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

Kingston, Jamaica,

14 & 16 October 2025

**Advancing Marine Mammal Conservation in the Wider
Caribbean Region: Expression of Interest in Support of the
Future Marine Mammal Regional Activity Network
(MM-RAN)**

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Expression of Interest

For Consideration by the Conference of the Parties to the Cartagena Convention and the SPAW Protocol (COP18 – Kingston, Jamaica, October 2025)

Title:

Advancing Marine Mammal Conservation in the Wider Caribbean Region: Expression of Interest in Support of the Future Marine Mammal Regional Activity Network (MM-RAN)

Submitted by:

Dr. Jeremy J. Kiszka, Florida International University (FIU)

Dr. Jaime Bolaños Jiménez, Caribbean-Wide Orca Project (CWOP)

Background and Rationale

The SPAW Protocol has long recognized the importance of regional cooperation for the conservation of marine mammals in the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR). In anticipation of the eventual establishment of the Marine Mammal Regional Activity Network (MM-RAN), we wish to express our joint interest in contributing to this effort and in supporting the SPAW Secretariat and Contracting Parties in advancing its preparatory phase.

The MM-RAN represents a unique opportunity to consolidate scientific knowledge, strengthen coordination among institutions, and foster regional partnerships under the Cartagena Convention framework. Florida International University (FIU) and the Caribbean-Wide Orca Project (CWOP) have been actively involved to achieve these goals in the region for over two decades, working collaboratively with partners throughout the Caribbean to advance science-based conservation and capacity building.

Our Experience and Contribution

Florida International University (FIU)

FIU, based in Miami, is one of the largest public universities in the United States, and hosts one of the leading marine mammal research programs in the Western Atlantic. Under the direction of Dr. Jeremy Kiszka, the Marine Mammal Ecology Lab has conducted extensive research on cetacean ecology, trophic interactions, and conservation across the Caribbean, and the Gulf of Mexico. FIU combines academic excellence with regional partnerships and has successfully trained graduate students, produced peer-reviewed publications, and contributed to regional capacity building through collaborations with government agencies, NGOs, and local researchers.

FIU's experience in coordinating multi-country projects, managing large datasets, and integrating ecological research with conservation policy makes it well positioned to support the scientific foundation of a future MM-RAN.

Caribbean-Wide Orca Project (CWOP)

The Caribbean-Wide Orca Project (CWOP), coordinated by Dr. Jaime Bolaños Jiménez, is a regional initiative that documents the distribution, ecology, and behavior of killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) and other cetaceans throughout the WCR. CWOP has built a trusted network of scientists, NGOs, fishers, citizen scientists and local communities, promoting participatory research and data sharing across more than a dozen Caribbean countries.

Dr. Bolaños Jiménez has over 30 years of experience in marine mammal research and conservation in the region and participated in the expert group that developed the Marine Mammal Action Plan (MMAP) under the SPAW Protocol in 2008. His leadership in building cross-national collaborations and his extensive record of scientific publications underscore CWOP's capacity to strengthen regional cooperation and bridge science with management.

Proposed Focus and Next Steps

Our shared objective is to continue facilitating collaboration, data mobilization, and scientific exchange throughout the WCR in alignment with SPAW's priorities. We propose to:

Continue engaging with SPAW Parties, RAC, and the Secretariat to ensure scientific and technical readiness for the MM-RAN once the revised Guidelines are adopted.

Contribute to regional coordination and outreach activities in collaboration with existing initiatives such as CAMAC and the SPAW Consortium.

Strengthen linkages among regional academic institutions and laboratories to support the eventual implementation of the MM-RAN.

We respectfully submit this expression of interest for the consideration of the COP and stand ready to work collaboratively with the SPAW Secretariat, Contracting Parties, regional and local organizations and partners to lay the groundwork for a strong, inclusive, and science-based MM-RAN.