the RAC has raised its international profile by participating in 42 events and has supported 16 projects through its Small Grants Programme. Conservation efforts are robust, focusing on threatened species like sharks and groupers through dedicated working groups and on ecosystem management for coral reefs and sargassum. A network of SPAW-listed protected areas is now active. The 2026-2030 roadmap aims to strengthen manager skills, improve climate adaptation, and ensure the network's sustainability.
79. The President thanked Ms. Rossin for her presentation and invited the Meeting to provide feedback.
80. **Colombia** advised that their work is aligned with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

They highlighted the relevance of the SPAW-RAC Small Grants Programme that have benefited Colombia and expressed the desire to be a part of these projects. They also highlighted the primary role of the SPAW focal point in Colombia, guiding the decision making in relation to all projects and activities related to SPAW in the country. They endorsed the United States's discussion points regarding Working Groups and stressed the importance of geographic and linguistic representation. They also recommended a geographical balance of small islands in the SPAW-RAC's project to see the benefits of the goals.

81. **The United States** reiterated their proposal for a working group to be established at the COPs to finalize the RAC/RAN Guidelines. They proposed that the Secretariat and SPAW-RAC train, implement, and hold meetings in advance, prioritizing short-term actions. They also supported SPAW-RAC serving as co-chair for GCRMN and noted they would speak to issues related to protected areas under the next agenda item (Agenda Item 5).
82. **Cuba** indicated that it was willing to offer scientific and technical expertise.
83. **France** disclosed that it favored the establishment of a Marine Mammal RAN with transparent and institutionalized governance and inclusive approach.
84. **The Kingdom of the Netherlands** acknowledged the importance of establishing a marine mammal RAN and recommended that Contracting Parties support its formal establishment at COP13 as well as for the Secretariat to clarify the process for nominations in advance of COP13.
85. **Barbados** welcomed the WG report and stated that there was value in official and individual representation. They also stressed the need for articulation and synergies going forward.
86. **Belize** offered their support where necessary.
87. **The Observer Lightkeepers Foundation** emphasized the urgent need for coordinated action to protect marine mammals in the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR) due to numerous threats. They suggested that a Marine Mammal Regional Activity Network (MMRAN) was essential for supporting coordination and implementing the SPAW Marine Mammal Action Plan (MMAP) objectives at regional and national levels. It could leverage existing interest and expertise.
88. The Foundation supported the recommendation for the MMRAN to be coordinated by a separate dedicated entity, operating through an MOU with the Cartagena Convention Secretariat. It could be governed by a Steering Committee, Country Coordinators, and an Advisory Board building on the existing Marine Mammal Experts Working Group.
89. The Foundation suggested that the Secretariat clarify the nomination process for MMRAN leadership. It also commended the Letter of Intent (LOI) and draft work plan with the International Whaling Commission (IWC), noting its prioritization of national marine mammal action and recovery plans.
90. The Secretariat invited Ms. Lucile Rossin, Executive Director of SPAW-RAC to present an update on the additional support provided to the Secretariat through the implementation of projects to meet the objectives of the SPAW sub-programme.
91. Ms. Rossin outlined current and future projects, focusing on three main initiatives: CAMAC, SARG'COOP II, and CARIPAP.
92. The CAMAC project (Caribbean Marine Megafauna and Anthropogenic Activities) aims to strengthen knowledge and regional cooperation to mitigate the negative impacts of human activities on marine megafauna like sea turtles, mammals, seabirds, and sharks. Its work packages focus on interactions with fisheries, strengthening stranding networks, and enhancing scientific knowledge.
93. SARG'COOP II is a three-year project (2025-2028) led by the Regional Council of Guadeloupe with a

budget of €5.766 million. It aims to bolster regional governance concerning Sargassum influxes by improving knowledge of their environmental impacts and developing a biodiversity action plan.

94. CARIPAP is a proposed five-year (2026-2030) regional support program for protected areas in the Greater Caribbean. With a proposed budget of €3.95 million, its goal is to preserve biodiversity by strengthening the capacities of protected area managers of the SPAW List of PAs and helping them meet challenges like climate change.

**AGENDA ITEM 5: REPORT OF THE PROTECTED AREAS WORKING GROUP  
(INCLUDING THE REVIEW OF THE PROPOSALS BY PARTIES FOR LISTING UNDER  
THE SPAW PROTOCOL)**

95. The President invited the SPAW-RAC, as Chair of the Protected Areas Working Group on the assessment of the protected areas proposed for listing, to report on the tasks assigned during SPAW STAC10 held virtually, 30 January – 1 February 2023 and detailed in the updated terms of reference (UNEP(DEPI)CAR WG.42/INF.12/Rev.1) as per information contained in document UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.10).
96. The President then invited Geraldine Conruyt, Deputy Director of SPAW- RAC to present the report of the Protected Areas Working Group.
97. Ms. Conruyt advised that the Working Group reviewed a proposal for the "Parke Marino Aruba" previously submitted by the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 2021. At SPAW COP 12, the proposing party was asked to provide more information regarding references to supporting publications and documents, elaborate, and validate a Management Plan in consultation with stakeholders and establish a framework to monitor management success.
98. The experts recommended supporting the proposal to include Parke Marino Aruba as a SPAW-listed site and that the management authority for Parke Marino Aruba join the SPAW Protected Area Manager Network and submit new protected area proposals early in the biennium; designate new scientific and technical experts to the working group and define a procedure to review protected areas already listed under the SPAW Protocol.
99. The President invited the Meeting to review the reports which included the updated proposal from Aruba, with the requested additional information, to be included in the list of protected areas under the SPAW Protocol: The "Parke Marino Aruba" (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.11).
100. The President then invited inputs re the inclusion of the Marine Park of Aruba in the list of SPAW PAs.
101. **Colombia** thanked the expert group of PAs and supported the proposal for the Parke Marino Aruba to be included.
102. **Ms Perera Valderrama** advised that the Secretariat will upload documents for the Parke Marino Aruba in the list of documents and request permission from the SPAW-RAC and Aruba for them to be included in the meeting document listing.
103. **The United States** expressed appreciation for the presentation. They recognized the significant progress made in streamlining the process for proposing new protected areas. However, they pointed out the need for further clarity in the draft revised guidelines and annotated format, particularly in the introductory section, which should clearly state its purpose and avoid interpreting the Protocol. They suggested the Secretariat invite intersessional written comments from Contracting Parties for revision before the SPAW COP.
104. The United States provided other recommendations from the Working Group:
- a. Supported encouraging Contracting Parties to propose new protected areas within the first

- year of the biennium.
- b. Did not support reminding Parties to complete the updated "ANNOTATED FORMAT" and "Guidelines and Criteria" as the revised documents are subject to COP review, and STAC cannot preempt the COP's decision.
  - c. Supported encouraging Parties and observers to designate experts with scientific/technical competence to the Protected Areas Working Group.
  - d. Did not support updating the "Common guidelines and criteria for protected areas in the wider Caribbean region: identification, selection, establishment and management, 1996", citing concerns about it being resource-intensive and distracting from other SPAW work.
  - e. Supported requesting the Secretariat and/or SPAW-RAC to develop a concise checklist of mandatory criteria for SPAW site listing and tasking the Working Group with its review.
  - f. Supported tasking the Working Group with developing a clear process for Contracting Parties to report information on SPAW-listed protected areas within their jurisdiction, considering SPAW Protocol Articles 19, 22(2)(e), and 15(2). The U.S suggest that periodic reporting on SPAW-listed sites might be useful at less frequent intervals than national reporting, ensuring the process is not unduly burdensome.
  - g. Did not support requesting the Working Group to create a glossary to accompany the annotated format and guidelines, expressing concerns about broader implications if it covered Convention-level terms, and the time-intensive nature of achieving common definitions.
105. **The Observer International Coral Reef Observatory (ICRO)** welcomed all protected areas in the Caribbean Sea and inquired how countries were improving their effectiveness of conservation and the actions being taken to halt the causes of coral reef degradation. The ICRO recommended that the focus on these should be strengthened.
106. **The Observer FDPI** commented on the presentations by the SPAW-RAC and PA Working Group. He noted that the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 2016 produced a directory of competencies for Protected Areas Managers. Given the range of issues to be addressed by Protected Areas Managers in the Caribbean, particularly political and social issues, they inquired whether the SPAW-RAC be asked to review the directory of competencies to determine if these could be used for training Protected Areas Managers in the Caribbean, including within the context of the SPAW Protocol.
107. **SPAW- RAC** advised that the creation of a network of the PAs listed under the SPAW Protocol was recognized as a priority during the last COP. With funding support from the Secretariat in 2023, they started to interview a network of PA Managers to draw on common issues. The intent is to have a responsive network that can enforce the protected areas mandate of the protocol. They also hosted a meeting to share a vision and to benefit from best practices.
108. SPAW- RAC also hosted several webinars with experts on issues of interest such as sustainable tourism. The programme also benefits from small grants programmes to strengthen the development of PAs which is the reason they want to network with other PAs regionally and internationally.
109. The President thanked the Secretariat for their contribution and invited other comments.
110. **The United States** thanked SPAW-RAC and participants for developing the proposal for a network of SPAW-listed protected area managers, strongly supporting it as "critical" to implementing Article 7(2). As this was the first time the proposal was presented to Contracting Parties, they suggested an **intersessional comment period** to allow for revisions before its presentation to SPAW COP13.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 6: REPORT OF THE SPECIES WORKING GROUP**

111. The Secretariat invited the SPAW-RAC, as Chair of the Species working group to report on the tasks assigned during the SPAW STAC10 (virtually 30 January – 1 February 2023) and detailed in the terms

of reference (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.12/Rev.1), as contained in documents UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.14 and UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.15; UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.16; UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.18. 17.

112. The Secretariat invited Amelie Tagliaferro of the SPAW-RAC to present the report on behalf of the Species Working Group.
113. The WG comprised of 16 experts from nine countries and 11 observers, Ms. Tagliaferro reported on the key achievements related to core tasks assigned by STAC10 and COP12.
114. **Conservation of Sawfishes:** She advised that to advance conservation for sawfishes, the group recommended that the Cartagena Convention Secretariat invite a sawfish expert to the SPAW STAC11 meeting to raise awareness and address information gaps.
115. **Conservation of Nassau Grouper:** In a joint effort with the Protected Areas Working Group, recommendations were developed for the conservation of the Nassau Grouper. They included **Habitat Mapping** to inform the creation or expansion of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs); strengthening fisheries and MPA regulations; improved monitoring to evaluate management effectiveness as well as strengthened collaboration through national working groups and standardizing monitoring protocols across the region.
116. **Conservation of Sharks and Rays:** The group successfully developed conservation and management recommendations for the Whale Shark, Giant Manta Ray, and Hammerhead Sharks. They also recommended capacity building and awareness programmes through fisher training on safe release, workshops for data collection, regional data sharing, and public awareness campaigns.
117. **Annex II (Whale Shark & Giant Manta Ray):** Ensure national legislation prohibits retention and trade, train personnel on species identification, adopt best practices for sustainable tourism and disentangling, and introduce reporting requirements to the Secretariat.
118. **Annex III (Hammerhead Sharks):** Regulate fishing through measures like catch limits and closed seasons, publish CITES non-detriment findings, require that sharks are landed with fins naturally attached, and prohibit international trade for relevant parties.
119. The group also suggested that these measures be applied to other shark species listed in the annexes, such as the silky shark and oceanic whitetip shark.
120. The Meeting was invited to make recommendations to SPAW COP13 in October 2025 regarding:
- Report on the conservation of Nassau Grouper (*Epinephelus striatus*) (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.15)
  - Recommendations for the conservation of Sawfishes (Pristidae) in the Wider Caribbean Region - Report (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.16)
  - Conservation and management recommendations for the Whale Shark (Annex II), Giant Manta Ray (Annex II) and Hammerhead Sharks (Annex III) in the Wider Caribbean Region (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.18)
121. Amélie Tagliaferro then invited Dr. Olga Koubrak to present on ‘Sawfish of the Caribbean: What we know and where we go from here?’.
122. Dr. Koubrak provided an overview of the status of sawfish in the Caribbean, focusing on the largetooth (*Pristis pristis*) and smalltooth (*Pristis pectinata*) species. Sawfish inhabit mangroves and estuaries and are threatened by direct fisheries, bycatch, the trade of their body parts, and habitat loss. The largetooth

sawfish is possibly extinct in much of its Caribbean range, while the smalltooth sawfish has distinct populations in the United States and the Bahamas, with recent records in Cuba and Costa Rica. She recommended the implementation of conservation obligations, information sharing, identification of remaining populations, and increased awareness to protect these culturally significant and critically endangered animals.

123. The President invited the Contracting Parties and Observers to provide any comments on the presentations respectively.
124. **The United States** commended the Protected Areas and Species Working Groups for their joint task on Nassau grouper. They supported **the recommendations in the report** and invited Contracting Parties to consider them in the context of national actions to promote the conservation of Nassau grouper; and requesting the Secretariat and SPAW-RAC, as appropriate and upon request, to support Contracting Parties in their implementation of the recommendations.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 7: REPORT OF THE EXEMPTIONS WORKING GROUP, INCLUDING THE REPORTING FORMAT FOR EXEMPTIONS UNDER ARTICLE 11(2) OF THE SPAW PROTOCOL**

125. The Secretariat invited the SPAW-RAC, as Chair of the Exemptions Working Group to report on the tasks assigned during the SPAW STAC10 (virtually 30 January – 1 February 2023) and detailed in the terms of reference (UNEP(DEPI)CAR WG.42/INF.12/Rev.1), as contained in documents UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.19, UNEP(DEPI)/CARWG.45/INF.20, UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.21 and UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.22 21.
126. Ms. Geraldine Conruyt of SPAW- RAC shared the SPAW STAC 11 Exemptions Working Group Report. She outlined the Group's activities over the biennium including reviewing exemption proposals from Curacao, Bonaire, and the United States under Article 11 of the SPAW Protocol. She emphasized the importance of exemptions for compliance. Recommendations included improving reporting formats, encouraging early submissions and extending the Group's mandate to support Parties and enhance exemption assessments.
127. The Meeting was invited to review the report presented and provide recommendations for final consideration by SPAW COP13 in October 2025.
128. **The United States** thanked the Exemptions Working Group for its review of reports from Curacao, Bonaire, and the United States. Regarding comments on the United States report, they noted that much of the requested information was available via linked websites, and providing separate summaries for each permit would negate the efficiencies of a streamlined, programmatic report. They stressed the importance of maintaining flexibility in reporting formats to encourage more Parties to fulfill their obligations under Article 11(2).
129. The United States noted that recommendations linked to broader implementation and compliance issues were more appropriately considered under Agenda Item 9. They supported tasking the Exemptions Working Group with developing a prioritized list of recommendations to encourage facilitative exemption reporting, focusing on simplifying processes and raising awareness of obligations. They **did not support revisiting the entire list of recommendations endorsed by COP12**.
130. They recommended that the Exemptions Working Group should focus on identifying activities that would help Parties, for example by simplifying or streamlining processes and raising awareness of reporting obligations under Article 11(2). The United States stated that , providing information for each exemption identified in the report would be counter to the purpose of a programmatic report, so they did not support the recommendation in paragraph 13. The United States supported the recommendations in paragraphs 12 and 14 but emphasized that they were helpful suggestions for Parties to consider when

practicable.

**131. The Meeting closed on Monday, 30 June 2025, at 4:30 p.m. (UTC-5, virtually) by the President.**

#### **AGENDA ITEM 8: REPORT OF THE SARGASSUM WORKING GROUP**

**132. The Meeting was opened by the President of the Meeting on Tuesday, 1 July 2025, at 9:00 a.m. (UTC-)**

133. The Secretariat invited the Sargassum Working Group to report on the tasks assigned during the SPAW STAC10 (virtually 30 January – 1 February 2023) and detailed in the terms of reference (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.12/Rev.1), as contained in documents UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.25, UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.26, UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.27, UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.31.

134. Ms. Geraldine Conruyt of SPAW-RAC detailed the group's work and findings for the 2023-2024 biennium.

135. The Working Group is composed of 30 experts from 13 countries. Its mandate included the survey of contracting parties, updating the action plan and defining sargassum inundations.

136. The survey of the Contracting Parties to the Cartagena Convention was to identify their needs for managing Sargassum influxes and the effects of these influxes on their obligations under the SPAW and Land-Based Sources (LBS) Protocols. The survey results confirmed the significant environmental, economic, and social impacts of Sargassum inundations, affecting marine ecosystems, water quality, biodiversity, tourism, and fishing. The capacity to manage these challenges varies significantly among members, with many national management plans considered fragmented and in need of improvement.

137. The survey also highlighted that the most significant challenges to implementing the SPAW protocol are habitat destruction, particularly to coral reefs and seagrass meadows, and the protection of listed species such as sea turtles. The group updated and prioritized the proposed action plan for managing Sargassum, considering the survey findings. Additionally, during a joint meeting in Trinidad and Tobago in March 2025, experts agreed on the definition included in 'UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF27'.

138. The Meeting was invited to review the reports presented and provide recommendations for final consideration by SPAW COP13 in October 2025.

139. **Colombia** mentioned the negative impact of Sargassum in their country. They cited the extensive body of work being done across nations and through regional institutions such as CARICOM. They suggested a working plan relevant to the Convention that promoted strengthened integration of efforts to better manage the Sargassum challenge.

140. **France congratulated** the Working Group on Sargassum for its report and expressed appreciation for the recommendations, recalling the importance of addressing this issue at the regional level.

141. **Grenada** congratulated SPAW-RAC on a very insightful presentation and advised that they are working with other countries and entities across the WCR that are also impacted by the Sargassum influx. They shared Grenada's approach to tackling the Sargassum challenge which included a focused task force and a new Ministry of the Blue Economy and Marine Affairs. The new Ministry is collaborating closely with the Ministry of Environment.

142. The delegate emphasized the detrimental impact of Sargassum on the region's economies, marine systems, people's health and livelihoods. In addition to long-term programmes, they suggested a short-term management program to urgently address the growing inundations and recommended that priority also be placed on addressing the health impacts, especially among vulnerable populations.

143. They also highlighted Sargassum's impact on ecosystems, particularly its effect on species that depend on plankton. They called for projects focused on overall Sargassum management, ranging from collection, storage, and processing to the creation of value-added products that could be reinvested into further management efforts. They expressed support for the recommendations of SPAWRAC and looked forward to wider collaboration.
144. **Panama** advised that it was necessary to have a management plan at the national level because the presence of sargassum has been increasing. They also advocated for strengthened capacities for working groups, an early warning system and governance regulations for the region.
145. **The United States** noted that The SPAW STAC Ad Hoc Sargassum Working Group, in consultation with the LBS Monitoring and Assessment Open-Ended Working Group, had made considerable progress on the draft action plan on Sargassum inundation. However, there were still several areas where the draft action plan needed clarity. For example, the title of the document itself is confusing and could be understood as a work plan for the SPAW Working Group rather than an action plan for the Cartagena Convention.
146. In response to IGM20/COP17 decision IX(3), they recommended the document be called the draft “Cartagena Convention Action Plan on Sargassum Inundation.”; and that in many cases where the action plan refers to “Sargassum management,” it should read “Sargassum inundation response.” Sargassum management is broader than just mitigation and response to inundation events, so the action plan needed to be more specific. They proposed that the Secretariat invite Contracting Parties to submit written comments inter-sessionally so the draft action plan may be revised prior to the SPAW COP.
147. They also requested that the Secretariat convene a working group during the COPs this Fall to resolve any outstanding issues before the draft action plan is presented to IGM21/COP18. Whilst the United States is supportive of a Cartagena Convention action plan on Sargassum inundation, they were not prepared to support a STAC recommendation that SPAW COP13 endorse the action plan until their comments are addressed.
148. **Saint Lucia** acknowledged the negative impact on people’s livelihoods and health noting that the true impact of sargassum has not been fully documented. They opined that the pace of actions that come from the management of sargassum was slower than that of the flooding which was occurring on the coasts and its impact on populations.
149. On the issue of governance, they advised that the State had been trying to address the issue. They are seeking agreements to create a working group and need help with expert knowledge to manage it. They also favoured the recommendations for funding and other support.
150. **Venezuela** noted the impact of Sargassum on marine and economic resources and cited incidents of inundations which were addressed collaboratively with fisherfolk. They expressed support for highlighting the issue at the COP.
151. **With respect to the recommendations from the joint workshop**, the United States supported moving towards an integrated State of the Convention Area Report in principle but required more information regarding what this could look like in practice, including how such a report would be tasked and how it would ultimately be endorsed.
152. Additionally, the United States supported the creation of a Sargassum working group at the Convention level in principle, but they needed more information regarding how such a group would be created and how it would operate in practice. For example, what resources would be involved? They also noted that such a group would likely need to develop its own terms of reference.
153. The United States could support noting the description of “Sargassum inundation” put forward by the

Joint Workshop participants in a preambular recommendation paragraph but could not support “endorsement” of this language as a “definition” for “Sargassum inundation.” as they did not have a clear understanding of the potential applications and implications of such a definition. Additionally, the language from the workshop seems to be describing “Sargassum inundation” events and provides some extra context, so the United States wouldn't consider this to be a “definition.”

154. **The Observer FDPI** expressed concern that the Sargassum problem was being handled at a level inappropriate to the scale of its impact on economies and social structures.
155. They suggested that the initiative should be expanded beyond the current Working Group and that a proper approach would involve several types of action and layers, including a significant investment economic component requiring coordinated funding for impact, and the formulation of country-specific responses.
156. FDPI also highlighted that many more research institutions outside of the Caribbean are working on this challenge and could be brought to the table. They stressed that the scale of work required needs a collective effort not yet recognized by this body. FDPI recommended that the Secretariat do more work in mapping research bodies such as marine labs and universities to this end. They also urged more to be done to promote the Sargassum Information Hub.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 9: DRAFT WORK PLAN AND BUDGET OF THE SPAW SUB-PROGRAMME FOR THE 2026- 2027 BIENNIUM**

157. The President invited the Secretariat to present on the “Draft Work Plan 2026- 2027 Biennium” (contained in document UNEP(DEPI)CAR WG.45/3), prepared by the Secretariat on the basis of the recommendations of previous STAC and COP Meetings, as well as on the outcome of activities of the 2023- 2024(2025) Work Plan for SPAW and other relevant emerging regional and international issues.
158. Ms. Perera Valderrama presented the Work Plan and Budget for 2026-2027. The plan outlines strategic actions to conserve marine and coastal biodiversity in the WCR. It aligns with global frameworks contributing to the objectives of the SPAW Protocol and supports regional cooperation, ecosystem restoration, and sustainability. It consists of 4 Thematic Areas and Strategic Objectives.
159. **Programme Coordination and Strategic Partnerships.** The main goals are to strengthen governance, promote ratification (at least one country), mobilize resources, and enhance collaboration.
160. **Strengthen Marine and Coastal Protected Areas.** Key actions include supporting the establishment or expansion of 2 PAs, effect regional capacity building via CaMPAM ToT course, update PA guidelines, promote sustainable tourism and Green Fins Standards.
161. **Conservation of Threatened and Endangered Species-enhance protection and recovery of species listed in the SPAW Annexes.** Key actions include support conservation efforts for endangered marine megafauna, assist counties in implementing species monitoring and conservation measures, support the nomination of new species to be added to the SPAW Protocol, and promote regional cooperation for manatee conservation initiatives.
162. **Conservation, Restoration and Sustainable Use of Ecosystems** including coral reefs, mangroves and seagrasses. Key actions include implementing restoration projects, addressing sargassum influxes through regional coordination and promoting blue carbon strategies and Red List of Ecosystems assessments.
163. Total indicative budget –\$ 3.931,285 of which the CTF - \$919,256 and other sources \$3,012,029.

164. The success of the work plan depends on sustained engagement from Contracting Parties, partners, and stakeholders.
165. The Meeting was invited to review the draft work plan, prioritize activities, including unfunded activities, and make recommendations to assist with its finalization prior to being adopted by SPAW COP13, the Twenty-first Intergovernmental Meeting on the Action Plan of the Caribbean Environment Programme, and the Eighteenth Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region, in October 2025.
166. Participants were also invited to contribute additional input to the proposed SPAW Work Plan by recommending synergies with other relevant projects and initiatives, as well as identifying potential sources of funding and support.
167. **Colombia** highlighted the need for synergies, acknowledging that not all countries have ratified all protocols. They shared their experience in updating their biodiversity plan and presented its key highlights. They also noted the gaps and needs within the region, suggesting that the SPAW Work Plan could offer tools for collective action and increased capacity.
168. **The Kingdom of the Netherlands** expressed strong support of efforts to improve the implementation and compliance mechanisms of the SPAW Protocol, commending the Secretariat's briefing paper on the topic. As a long-standing Party, they emphasized that the Protocol's effectiveness hinges on transparent, consistent, and regular reporting and implementation by all members. They advocated for these efforts to be non-confrontational and focused instead on support, guidance, and capacity building. They urged the STAC to recommend that the upcoming COP endorse this proposal and request further consultation with Parties on its design and next steps.
169. **The Bahamas** provided a recommendation on CAR-WEN and highlighted its continued relevance in addressing widespread wildlife crime in the Caribbean, including IUU fishing, poaching, and habitat destruction, which undermine the region's well-being. They urged Contracting Parties to explicitly support CAR-WEN by designating national representatives, finalizing the Memorandum of Understanding, participating in pilot initiatives, and providing strategic feedback.
170. **France** expressed its support for a partnership between the Cartagena Convention and the International Whaling Commission.
171. The United States thanked the Secretariat and SPAW-RAC for pulling together so many resources and preparing the draft plan for the next biennium noting that as with previous biennia, this was a very ambitious plan. They indicated a need to clearly prioritize activities that directly supported implementation of obligations under the Convention and Protocol. Along these lines, they were pleased to see activities in the work plan that would support the implementation of the SPAW Protocol at the national level.
172. They also advised that they had a number of comments and questions regarding the Draft Work Plan for the 2026-2027 biennium. In line with the process following STACs 9 and 10, they proposed that the STAC recommend that Contracting Parties submit comments on the Draft Work Plan by a specific deadline so the work plan may be adjusted accordingly before the COP. If needed, the Secretariat could convene a working group to resolve outstanding issues before or at the COP.
173. The United States strongly supported efforts to improve implementation of and compliance with the SPAW Protocol through facilitative actions. We encourage the Secretariat and SPAW-RAC, as appropriate, to prioritize activities that support implementation of and compliance with the SPAW Protocol in a facilitative and nonconfrontational manner.
174. The United States would divide such activities into three buckets. The first should help assess Contracting Parties' needs. This could include follow-up listening sessions, outreach to Contracting

Parties, and/or a survey of national capacities. They noted that such a survey should be easy to complete and should not duplicate information provided through national reporting. The second bucket should help build Contracting Parties' capacities, for example, through workshops and Focal Point toolkits. The third bucket should help simplify reporting processes, for example through development of an online tool to submit national reports and timely reminders of reporting obligations.

175. Along these lines, the United States emphasized the utmost importance of ensuring that any information regarding reporting obligations is accurately conveyed. Paraphrasing obligations is not appropriate, as it can lead to perpetual misinterpretation of the Protocol. For example, any checklist or similar tool should include the actual text of the Protocol. As noted in UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.7, there have been numerous recommendations related to implementation and compliance in previous biennia. In the United States' view, Contracting Parties should prioritize implementing activities that fall under these three buckets before creating any kind of new mechanism or considering extending the mandate of the Exemptions Working Group to cover compliance.
176. **The Observer ICRO** noted the desire from Cartagena meetings to integrate SPAW and LBS, aligning with the Global Biodiversity Framework's (GBF) targets for environmental management, climate change, and nature conservation.
177. **The Observer Lightkeepers' Foundation** underscored that the ultimate effectiveness and integrity of the SPAW Protocol depend on Parties' adherence to its provisions. They highlighted a concerning lack of compliance, citing continued hunting and fishing of high-profile SPAW-listed species as an example. They pointed out that COP10 called for an update on how STAC should approach non-compliance or assessments of non-pertinence for exemption reports.
178. Drawing on feedback from the Exemptions Working Group, especially regarding the Curacao exemption report, they questioned what happens procedurally when STAC assesses non-pertinence, and what guidance the STAC will offer the COP for action. They noted that unlike many other multilateral environmental agreements, the SPAW Protocol lacks a formal compliance review process.
179. They recommended that the Secretariat, in consultation with contracting parties and observers, develop a proposed compliance mechanism and other measures for presentation at STAC12, outlining its structure, operation, and administration.
180. **The Observer Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC)** highlighted two items from the work plan for continued collaboration on thematic area 2.3. Conservation of Threatened and Endangered Species. The IAC can offer technical support for Phase II CAMAC Work Package 2: Strengthening Stranding Networks for Turtles.
181. The IAC has developed comprehensive guidelines and forms for collecting information on sea turtle strandings which are currently in use by IAC Parties. It offered to share these resources with SPAW for further consideration and use. The IAC is ready to collaborate with SPAW and WIDECASST to advance the establishment of a regional network for sea turtle stranding response in at least five countries.
182. The IAC recommended that it would be a good synergy to try and integrate other countries that are members of the IAC but not yet members of SPAW into this network through collaboration between both Conventions. *This sort of collaboration is available to us by the Letter of Intent that exists between the IAC and SPAW.*
183. **The Kingdom of the Netherlands, Aruba** reiterated the desire expressed at Cartagena Convention meetings to integrate the SPAW and LBS protocols, aligning with GBF's targets for environmental management, climate change, and nature conservation. They also highlighted the gaps and needs within the region, suggesting that the SPAW Work Plan could provide tools for collective action and increased capacity.

184. The President invited Susana Perera Valderrama of the Secretariat to present on the establishment of a Compliance Committee or Mechanism, as outlined in the Briefing Paper: Implementation and Compliance Issues within the SPAW Protocol (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.7).
185. Ms. Perera Vaderrama's presentation addressed the challenges of compliance with the Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) Protocol. While the protocol includes reporting requirements to assess implementation, it lacks a formal compliance or enforcement mechanism. Reporting from Contracting Parties has been inconsistent, hindered by limited capacity and weak coordination, and unclear obligations.
186. Key challenges include weak national legal frameworks, low reporting rates (with under 25% of Parties submitting recent biennial reports), and insufficient financial contributions to the Caribbean Trust Fund. Furthermore, very few Parties have submitted required reports on exemptions for protected species.
187. To address these issues, the presentation proposed several recommendations for the STAC to consider. These include developing a formal compliance mechanism, extending the mandate of the Exemptions Working Group, or establishing a new compliance committee to advance the protocol's implementation.

#### **SPAW Consortium Presentation**

188. The President invited Monica Borobia to present on behalf of the SPAW Consortium on their contributions to the SPAW Work Plan for the 2026-2027 and the expansion of civil society participation in the Caribbean Environment Programme (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.17).
189. Ms. Borobia deferred to Mr. Lloyd Gardner to make the presentation on behalf of the Consortium. Mr. Gardner stated that the Consortium agrees to support the workplan in the stated roles. He focused on the proposed assessments of ecosystem changes, indicated that the impact of disasters should be included, and noted the relevance of each element to Caribbean development. The Consortium supports the review to determine the extent of alignment between the SPAW Sub-programme and the new national biodiversity strategy and action plan required under Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

#### **Caribbean Wildlife Enforcement Network Presentation**

190. The President invited Dr. Mark Gibson of Sustainable Innovation Initiatives (SII) on the Caribbean Wildlife Enforcement Network (CAR-WEN) proposal, in response to a request from the Government of The Bahamas.
191. Dr. Mark Gibson and Commander Desiree Corneille, Chair and Co-Chair of CAR-WEN respectively shared the development and strategic direction of the Caribbean Wildlife Enforcement Network (CAR-WEN), a regional initiative aimed at combatting wildlife crime across the WCR. CAR-WEN fosters collaboration among over 20 countries supported by a diverse leadership team and partner organizations. It builds on global Wildlife Enforcement Network (WEN) models and is guided by a strategic plan structured in 4 phases; establishment, foundational and expanded operations; and external support. Main initiatives include pilot projects like the Rapid Wildlife Assessment Toolkit and the Biodiversity Manager platform. They encouraged participation through working group involvement, MOU endorsement, pilot testing, and funding support. They called on SPAW Protocol Parties to affirm support, finalize core documents, and engage in strategic feedback to strengthen regional enforcement and biodiversity protection.

#### **Wider Caribbean Manatee Alliance Presentation**

192. On a request from the Government of Belize, The President invited Anmari Alvarez of Clearwater Marine Aquarium Research Institute to present on the Wider Caribbean Manatee Alliance.

193. Ms. Alvarez advised that the newly created Wider Caribbean Manatee Alliance (WCMA) mission is to coordinate regional efforts and build national capacities to ensure manatee survival. It aims to unify stakeholders, enhance conservation capacity, expand scientific research and strengthen rescue and rehabilitation efforts. She highlighted the urgent need for coordinated conservation of manatees in the WCR, a place which is home to two subspecies of this endangered aquatic mammal. Manatees face numerous threats including habitat loss, watercraft collision, poaching, and climate change. With an estimated population of just over 2000 mature species, regional collaboration is critical. She shared historical and current conservation priorities emphasizing awareness, protection, research, and the creation of a robust cooperation network. She urged governments and organizations to endorse the strategy, support research, promote education, and protect critical habitats, positioning the Caribbean as a leader in manatee conservation.

### International Whaling Commission Presentation

194. The President invited Emma Neave-Webb of the International Whaling Commission to present on a Joint Work Plan between SPAW and the International Whaling Commission: A Strategic Partnership for Marine Mammal Conservation (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.34), to explore further collaboration on marine mammal conservation efforts.
195. Ms Neave-Webb shared key insights about the collaboration between the SPAW Protocol and the International Whaling Commission (IWC) to enhance marine mammal conservation the WCR. The IWC comprising 88 member governments addresses threats to cetaceans including ship strikes, entanglement, bycatch, pollution and noise. She advised that the 2024 letter of intent which formalized the cooperation between SPAW and IWC focused on data sharing, joint initiatives, and capacity building.
196. Key IWC programmes include the Strandings Initiative, offering emergency response and training, and the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI), which promotes solutions through partnerships with fisheries and global organizations. She emphasized the value of expert panels, training resources and global coordination. She called for continued collaboration whilst highlighting IWC's role in supporting SPAW's conservation goals through education, technical assistance, and research.
197. The President invited the Meeting to provide any comments on the presentations on synergies with the work plan.
198. **The Bahamas** thanked Commander Desiree Corneille and Dr Mark Gibson for their presentations. They supported the CAR-WEN initiative for appropriate use by the SPAW Protocol. Regarding the **establishment and operation of a Caribbean Wildlife Enforcement Network (CAR-WEN)**, they noted that this recommendation stemmed from a long history of calls for such a network, dating back to STAC6 in 2014 due to rising wildlife crime, including the smuggling of Bahamian rock iguanas; and that over the years, various STAC and COP meetings have endorsed the idea and seen collaboration with organizations like UNODC and ICCWC.
199. The Bahamas highlighted the continued relevance of CAR-WEN in addressing widespread wildlife crime in the Caribbean, including IUU fishing, poaching, and habitat destruction, which undermine the region's well-being. They suggested that Contracting Parties **explicitly support CAR-WEN by designating national representatives, finalizing the Memorandum of Understanding, participating in pilot initiatives, and providing strategic feedback**; and that the Secretariat facilitate the finalization of the MOU, support interim activities, engage relevant organizations for financial and technical assistance, and regularly monitor CAR-WEN's progress.
200. **France** expressed its support for a partnership between the Cartagena Convention and the International Whaling Commission.
201. **The Kingdom of the Netherlands** supported efforts aimed at enhancing the implementation and compliance mechanisms of the SPAW Protocol. They commended the Secretariat for the preparation

of the compliance briefing paper (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.7), which provided a comprehensive overview of the current challenges and opportunities for strengthening adherence to the Protocol.

202. As a longstanding Party to the SPAW Protocol, the Kingdom of the Netherlands recognized that the effectiveness and credibility of the Protocol depend heavily on transparent, consistent, and regular reporting and implementation by all Contracting Parties.
203. They believe these efforts should remain non-confrontational and focused on support, guidance, and capacity building for Parties. They encouraged the STAC to recommend that the upcoming COP endorse this proposal and requested the Secretariat to further consult with Parties on its design and next steps.
204. **The United States** thanked the presenters and Bahamas for their leadership for CAR-WEN and for the very informative presentation. They appreciated the presentation for awareness, and that the CAR-WEN coordinators reached out to some Contracting Parties ahead of the meeting. Regarding recommendation from the STAC, they expressed concern that no meeting document was prepared so that Contracting Parties could be appropriately prepared for this meeting. They noted that the presentation and any discussion on CAR-WEN would be accurately reflected in the meeting report, which would give Contracting Parties an opportunity to reflect on CAR-WEN ahead of the SPAW COP. However, the United State would not be able to support a recommendation at this meeting given that there was not adequate information available in advance to prepare for discussion of this issue.
205. **Grenada** supported the submission concerning civil society participation within the Caribbean programme. They underscored the need for traditional, cultural, heritage, food sovereignty, and the role of civil society to this end. Regarding CAR-WEN they advised that they still needed some more time for closer review and consultation with local experts and superiors to inform decision-making.
206. **Panama** expressed support for the protection and conservation of the manatees noting that they inhabit various regions along the Canal route and played a valuable ecological role. They shared concerns about the many threats they face including pollution and collision with boats. They are monitoring these developments and are working with scientists and researchers. They reiterated the importance of regional cooperation between countries in sharing scientific information. They reported that they had established linkages to reduce the threats that exist in these areas, such as speed reduction of boats. They emphasized the importance of public education and community participation as well as partnerships with other countries. They cited their partnership with Costa Rica to establish a working, national site where this specie will dwell in a shared ecosystem
207. **Cuba** expressed appreciation for the presentations and spoke of the need for coordinated regional actions/response to combat the various threats.
208. **The Observer ICRO** noted the desire from Cartagena meetings to **integrate SPAW and LBS**, aligning with the Global Biodiversity Framework's (GBF) targets for environmental management, climate change, and nature conservation. They emphasized the need to **fund transdisciplinary research to identify and stop unsustainable development** that is being 'falsely' justified by coral restoration projects, citing the example of the 4th Port project impacting coral reefs in Cozumel, Mexico.
209. **The Observer Lightkeepers Foundation** emphasized that the ultimate effectiveness and integrity of the SPAW Protocol depended on Parties' adherence to its provisions. They highlighted a concerning lack of compliance, citing continued hunting and fishing of high-profile SPAW-listed species as an example.
210. They pointed out that COP10 called for an update on how STAC should approach non-compliance or assessments of non-pertinence for exemption reports. Drawing on feedback from the Exemptions

Working Group, especially regarding the Curacao exemption report, they questioned what happens procedurally when STAC assesses non-pertinence, and what guidance the STAC will offer the COP for action.

211. They noted that unlike many other multilateral environmental agreements, the SPAW Protocol lacked a formal compliance review process. Lightkeepers' recommended that the **Secretariat, in consultation with Contracting Parties and Observers, develop a proposed compliance mechanism and other measures** for presentation at STAC12, outlining its structure, operation, and administration
212. **The Observer IAC** highlighted 2 items from the work plan for continued collaboration:-Work Plan 2.3. Conservation of Threatened and Endangered Species / Plan de Trabajo 2.3. Conservación de especies amenazadas y en peligro de extinción. They advised that The Sea Turtle Convention can offer technical support for Phase II CAMAC Work Package 2: Strengthening Stranding Networks for Turtles. The IAC has developed comprehensive guidelines and forms for collecting information on sea turtle strandings which are currently in use by IAC Parties. They offered to share these resources with SPAW for further consideration and use. The IAC is ready to collaborate with SPAW and WIDECASST to advance the establishment of a regional network for sea turtle stranding response in at least five countries.
213. They also recommended that it would be a good synergy to try and integrate other countries that are members of the IAC but not yet members of SPAW into this network through collaboration between both Conventions. This sort of collaboration is available to us by the Letter of Intent that exists between the IAC and SPAW.
214. **The Kingdom of the Netherlands, Aruba** - reiterated the desire expressed at Cartagena meetings to integrate the SPAW and LBS protocols, aligning with GBF's targets for environmental management, climate change, and nature conservation. They also highlighted the gaps and needs within the region, suggesting that the SPAW Work Plan could provide tools for collective action and increased capacity
215. **The Meeting closed on Tuesday, 1 July 2025, at 5:10 p.m. by the President of the Meeting (UTC-5, virtually).**

#### **AGENDA ITEM 10: ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

216. **The Meeting was opened by the Secretariat on Wednesday, 2 July 2025, at 9:00 a.m. (UTC5).** Participants were invited to raise any other issues not covered by the preceding agenda items but were deemed relevant to the scope of the Meeting.
217. The President advised that presentations on synergies with the draft work plan would be made. The presentations included: -
- **Advancing Coastal Wetlands Conservation Project-Enhancing Regional Action for Blue Carbon Coastal Wetland Ecosystem Conservation-** Kate Meyer, The Pew Charitable Trust, Washington DC
  - **Tourism as a Vector of Environmental Conservation & Economic Development: Case Study of East African Sustainability Standards** -Svitlana Mikhalyeva, One Planet
  - **Green Fins Initiative- Engaging the Tourism Industry to Support Coral Reef Management-** Emma Levy, Senior Programmes Officer, The Reef -World Foundation

- **Resources Emma Levy | The Reef-World Foundation / Green Fins** Green Fins brochure: [https://greenfins.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/GF\\_New-Country-Brochure.pdf](https://greenfins.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/GF_New-Country-Brochure.pdf)
- **PROCARIBE+ and the Regional Ocean Coordination Mechanism (OCM): supporting the advancement of the SPAW Protocol.**—Patrick Debels, Regional Coordinator of the UNDP/GEF/UNOPS PROCARIBE+ Project
- **The Contribution of the GOM LME Project to the SPAW Protocol Gulf of Mexico Project SAP/LMe Project** -Margarita Garcia Martinez, Gulf of Mexico LME Project, United Nations Office of Project Services (UNOPS)
- **The Global Red List of Coral Reef Ecosystems- Assessing the Risk of Collapse in the World’s Coral Reef Ecosystems**-Mishal Gudk, The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
- **The Global Network of MPA Managers Network** -Puri Canals, the Blue Nature Alliance
- **From Crisis to Conservation: Mobilizing for Neotropical Songbirds** -Dr Mark Gibson, Sustainable Innovation Initiatives and Alona Sankar SPAW Focal Point of Guyana
- **Key Policy Asks For Coral Reefs - Accelerating The Decade of Action #ForCoral**, Margaux Monfared, ICRI-Blue Pangolin Consulting. <https://icriforum.org/documents/key-policy-asks-forcoral-2025/>
- **Northwest Atlantic Leatherback, Regional Action Plan for the Wider Caribbean Region** – Arjan de Groene Worldwide Fund for Nature Netherlands WWF-NL on behalf of Thyra Balborda, Kingdom of the Netherlands
- **Conservation, Sustainable Use and Governance of Coastal and Marine Biodiversity in the Caribbean Biological Corridor**- Juan Carlos Duque, Representative of the Caribbean Biological Corridor of UNEP
- **Towards a Joint Environmental Mechanism in the Southwestern Caribbean**, Susana Espinosa of Franz Weber Foundation
- **Five-year progress of the Ti Whale An Nou Programme** -Jeffrey Bernus, Caribbean Cetacean Society
- **Key Biodiversity Areas**-Javier Neme, UNEP Regional Office of Latin America and the Caribbean
- **From Coasts to the High Seas: Complementarities Between BBNJ and the Cartagena Convention**-BBNJ and Cartagena in High Seas Alliance-High Seas Alliance-Leneka Scott, Coordinator. She encouraged LAC governments to become party to BBNJ treaty to secure the many benefits She also highlighted mechanisms to support LAC countries and cited the Alliance’s collaboration with UNEP especially on workshops and capacity building events.
- **Concept note on Panama's coastal wetlands and their link to Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)** - Government of Panama

218. The President invited comments on the presentations.

219. The consensus was that whilst these presentations were well received and many of them were important to the work of the SPAW Protocol they were excluded from the annotated agenda making it very challenging for delegates to follow them and absorb salient recommendations.

220. **The Observer ICRO** asked about the machinations of the alerts of Pollution in the Gulf of México. They recommended that parties be involved in controlling sewage pollution and dredging close to coral reefs that degrade the coral reef ecosystems. They also asserted that cruise industries should not clean their vessels close to coral reefs as these activities may be related to Sargassum blooms enrichment of nutrients.
221. **The Observer United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) representing the Gulf of Mexico Large Marine Ecosystem (GoM LME) Project** – responded to the question from the Observer from ICRO and advised that CONABIO was the implementing partner for this activity (water quality) and was responsible for the creation and operation of a Marine Water Quality Alert System. This system will measure water quality based on optical properties of the water, as well as model estimates of water chemistry parameters (e.g., NO<sub>3</sub>, PO<sub>4</sub>, pH, and O<sub>2</sub>). The results of the combined analysis of in situ and satellite data will be integrated into the SIMAR platform as part of a marine water quality monitoring system in the Gulf of Mexico. Website: <https://simar.conabio.gob.mx/explorer/> and <https://gulfmexico.org/es/>
222. IUCN was asked by **ICRO** to advise whether they have identified coral reefs that have been submitted for the scaling up of projects of coral restoration without stopping the causes of coral reef degradation.
223. **IUCN** responded confirming that the Red List of Ecosystems process includes identifying major threats and assessing changes in extent and condition (past, present and projection up to the next 50 years). In the regional chapters and the global publication, they include a dedicated section on threats and recommendations, where they can address cases of restoration efforts that have not been accompanied by effective threat mitigation, as well as highlight positive examples. This analysis is informed by inputs from regional assessments. They also advised that they were working with Mishal Gudka on the Red List of Global Coral Ecosystems initiative. They remain at the Secretariats disposal and are very happy that the Caribbean is a part of this global effort.
224. **The United States** expressed their appreciation for the very informative presentations, which were helpful for awareness. They wished to thank the presenters for their time and note their understanding that the presentations will be duly reflected in the meeting report. However, they were not in a position to support recommendations related to initiatives that were not previously identified on the agenda and/or for which Contracting Parties did not have information available in advance.
225. They kindly requested that for future meetings all presentations be reflected in the annotated agenda for the meeting before it is adopted. They also requested that any efforts or initiatives that may propose recommendations for the STAC's consideration provide information in documents posted to the meeting website so that Contracting Parties can adequately prepare.
226. They emphasized the importance of national-level coordination, and stressed that it requires advance notice. Finally, they encouraged the Secretariat to prioritize more time for discussion on key parts of the agenda, specifically documents that were expected to go to the COP for consideration such as the work plan and budget, for future meetings.
227. **St Lucia** thanked all the presenters and commended their valuable work. They expressed concerns like others that given the omissions of these presentations from the annotated agenda the presentation series was hard to follow. Whilst not diminishing the work being done, they recommended the Secretariat should consider sharing the presentations beforehand for future meetings.
228. **The Kingdom of the Netherlands** echoed the concerns of St Lucia and USA whilst noting that several programmes and projects that were presented related to the work of the SPAW Protocol. They advised that they had a challenge with the Leatherback Turtle which was under stress in Aruba. They noted that as SIDS with deep ties to the Caribbean Sea, the regional action plan provides a valuable roadmap for conservation across the Caribbean.
229. They suggested that given the importance of the Action Plan concerning the Leatherback Turtle that

the recommendation concerning same should be adopted by the meeting for sharing at the upcoming COP. They supported the request to invite the NW regional action plan, identify regional activities to which the SPAW- RAC could contribute, and submit recommendations for the next COP. They also support a RAN /RAP team. They invited the Contracting Parties to support this plan.

230. **The Secretariat** thanked all presenters, highlighting the numerous proposals for strategic alliances. It noted that these are closely aligned with the objectives of the SPAW Protocol and, while acknowledging the large amount of information, it considered appropriate that they be heard by the meeting given their potential relevance for the work of the Protocol during the next biennium. The Secretariat also thanked all focal points for considering them.
231. **The Observer ICRO** reiterated that the Cartagena Convention covers various aspects of marine pollution for which CPs must adopt specific measures including prevention, reduction and control of pollution from ships. They advised that there are legal regional norms to stop sewage waters going to Coral Reef Areas, and avoiding projects related to dredging and depositing waste materials close to or on coral Reef areas.
232. **The Observer Inter-American Association for Environmental Defense (AIDA)** shared contact information for the High Seas Alliance Working Group for Latin America: [mrodriguez@aida-americas.org](mailto:mrodriguez@aida-americas.org) and [szelaya@aida-americas.org](mailto:szelaya@aida-americas.org). She advised that (AIDA) is happy to cooperate with countries in the region in capacity building efforts related to the BBNJ.
233. **The Observer Franz Weber Foundation** invited delegates to visit their webpage: [www.saltwatta.org](http://www.saltwatta.org) and email: [susanaespinosa@ffweber.org](mailto:susanaespinosa@ffweber.org)
234. **The Observer World Wide Fund for Nature-The Netherlands (WWF-NL)** expressed their full support for the Kingdom of Netherlands and advised that the regional action plan was critical to advancing the preservation of the leatherback turtle as fisheries bycatch was most prevalent and pervasive. They also advised the Regional Action Plan for Leatherbacks for WCR developed in conjunction with WIDECAS and many of the countries present aimed to preserve and protect the Leatherback Sea Turtle. They recommended that a Leatherback Action Plan be implemented where the SPAW-RAC could play a role and that it be presented for adoption at the COP.
235. **The Observer ICRI-Blue Pangolin Consulting** invited countries who were interested in membership to get in touch.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 11: ADOPTION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MEETING**

236. The Rapporteur of the Meeting presented the draft recommendations of the Meeting (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/4). The Meeting was invited to adopt the recommendations, with amendments and corrections to be introduced as appropriate. Following discussions related to the length of the recommendations document and the need for a comprehensive review for the finalisation of a concise document, the recommendations were approved and will be made available to SPAW COP13 in October 2025 for adoption.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 12: CLOSURE OF THE MEETING**

237. The Secretariat thanked the Contracting Parties and the Observers for their comprehensive analysis of the Status Report, the Draft Work Plan and the documents submitted for consideration. There was a short time provided for in-depth discussion on technical issues and proposals. The Secretariat expressed appreciation for the effort by Contracting Parties to achieve consensus, especially on issues where there were diverging views.
238. The Meeting closed on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2025 at 5:30 pm (UTC-5) by the President of the Meeting.

**ANNEX I – PROVISIONAL AGENDA**

## **PROVISIONAL AGENDA**

1. Opening of the Meeting
2. Organization of the Meeting
  - 2.1. Rules of Procedure
  - 2.2. Election of Officers
  - 2.3. Organization of Work
3. Adoption of the Agenda
4. Status of activities of the SPAW Sub-Programme for the period 2023-2025, including activities of the Regional Activity Centre for SPAW (SPAW-RAC) in Guadeloupe, and review of the Decisions of the 12<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties to the SPAW Protocol.
5. Report from the Protected Areas Working Group
6. Report from the Species Working Group
7. Report from the Exemptions Working Group
8. Report from the Sargassum Working Group
9. Draft Work Plan for the SPAW Sub-Programme for the 2026-2027 biennium.
10. Other Business
11. Adoption of the Recommendations of the Meeting
12. Closure of the Meeting

**ANNEX II - LIST OF DOCUMENTS**

### PROVISIONAL LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Symbol	Title	Agenda Item
<b><u>Working Documents</u></b>		
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/1	Provisional Agenda	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/2	Provisional Annotated Agenda	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/3	Draft Workplan and Budget of the Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) Sub-programme for the 2026-2027 Biennium	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/4	<i>Recommendations of the Eleventh Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) of the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) in the Wider Caribbean Region (to be prepared during the meeting)</i>	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/5	<i>Report of the Eleventh Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) of the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) in the Wider Caribbean Region (to be prepared after the meeting)</i>	

Symbol	Title	Agenda Item
<b><u>Information Documents</u></b>		
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.1	Provisional List of Documents	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.2	Provisional List of Participants <i>(to be finalised during the meeting)</i>	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.3	Status of Ratification of the SPAW Protocol	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.4	Status of Activities of the SPAW Subprogramme for 2023- 2024(2025) (includes status of STAC10 Recommendations and COP12 Decisions)	Y
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.5	Report of the SPAW Regional Activity Centre (SPAW-RAC) in Guadeloupe: operations and budget for the period 2023-2024(2025)	Y
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.6	SPAW-RAC 2022 and 2023 Call for proposals Short-Term Small Grants -: Final Report	Y
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.6 Addendum 1	SPAW-RAC 2023 Call for proposals Short-Term Small Grants -: Final Report ADDENDUM	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.7	Implementation and Compliance Issues within the SPAW Protocol: Briefing Paper	Y
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.8	Revision of the legal and governance structure for a new Marine Mammal RAN	Y
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.9	Final Report including Guidelines and Recommendations for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of Working Groups to the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols including recommendations for effectively engaging the experts nominated by	Y

Symbol	Title	Agenda Item
	the Contracting Parties	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.10	Report of the STAC Protected Areas Working Group 2023-2024	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.11	Report on the SPAW protected area manager network 2023-2024	Y
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.12	Report on the development of a regional support program for protected area managers in the Wider Caribbean Region	Y
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.13	Report on Updated procedure through which Contracting Parties can propose new Protected Areas to be listed as SPAW sites	Y
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.14	Report of the STAC Working Group on the Listing of Species under the Annexes to the SPAW Protocol	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.15	Report on the conservation of Nassau Grouper ( <i>Epinephelus striatus</i> )	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.16	Recommendations for the conservation of Sawfishes (Pristidae) in the Wider Caribbean Region-report	Y
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.17	SPAW Consortium: Expanding Civil Society Participation in the Caribbean Environment Programme. Briefing Paper	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.18	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	Y
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.19	Report of the STAC Exemptions Working Group	Y
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.20	United States Exemptions Report to the Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife Protocol of the Cartagena Convention for 2022-2024	N
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.21	Bonaire exemption report (crocodile)	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.22	Curacao exemption report (hotel)	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.23	Half Yearly Report of the ACP MEAs III Programme July 2024 to December 2024	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.24	SARGCOOP II project proposal	N
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.25	Sargassum working group report	Y
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.26	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, as appropriate	Y
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.27	Updated action plan of the Sargassum Working Group	N
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.28	Report of GCRMN – Caribbean network activities for the period 2023-2024, project for a new regional and global report	Y

<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Agenda Item</b>
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.29	Report of WIDECASST Activities	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.30	Camac phase 1: final report	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.31	Report of the Joint Monitoring and Assessment Open Ended Working Group and Sargassum Working Group Meeting/Workshop	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.32	Letter of Intent – Inter-American Sea Turtle Convention	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.33	Letter of Intent – International Whaling Commission	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.34	SPAW and the International Whaling Commission: A Strategic Partnership for Marine Mammal Conservation	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.35	Saltwatta Initiative	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.36	Project Document: Protecting and Restoring the Ocean’s natural Capital, building Resilience and supporting region-wide Investments for sustainable Blue Socio-Economic development (PROCARIBE+)	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR IG.24/CRP.9 Rev.4	Final updated Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Regional Activity Centres and Regional Activity Networks for the Cartagena Convention.	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.11	Proposal of the “Parke Marino Aruba” for listing under the SPAW Protocol	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.43/INF.39	Project Document: Implementation of the Strategic Action Program of the Gulf of Mexico Large Marine Ecosystem	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR IG. WG.43/3 Rev .1	Workplan and Budget of the Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) Sub-programme for the 2023-2024 Biennium	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.43/4	Recommendations of the Tenth Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) to the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) in the Wider Caribbean Region	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.43/5	Report of the Tenth Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) to the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife in the Wider Caribbean	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.43/INF.32	Potential costs, benefits and operational framework for the establishment of a Marine Mammal Regional Activity Network (RAN)	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR IG.46/4	Report of the Twelfth Meeting of the Contracting Parties (COP) to the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) in the Wider Caribbean Region, 27 July 2021	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR IG.46/3	Decisions of the Twelfth Meeting of the Contracting Parties (COP) to the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) in the Wider Caribbean Region	

<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Agenda Item</b>
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR IG.48/X	Report of the Twentieth Intergovernmental Meeting of the Action Plan for the Caribbean Environment Programme and Seventeenth Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR IG.48/5	Decisions of the Twentieth Intergovernmental Meeting of the Action Plan for the Caribbean Environment Programme and Seventeenth Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region	

<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Agenda Item</b>
<b><u>Reference Documents</u></b>		
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.43/INF.4	Overview of Procedural Deadlines under the SPAW Protocol	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.43/INF.6	Report of the SPAW Regional Activity Centre (SPAW-RAC) in Guadeloupe: operations and budget for the period 2021-2022	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.43/INF.7	SPAW Regional Activity Centre Strategic Plan	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.12/Rev.1	Terms of Reference for the SPAW STAC Ad Hoc Working Groups	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.15	Proposal for potential inclusion of all parrotfishes (Perciformes: Scaridae) in Annex III of the Protocol on Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife in the Wider Caribbean Region of the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment in the Wider Caribbean Region (SPAW Protocol)	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.24 Add.1	Proposal for the inclusion of the Oceanic whitetip shark <i>Carcharhinus longimanus</i> in Appendix II of the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW Protocol)	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.24 Add.2	Proposal for the inclusion of the whale shark <i>Rhincodon typus</i> in Appendix II of the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW Protocol)	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.24 Add.3	Proposal for the inclusion of the Giant manta ray species <i>Manta birostris</i> in Appendix II of the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW Protocol)	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.24 Add.4	Proposal for the Uplisting of the Great Hammerhead Shark <i>Sphyrna Mokarran</i> from Annex III to Annex II of the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW Protocol)	

<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Agenda Item</b>
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.24 Add.5	Proposal for the Uplisting of the Smooth Hammerhead Shark <i>Sphyrna Zygaena</i> from Annex III to Annex II of the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA Protocol)	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.25	Recommendations for preventing sawfish extinction	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.29	Implementation highlights of the Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Mammals (MAMP) in the Wider Caribbean and recommendations	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.29 Add.1	Implementation of the Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Mammals (MAMP): A Scientific and Technical Analysis	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.38	Recommendations for conserving the Nassau Grouper	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.39	Recommendations for the protection and recovery of the Caribbean Sea turtles	
UNEP(DEPI) CAR WG.41/INF.22/Rev.2	Strategy for the Cartagena Convention Secretariat 2023-2030	
UNEP(DEPI)/CARWG.38/INF.6	Evaluation of CaMPAM Activities and Recommendations for Improvement - An analysis of the last 15 years	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR IG.36 CRP.1	Amendment to the Financial Rules for the Cartagena Convention Rules of Procedure for the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region (Cartagena Convention)	
UNEP(DEC)/CAR IG.20/4	Structure and Scope of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) of the SPA Protocol	
UNEP CEP, 2025	Cartagena Convention Secretariat (CCS) Resource Mobilization Strategy	
UNEP CEP, 2022	Review of Operations, Functioning, and Financing of Regional Activity Centres and Regional Activity Networks of the Cartagena Convention	
UNEP CEP, 2020	UNEP CEP Technical Report No. 1: The State of Nearshore Marine Habitats in the Wider Caribbean	
UNEP CEP, 2020	UNEP CEP Technical Report No. 2: Regional Strategy Action Plan for the Valuation, Protection and/or Restoration of Key Marine Habitats in the Wider Caribbean 2021–2030	
UNEP CEP, 2012	Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region, Protocol Concerning Cooperation in Combating Oil Spills, Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife and the Protocol Concerning Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities	

<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Agenda Item</b>
UNEP CEP, 2010	Rules of Procedure for the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region (Cartagena Convention	
UNEP CEP, 2010	Financial Rules for the Cartagena Convention, its Caribbean Environment Programme and Terms of Reference for the Caribbean Trust Fund	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR IG.36 CRP.1	Amendment to the Financial Rules for the Cartagena Convention	
UNEP CEP, 2010	Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Regional Activity Centres and Regional Activity Networks for the Cartagena Convention	
UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.41/INF.25 Rev.1	Revised Template for National Reporting on the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols	
UNEP CEP, 2008	Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Mammals (MMAP) in the Wider Caribbean Region. United Nations Environment Programme – Caribbean Environment Programme, Kingston, Jamaica. 2008. (English and Spanish	
UNEP, 1991	Final Act of the Conference of Plenipotentiaries for the Adoption of the Annexes to the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife in the Wider Caribbean Region	
UNEP, 1990	Final Act of the Conference of Plenipotentiaries Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife in the Caribbean Region	

**ANNEX III - RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MEETING**

## 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 (SPA) 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. Contingent upon adoption of the Updated Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of the RACs and RANs for the Cartagena Convention (UNEP(DEPI)CAR IG.24\_CRP.9 Rev.4) at IGM21/COP18, and in line with such guidelines, the Secretariat open a call for nominations for institutions interested in hosting and/or directing a (MMRAN). The Secretariat should work with Contracting Parties following IGM21/COP18 to elaborate next steps, including a process for review and possible intersessional approval of a nomination.
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, **organise** 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 COP13. 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 analyze” (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.
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.



**ANNEX IV - LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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