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

Panama City, Panama,
30 June – 3 July 2025

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MEETING

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

The Meeting recommends,

RECOMMENDATION I STATUS OF ACTIVITIES

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

RAC/RAN Guidelines

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

Marine Mammals RAN (MMRAN)

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

Working Group

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

1. The Secretariat and/or SPAW-RAC, as appropriate, **develop** training materials for new working group members.
2. The Chairs of the working group **announce** meetings and deadlines well in advance and distribute meeting reports promptly.

3. The Secretariat and/or SPAW-RAC **continue** to provide interpretation for the Working Groups, as funding permits. Request for interpretation should be made 15 days in advance.
4. The Secretariat and/or SPAW-RAC, as appropriate, **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 COP14. The proposal should take into account the relevant provisions of the SPAW Protocol, including Articles 15(2), 19, and 22(2)(e).
5. SPAW COP13 **welcome** the proposal from the Kingdom of the Netherlands to include Parke Marino Aruba in the SPAW list of Protected Area.

RECOMMENDATION III

SPECIES

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

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

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

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

1. SPAW COP13 **encourage** Contracting Parties to consider the recommendations in UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.15 in the context of national actions to promote the conservation of Nassau grouper and the Secretariat and SPAW-RAC, as appropriate and upon request, support Contracting Parties in their implementation.
2. Following the presentation by a sawfish expert on the species’ biology, ecology, and conservation needs (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.16), the Contracting Parties wish to **underscore** the critical importance of continuing efforts to prevent the extinction of sawfish

in the region.

3. The Species Working Group **continue** to assist the Secretariat and SPAW RAC to support relevant Contracting Parties in implementing the recommendations for the conservation of sawfish in UNEP(DEPI) CAR WG. 43/INF.25.
4. SPAW COP13 **encourage** Contracting Parties to consider the recommendations in UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.18 in the context of national actions to promote the conservation and management of Whale Shark, Giant Manta Ray, and Hammerhead Sharks, as outlined in and the Secretariat and SPAW-RAC, as appropriate and upon request, support Contracting Parties in their implementation.

RECOMMENDATION IV

EXEMPTIONS

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

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

RECOMMENDATION V

SARGASSUM

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

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

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

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

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

1. The Secretariat and/or SPAW-RAC, as appropriate, **invite** Contracting Parties to provide comments on the “STAC Sargassum Working Group Updated Action Plan Proposal and Sustainable Financing Resources” (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.27) by 21 July 2025, ensuring that all feedback is transparently reviewed and effectively integrated, and call for an intersessional meeting, if needed, and the Secretariat provide interpretation depending on availability of funds.
2. The Sargassum Working Group be at the level of the Convention Parties to facilitate participation by both the SPAW and LBS Protocols.
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.