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**PROPOSAL FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE
MARINE MAMMAL REGIONAL
ACTIVITY NETWORK
(MMRAN)**

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CONFERENCE ROOM PAPER

PROPOSAL FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MARINE MAMMAL REGIONAL ACTIVITY NETWORK (MMRAN)

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1. CONTEXT: WHY A MMRAN AND WHY NOW

Marine mammals play a vital ecological, cultural, and economic role across the Wider Caribbean Region. They connect ecosystems, cycle nutrients, and sustain local livelihoods through ecosystem services, tourism and education. Yet, these species face multiple transboundary threats that no single country can address alone:

- Bycatch and entanglement in fishing gear;
- Ship strikes;
- Noise and chemical pollution;
- Habitat degradation;
- Direct and indirect catches.

Over 30 species of marine mammals inhabit Caribbean waters, demonstrating the exceptional biodiversity of the region. Recent research highlights their frequent cross-border movements, emphasizing the need for regional coordination and shared management.

Despite this common heritage, conservation efforts remain fragmented between jurisdictions.

Under the SPAW Protocol of the Cartagena Convention, the creation of a Marine Mammal Regional Activity Network (MMRAN) offers an opportunity to:

- Strengthen cooperation between governments, scientists, and NGOs;
- Harmonize data collection and monitoring protocols across jurisdictions;
- Pool expertise and financial resources to support territories;
- Integrate cultural and traditional knowledge into management frameworks;
- Build regional capacity and education programs;
- Ensure that Caribbean voices are represented in regional and international decision-making.

This proposal presents a concrete and inclusive mechanism to launch the MMRAN through an existing coalition of recognized Caribbean experts

and institutions already collaborating for marine mammal protection.

2. A COLLABORATIVE HOSTING MECHANISM

To ensure representativeness, efficiency, and shared ownership, the MMRAN could be structured as a collective network with one coordinating host and multiple regional co-hosts representing all major subregions and languages of the Caribbean.

Roles and Responsibilities

Main Host – Coordination and Administration

- Serve as the administrative and coordination hub of the MMRAN;
- Report to the SPAW STAC and COP;
- Facilitate communication, meetings, and exchanges among members;
- Coordinate production of regional reports and technical recommendations;
- Manage shared data platforms and harmonized monitoring tools;
- Channel demands, funding, and information in a transparent and inclusive way;
- Integrate co-host functions by actively contributing to field actions, data management, and training.

Co-Hosts – Regional Representation and Expertise

- Represent their respective regions or territories within the network;
- Participate in thematic and governance committees;
- Lead or co-lead committees according to their recognized expertise (e.g., sperm whales, manatees, outreach, data management, or policy);
- Ensure linguistic, cultural, and gender diversity, representing the region's four main languages — English, Spanish, Dutch, and French;

- Strengthen the link between local stakeholders, communities, and governments, ensuring that the network remains grounded and inclusive.

This model promotes cross-geographical and cross-thematic collaboration, bringing together decades of experience from regional experts. In the long term, this model of MMRAN envisions when possible, at least one governmental and one NGO focal point per territory, ensuring shared responsibility and equitable participation under the Cartagena Convention. Future co-hosts could be invited to join the network if they represent a recognized local NGO and demonstrate experience in marine mammal research, management, conservation or education in the Caribbean. The host and co-hosts will work jointly to design and deliver regional actions, share expertise and data, and co-develop new projects. Committees will be established to address specific themes such as regional coordination, data, education, or emerging threats.

3. PROPOSED FOUNDING HOST AND CO-HOSTS

Caribbean Cetacean Society (CCS) – Host and Coordinator

Based in Martinique, CCS will act as the coordinating organization. Since 2020, CCS has connected more than 20 Caribbean territories through research, education, and cooperation programs. Its UNESCO-endorsed “Ti Whale An Nou” initiative is recognized as the largest collaborative cetacean research program in the region, applying a standardized methodology. The team is composed of several cetacean experts, regional coordinator, biostatistician, and a doctor in social science. CCS has proven administrative and financial capacity to coordinate multi-country projects and report to international donors. Its systems ensure inclusive and transparent management and timely delivery of outputs in line with UN Environment Programme standards. CCS could handle coordination, reporting, and facilitation while supporting co-hosts and enabling new members to join the network.

Bahamas Marine Mammal Research Organisation (BMMRO)

Operating in The Bahamas, BMMRO is a globally recognized scientific institution conducting long-term marine mammal monitoring. It contributes expertise in data collection, acoustic research, data analysis and population monitoring.

Dominica Sperm Whale Project (DSWP)

Based in Dominica, DSWP brings decades of leadership in sperm whale research, acoustic ecology,

and community engagement. It combines cutting-edge science with cultural knowledge and public education.

Beyond the Reef (BTR)

Located in the British Virgin Islands, BTR leads community-based conservation, integrating citizen science and marine education.

Ripples To Waves (R2W)

Headquartered in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, R2W focuses on youth education, community engagement, and marine mammal monitoring.

FUNDEMAR

Based in the Dominican Republic, FUNDEMAR have experience in manatee, coastal species studies, offshore expeditions, as well as community engagement, and government support.

Blue Sustainable Caribbean Group Inc.

Based in Barbados, this organization promotes blue economy development and connects community-led initiatives with marine conservation. It bridges ecological protection and sustainable livelihoods.

Caribbean Manatee Conservation Center (CMCC)

Based in Puerto Rico, CMCC leads manatee rescue, rehabilitation, and research efforts. It contributes expertise on coastal and estuarine ecosystems.

Fish’n Fins Inc.

Based in Montserrat, Fish’n Fins empowers youth through marine education, citizen science, and environmental stewardship, reinforcing community-based engagement in the eastern Caribbean.

Centro para la Conservación y Eco-Desarrollo de la Bahía de Samaná y su Entorno (CEBSE)

Based in Samaná, Dominican Republic, CEBSE works on humpback whale conservation, sustainable tourism, and marine protected area management, bringing long-standing experience in local stakeholder involvement.

4. GOVERNANCE AND FUTURE EXPANSION

The MMRAN will develop around a multi-layered governance framework ensuring both scientific rigor and participatory decision-making:

Regional Subcommittees:

- Greater Antilles ; Lesser Antilles ; Central America ; South American Caribbean

Council of Parties:

- Composed of government representatives ensuring policy alignment, consistency with national priorities, and integration with the Marine Mammal Action Plan (MMAP).

Species Working Groups:

- Sperm whales ; Beaked whales and Kogidae ; Small cetaceans ; Baleen whales ; Manatees

Thematic Working Groups:

- Education and Outreach ; Social Sciences and Traditional Knowledge ; Capacity Building and Training ; Strandings and Rescue ; Research and Development ; Whale Watching and Sustainable Tourism ; Bycatch and Direct Catch Mitigation ; MPA Development and Management ; Threats mitigation (Pollution, ship strikes)

This flexible, inclusive, and scalable model allows the integration of new partners and territories as the network expands, ensuring that all Caribbean voices — from community groups to national agencies — are represented.

5. BUILDING ON EXISTING COLLABORATION

This proposal builds on a well-established and functional collaboration network that has already demonstrated its ability to mobilize and coordinate resources and expertise, and deliver results across the Caribbean.

Over the past years, these organizations have:

- Conducted joint and inclusive scientific expeditions, trainings, and data collection;
- Supported governments in establishing marine mammal sanctuaries and regulatory frameworks;
- Supported the establishment of Important Marine Mammals Area.
- Delivered large-scale education and youth programs;
- Responded collectively to regional emergencies, including hurricanes and seismic survey events, demonstrating operational capacity and solidarity.

This existing collaboration includes ongoing partnerships and informal recognition from several governments and international bodies.

We now invite Parties to the Cartagena Convention to:

- Acknowledge the commitment, expertise, and capacity of aforementioned marine mammal institutions to serve as the foundational members of the MMRAN;
- Officially recognize the establishment of the MMRAN under the SPAW Protocol
- Call upon the Secretariat to initiate and lead the formal nomination and evaluation process for MMRAN host and co-host institutions;
- Nominate national focal points from governmental agencies to participate in the network;
- Support the continuity and formalization of this regional mechanism, ensuring it can operate as an official coordination tool under the Marine Mammal Action Plan.

6. CONCLUSION

The Caribbean hosts one of the world's richest and most interconnected marine mammal communities. Protecting these migratory and transboundary species requires collaboration that reflects their ecological range, cultural importance, and linguistic diversity. This proposal presents an inclusive, multilingual, and regionally representative structure to establish the Marine Mammal Regional Activity Network (MMRAN) under the SPAW Protocol.

The proposed host (Caribbean Cetacean Society) and co-host organizations combine:

- Proven scientific and operational excellence;
- Established regional legitimacy and partnerships;
- Robust administrative, financial, and logistical capacity;
- Commitment to equity, cooperation, and transparency.

This network is not a new concept but the formal recognition of an existing and active collaboration, ready to scale through the proposed hosting and co-hosting structure and in close partnership with the SPAW Secretariat and Regional Activity Center (RAC).

Through this initiative, the Caribbean partners noted herein reaffirm that they are ready, organized, and united to launch the MMRAN and deliver on the objectives of the Cartagena Convention and its Marine Mammal Action Plan, ensuring the protection of the region's shared marine heritage for generations to come.