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

Virtual, 30 January – 1 February 2023

## SPA-W-REGIONAL ACTIVITY CENTRE (RAC) STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2028

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# SPA W-RAC Strategic plan 2023-2028



## Table of Contents

1.	Foreword.....	1
2.	Context.....	2
2.1	Habitat loss.....	2
2.2	Invasive species .....	2
2.3	Overexploitation of resources .....	3
2.4	Brown algae of the genus <i>Sargassum</i> .....	3
2.5	Climate change.....	4
2.6	The need for knowledge.....	4
3.	The Regional Support Centre.....	4
3.1	Missions .....	4
3.2	Key success factors .....	5
4.	Action plan of the proposed strategy .....	8
5.	Resources and funding .....	15
6.	Conclusion .....	15

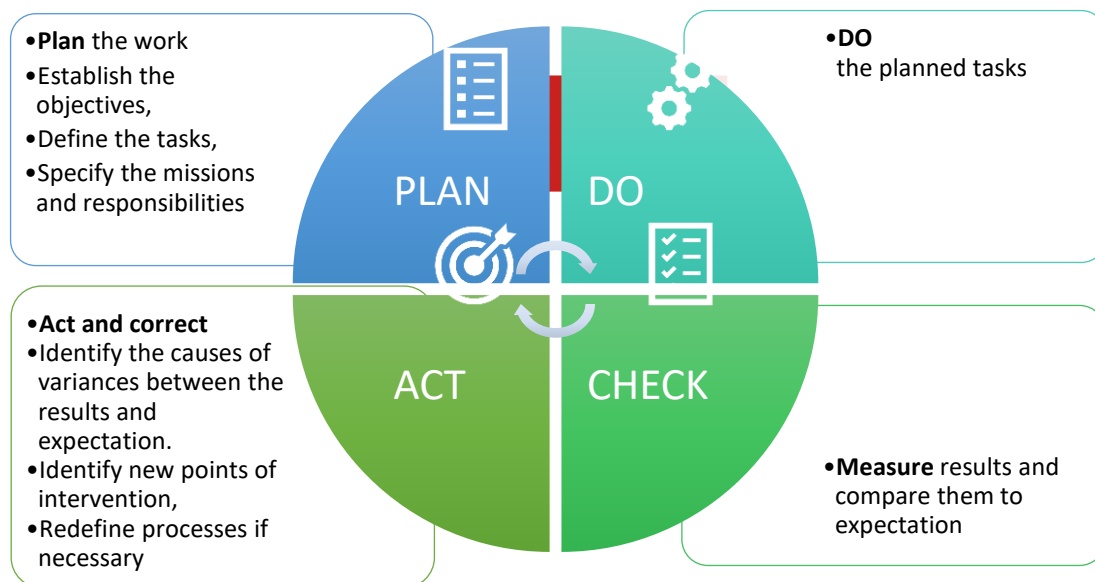
## List of ACRONYMS

CFP	Call for proposals
AGRRA	Atlantic and Gulf Rapid Reef Assessment
MPA	Marine protected areas
BRGM	Bureau de Recherches Géologiques et Minières
CAMAC	Caribbean Marine Megafauna and Anthropogenic Activities
CaMPAM	Caribbean Marine Protected Areas network and forum
RAC	Regional activity center
IWC	International whaling Commission
DEAL	Direction de l'Environnement de l'Aménagement et du Logement
IAS	Invasive alien species
KSF	Key success factor
GCRMN	Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network
H <sub>2</sub> S	hydrogen sulfide
INTERREG	European territorial coopération program
LBS	Land-Based Sources and activities Protocol
MMAP	Marine mammals action plan
Nb	Numbers
NGO	Non-Governmental organization
PEC	Programme pour l'environnement des Caraïbes
UNEP	United Nations environment program
RAN	Regional Activity Network
SCTLD	Stony coral tissue loss disease
SPAW	Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife for the Wider Caribbean Region
STAC	Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee of the SPAW protocol
SWOT	strengths, weaknesses, opportunities et threats
WECAFC	Western Central Atlantic Commission (FAO)
WIDECAST	Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network



## 1. Foreword

1. The Thirteenth Intergovernmental Meeting on the Action Plan for the Caribbean Environment Program and the Tenth 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.28/INF.5), decided that each RAC will prepare a strategic plan which cover a six years period, which will be presented and approved by the Contracting Parties. This strategic action plan must contain at least four sections:
  - (a) The Mission and Vision Statement.
  - (b) The Trends and developments in the subject area (e.g., oil spills, LBS) of the RAC and the related challenges for the Wider Caribbean Region.
  - (c) The strategic directions that the RAC recommends to address the trends and challenges.
  - (d) A series of performance indicators and results.
2. Through the drafting and implementation of this strategic plan, the SPAW-RAC is involved in a process of continuous improvement by improving its organization, methods and tools. Therefore, the SPAW-RAC will base itself on the principles of the Deming wheel for its strategic plan:



3. This strategic plan is established for 6 years. The achievement of the objectives through the implementation of the action plan will be monitored and evaluated through indicators. At the end of the 6-years implementation period, the 2023-2028 strategic action plan will be evaluated and updated.

## 2. Context

4. The Caribbean has a rich and unique biodiversity in the world. This biodiversity is increasingly threatened. The Caribbean islands have been identified as one of the world's biodiversity hotspots, characterized by both: a high level of endemism, and a high level of pressure on habitats and vulnerability to extinctions.
5. Caribbean ecosystems are essential for the survival and development of these territories. They provide essential services such as food, livelihood, fuel, tourism or storm protection and climate resilience (CARICOM, 2018). All types of Caribbean marine ecosystems are now considered endangered (Augier, 2010).
6. In the years to come, the challenges of preserving biodiversity are multiple and concern many stakeholders in the territories (decision-makers, managers, companies, NGOs, civil society) at the local, national and regional levels.

### 2.1 Habitat loss

7. Due to destruction, overexploitation but also to pollution (plastic, wastewater, oil, noise) the loss of habitats constitutes a threat and a major factor of biodiversity loss. In 2004, it was already estimated that two thirds of the Caribbean reef surface were threatened by human activities and they were considered the most degraded and threatened in the world (Burke et al., 2004).
8. Caribbean reefs likely contain about 30,000 described species of all taxa (Reaka-Kudla, 2005) and annual revenues from coral reef fisheries exceed \$300 million (Burke et al., 2004). In addition, due to their ability to dissipate wave energy (up to 97%), approximately 21% of the Caribbean coastline are directly protected by reefs (Burke et al., 2004 and Gracia et al., 2018). The value of this service is estimated between \$700 million and \$2.2 billion per year (Burke et al., 2004). Coral reef loss is therefore a major concern, with significant ecological impacts on entire reef ecosystems, but also economic impacts for all Caribbean countries.
9. Mangroves are a huge reservoir of biodiversity (OECS, 2009). The ecosystem services provided by mangroves are numerous and widely studied: as nurseries, the good ecological state of mangroves has a direct impact on the quantity of fish in adjacent coral reefs (Serafy et al., 2015). In addition, the roots of mangroves filter nitrates, phosphates and heavy metals. Finally, mangroves are fundamental for coastal protection, erosion control or to limit climate change (Barbier et al., 2011). It's a natural barrier against hurricanes, storms and floods. This ecosystem service is estimated between 23 and 45 million USD/ha for the Caribbean. Although mangroves are very important in the Americas and the Caribbean, 24% have been reduced in the last 25 years due to deforestation (UNEP, 2021a).
10. Finally, seagrass, which play an important role in coastal protection, erosion control or even in limiting climate change (carbon sink), are in decline due to human activities (pollution, sedimentation and coastal development) combined with climate change (Barbier et al., 2011; UNEP, 2020).
11. The preservation of these major ecosystems, in particular through the strengthening of existing marine protected areas (MPAs) and the creation of new ones, as well as marine and coastal planning based on the concept of integrated management using ecosystem and nature-based solutions, is a priority challenge. These principles are also part of the United Nations Decade for Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030).

### 2.2 Invasive species

12. After the destruction of natural habitats by humans, invasive species are the second leading cause of species extinction worldwide, and even the first in islands. Island ecosystems are indeed more fragile than most

continental ecosystems to invasive species (IUCN, 2018). In the Caribbean, lionfish (*Pterois volitans*) or *Halophila stipulacea* remain species whose impact on marine ecosystems is of concern (ICRI, 2013; Winters et al., 2020). The poor management of ballast water from ships involved in maritime traffic represents an important factor in the introduction of exotic organisms and pathogens into the marine environment. On a global scale, it is estimated that 7,000 different species are transported at any given time (RAC-REMPEITC-Caribe, 2012). The Caribbean is not left out since it represents, together with Latin America, more than 20% of the annual maritime traffic (UNCTAD, 2020). Ballast water, for example, is considered a potential vector of the Stony coral tissue loss disease (SCTLD) that has been ravaging Caribbean reefs since 2014 (Rosenau et al. 2021).

13. In addition, in terrestrial coastal environments, invasive alien species (IAS) are a major threat notably to seabird and sea turtle nests. For example, the small Indian mongoose (*Urva auropunctata*), is responsible of ecological disaster in the Caribbean (Lorvelec and Lenoble, 2021). The support of SPAW territories for the implementation of prevention plans against IAS and the control against the present species is a priority for the preservation of biodiversity and habitats.

### **2.3 Overexploitation of resources**

14. Overexploitation of resources is also a major threat to Caribbean biodiversity. In particular, in order to preserve stocks, it is necessary to limit the impact of fishing practices on emblematic species of fisheries interest such as reef fish or sharks and rays (Linardich et al., 2017; FAO, 2017).
15. In addition, other species and environments are indirectly impacted by fisheries, including bycatch during fishing operations and abandoned fishing gear (Linardich et al., 2017; Burke et al., 2004; Sacchi J, 2021). At the global scale, bycatch is considered to be a major threat to sea turtles and cetaceans, which are listed in Appendix II of the SPAW Protocol (e.g., Nelms et al., 2021; Wallace et al., 2013).
16. Finally, the hunting of these same groups of species, although protected, is still applied in some Caribbean territories that are signatories to the SPAW Protocol. Therefore, it is necessary to support the implementation of a sustainable and integrated fisheries management.

### **2.4 Brown algae of the genus *Sargassum***

17. These algae form floating rafts moving on the surface of the oceans. These rafts have been observed for a long time in the Caribbean basin and their presence has given its name to the Sargasso Sea, located in the North Atlantic Ocean.
18. However, since 2011, there has been an unusually high proliferation of two species of the genus: *Sargassum fluitans* and *Sargassum natans* (UNEP, 2021b). Pelagic *Sargassum* sp. in the tropical Atlantic, although relatively new in such quantities, has positive impacts in terms of habitat for marine species (turtles, fish, etc.). There are still many uncertainties or unknowns about the detail of the processes and mechanisms of formation of these sargassum slicks (eutrophication, climate change, current, etc.) but all agree that the influx process is sustainable and that the problem is unlikely to resolve itself.
19. The identified and potential impacts of brown tides during *Sargassum* stranding on the coastline are multiple, whether on the socio-economic (public health, tourism, fishing, navigation), ecological (aquatic organisms, beach erosion) and sanitary (decomposition and release of H<sub>2</sub>S) levels. The management of *Sargassum* influxes is a strong local, national and regional issue (UNEP, 2021b).



## 2.5 Climate change

20. Climate change is already affecting the region's biodiversity and ecosystems in multiple and deeply ways (development of diseases on coral reefs, coral bleaching, sea level rise, coastal erosion, intensification of hurricanes, ocean acidification<sup>1</sup>, etc.) which in turn affects Caribbean populations (Birchenough, 2017). These effects are expected to intensify as change accelerates, posing a significant threat to the sustainability of the region and the well-being of its citizens.
21. Monitoring the impacts of climate change and planning for adaptation of coastal communities is a development priority for the region. Ocean acidification<sup>2</sup> is an important emerging issue.
22. Ocean acidification impacts the physiology, sensory systems, and behavior of marine organisms and thus compromises ecosystem health (CBD, 2014).

## 2.6 The need for knowledge

23. Finally, the lack of knowledge on the habitats and populations of protected species does not allow the development of targeted and efficient conservation and monitoring programs.
24. Developing the knowledge on the state of conservation and the evolution of the SPAW sites and species as well as identifying the main threats and quantifying the impacts, constitute main priorities.

## 3. The Regional Support Centre

### 3.1 Missions

25. According to the terms of the Protocol, the Parties must, in accordance with their own laws and regulations, take all measures to protect, conserve and sustainably manage in their territory the areas in need of protection and the threatened animal and plant species listed in the Annexes of the Protocol. The vocation of the SPAW-RAC is to provide support to the signatory countries so that they develop the agreed actions and achieve their objectives.
26. According to the May 2000 Agreement between the French government and UNEP on behalf of the parties to the Cartagena Convention, the statutory missions of the SPAW-RAC are as follows
  - Gather, inventory and transmit to the Caribbean actors (regional activities network) the relevant scientific and technical information, as well as the useful feedbacks;
  - To collect information on state-of-the-art technologies and know-how in the field of wildlife and protected areas management in the Caribbean region and transfer it to these same actors;
  - Develop training and information activities;
  - Provide scientific and technical assistance to SPAW Parties;
  - To cooperate with the United Nations agencies, with the competent intergovernmental, governmental or non-governmental organizations and more generally with all the actors concerned to develop joint projects or to implement activities related to SPAW;
  - Establish and maintain a regular exchange between Caribbean actors;
  - To contribute to the development of regional cooperation in pursuit of the objectives of the SPAW Protocol;

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<sup>1</sup> Acidification is the consequence of the increase in the atmospheric concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> of anthropogenic origin. A quarter of the CO<sub>2</sub> is absorbed by the ocean in dissolved form or in living beings (photosynthesis, skeletons) and eventually in marine sediments. By chemical reaction, CO<sub>2</sub> is transformed into carbonic acid: the ocean is gradually acidifying. The parameters of carbonate chemistry are changing.

- Encourage the harmonization of approaches and methods used at the regional level.

27. Our vision is a Caribbean that is aware of the great biodiversity and great vulnerability of its territories, of nations that, strengthened by their complementarities and their inescapable links to their exceptional common natural heritage, are collectively committed to preserving and enhancing biodiversity.
28. The SPAW-RAC is made up of professionals with integrity and commitment to the preservation of biodiversity, who put their expertise at the service of the Contracting Parties to the SPAW Protocol in order to strengthen regional competencies and encourage cooperation between the various nations of the Caribbean.

### **3.2 Key success factors**

29. With its 22 years of experience and being aware of the room for improvement to effectively accompany the implementation of the SCARSPAW Protocol, the SPAW-RAC wishes to focus on the key success factors (KSF): "quality of service" and "visibility / awareness" of the SPAW protocol. It is through these two competences that the SPAW-RAC can propose a strategic planning allowing to set clear identifiable and measurable objectives to be submitted to all stakeholders for the next six years.
30. A SWOT analysis was carried out to identify the strategic orientations and the resulting objectives. It allows to specify the objectives and to identify the internal and external as well as successful and unfavorable factors to the achievement of these objectives and with regard to the framing documents of the SPAW-RAC activity (agreement of May 2000 between the French government and the UNEP, SPAW work plan for the 2021-2022 biennium). Our strategic objectives have thus been set according to the purpose and resources of SPAW-RAC and our environment.



## STRENGTHS

- complementarity of the team's profiles
- Good collaboration / articulation with the Secretariat
- skills/motivation held
- financially and structurally stabilized
- Financial assistance from French environment ministry
- functional autonomy in relation to the contracting parties
- knowledge of Caribbean networks
- leadership/legitimacy in the technical support of biodiversity issues at the Caribbean level
- regional call for projects to support Caribbean countries



## WEAKNESSES

- precariousness of the team/high staff turnover
- Complexity of the payment chain
- multiple and complex frameworks
- Complex and limiting mobilization funds
- Unsuitable tour operator market
- Lack of a communication strategy
- lack of a strategic plan )
- Insufficient human and financial resources to carry out all of the RAC's missions



## OPPORTUNITIES

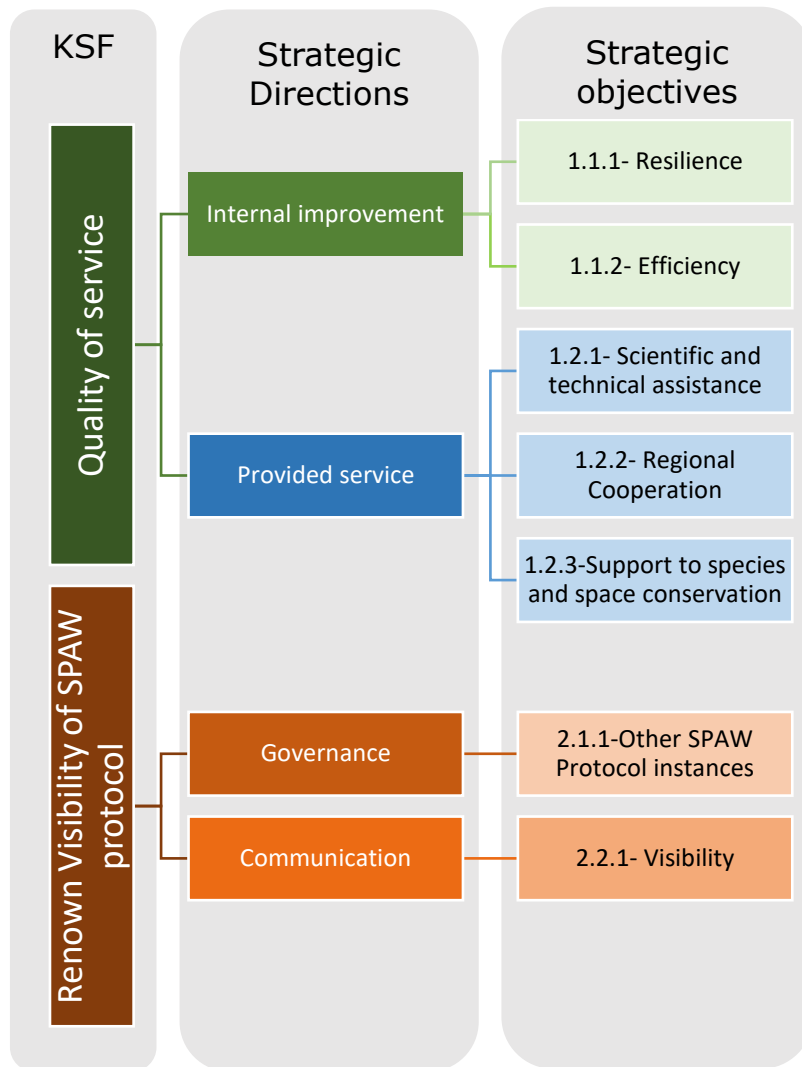
- need for technical support at the Caribbean level
- need to strengthen cooperation in the region
- numerous initiatives and networks that need coordination
- Caribbean => biodiversity hot spot
- European financial funds
- numerous biodiversity threats: climate change, sargassum, invasive species, etc. => reinforcement of conservation measures necessary
- an organization known and recognized regionally



## THREATS

- The lack of a strategic plan and an action plan defined by the Contracting Parties, the Secretariat and the SPAW-RAC creates difficulties for the preparation and implementation of the biennial work plans.
- lack of coordination and collaboration with other Cartagena Convention bodies.
- Some SPAW countries not very proactive
- single and limited source of funding

31. Each objective is written to be specific, measurable, acceptable (to stakeholders and teams), realistic, and time-bound. The following sheets repeat the previous diagram and detail the operational objectives and action plans assigned to each strategic direction.



#### 4. Action plan of the proposed strategy

1.1.1	Domain	Strategic direction
	Quality of service	Internal improvement
Strategic objective	Increasing our resilience The resilience of organizations is their ability to adapt and respond quickly to disruptions in order to maintain business continuity.	
Result	An organization resilient to changes in resources, governance and orders	

Operational objectives	Reduce staff turnover to maintain a collective memory and knowledge of regional technical topics and networks	
	Diversify funding sources	
	Develop new thematic expertise (climate, invasive species)	

Performance indicator(s)	Indicator target
Turnover rate	-33% over the duration of the action plan
No. of financial resources	at least 3 different sources

Action plan					
2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
Contract at least one long project Search for Secretariat funding (at least 1)	Start of at least one long project Work on the development of at least one other project Explore other sources of funding	Start a second project. Continue to explore funding sources			If the project ends in year N+ 1, a new project will be set up

1.1.2	Domain	Strategic direction
	Quality of service	Internal improvement
Strategic objective	Increase our efficiency For an organization, efficiency represents the right ratio between the results obtained and the means used.	
Result	Financial and functional processes more adapted	

Operational objectives	Develop financial processes more efficient (30% of payments on first commitment)
	Explore an evolution of the status of the SPAW-RAC that is more flexible in terms of operation

Performance indicator(s)	Indicator target
Payment rate at 1st commitment	30 %

Action plan					
2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
Implementation of procedures with payments organisms	Make procedures evolve if necessary				
Identify potential status and evaluate the interest in particular of co-linkages GO /NO GO					

1.2.1	Domain	Strategic direction
	Quality of service	Improvement of the service provided
Strategic objective	Develop the mission of scientific and technical assistance to the Parties	
Result	A well-developed core business mission	

Operational objectives	Develop guidelines and encourage States to designate new sites (at least one per biennium) and SPAW species (at least one per biennium)
	Encourage States to propose waiver requests as appropriate (1 per biennium)
	Develop tools and actions to strengthen the role of the SPAW-RAC in scientific and technical monitoring and dissemination
	Maintain, develop and update the database dedicated to recording national reports on listed protected areas as well as areas recommended by STAC for listing, including the online tool for Parties to prepare and submit regional reports online.

Performance indicator(s)	Indicator target
Nb of new SPAW sites / Biennial	+1/ biennial
Nb of new species / biennium	+1 / biennial
No. of exemption requests	1

Action plan				
2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
Solicit the States Reviewing the protected area listing process	Solicit the States. Valorize SPAW sites Network	Solicit the States. Strengthen the interaction between SPAW sites and the enhancement of the SPAW sites and species (com strategy).	Solicit the States. Valorize the SPAW sites + constitution of an operational network etc;	Solicit the States. Reinforce the communication and the valorisation of SPAW sites and species (com plan).
Support for the deployment of the new CaMPAm			Involvement based on needs and resources	
Strengthen bilateral exchanges with States				
Setting up an online library on the SPAW-RAC website + Communication Strategy		Populating and updating the library		
Simplify and modernize the MPA tool		Redesign the tool	Soliciting the States for using MPA tool	

1.2.2	Domain	Strategic direction
	Quality of service	Improvement of the service provided
Strategic objective	Strengthen regional cooperation	
Result	More countries involved in SPAW bodies and regional projects coordinated by the Secretariat and SPAW-RAC to reflect the plurality of regional knowledge and expertise	

Operational objectives	Development of the small grants program by targeting and enhancing projects that involve regional collaboration
	Involvement of experts from various Caribbean countries in professional networks, working groups
	Technical cooperation with fishing organizations and other regional cooperation organizations

Performance indicator(s)	Indicator target
Number of cross-border or interregional projects supported / year	50% of projects in collaboration with several countries

Action plan					
2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
Encourage cross-border or interregional projects in the call for projects	Encourage cross-border or interregional projects in the call for proposals (CFP) Seek other funding to maintain the CFP				
Development of collaborative tools (Teamwork, etc.) and training plan					
Participate in WECAF meetings	Participate in WECAF meetings Develop contacts with fisheries	Participate in WECAF meetings Develop contacts with fisheries Become a source of proposals			



1.2.3	Domain	Strategic direction
	Quality of service	Improvement of the service provided
Strategic objective	Supporting the conservation of SPAW species and sites	
Result	<p>Better knowledge of SPAW species. Synergy and coherence between the projects of networking of marine protected areas in the region. Better involvement in marine habitat protection and restoration initiatives</p>	

Operational objectives	Improved knowledge and monitoring of SPAW species
	Support the drafting, updating and implementation of regional action plans for SPAW species and marine habitats in the Caribbean.
	Coordination of the GCRMN-Caribbean network and search for synergy with other regional coral reef initiatives
	Support the networks of actors created within the framework of SPAW, and in particular the marine mammal RAN project, WIDECASST and CaMPAM.

Performance indicator(s)	Indicator target
Number of projects to improve knowledge or conservation of species populations supported per biennium	5/year

Action plan					
2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
Search for funding and set up a knowledge project.	Implementation of the knowledge acquisition project			Valuation of data	
Assessing the value of a RAN Carrying out/animating the review of the MMAP	<p>Assist the Contracting Parties in the potential implementation of a RAN Communicate on the revision of the PMM and the tools developed by SPAW. Support the countries in the implementation of NAP MM</p>				
Re-launching the GCRMN-Caribbean dynamic	Effective implementation of the work plan (2024-2025) with network members, in partnership with regional actors	<p>Promotion of the results achieved, evaluation of the implementation of the work plan (2024-2025) Development of a new project</p>			

2.1.1	Domain	Strategic direction
	Visibility Notoriety	Governance
Strategic objective	Strengthen the collaboration of the SPAW-RAC with the other bodies of the Cartagena Convention: Secretariats of the SPAW Protocol and the Convention, Regional Activity Centres (RACs) of the Convention, and Regional Networks (RANs) affiliated with the SPAW Protocol	
Result	To strengthen the transversality between the different bodies and programs of the Cartagena Convention.	

Operational objectives	Strengthen links with other RACs
	Participate in the Secretariat steering committee
	Set up a work plan with the various bodies for each biennial event

Performance indicator(s)	Indicator target
No. of meetings with other RACs and RANs per biennium	2/year

Action plan					
2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
Initiate a cross-cutting RAC topic or project + participate in at least 2 RAC meetings	Develop collaboration with at least 1 other RACs and or Secretariat on a project	Collaborate with at least 1 other RACs and/or the Secretariat on a project			
To have regular exchanges with the SPAW Officer and to participate in the meetings proposed by the Secretariat and the RACs					

2.2.1	Domain	Strategic direction
	Visibility Notoriety	Strengthen communication
Strategic objective	Strengthen the visibility of the Protocol Increase the visibility of the SPAW-RAC, so that it is easily identifiable and accessible to the target audience(s)	
Result	Important presence in socio-professional networks but also with decision-makers and the general public	

Operational objectives	Development of a communication plan
	Develop institutional partnerships with governmental and intergovernmental organizations (regional, international), NGOs
	Increase contributions and publications in different networks (GCRMN, marine mammals, turtles, CaMPAM, ...) and organizations

Performance indicator(s)	Indicator target
Number of publications in professional networks	20 / biennial

Action plan					
2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
Development of the communication strategy	Implementation of the communication strategy	Evaluation and update of the communication strategy	Implementation of the communication strategy		Final evaluation of the communication strategy Development of a new communication strategy
WECAF, IWC		Current function (need)			
Maintain our presence in the networks Integrate new networks					

## **5. Resources and funding**

32. The 3 positions financed by the French government are dedicated to the core business of the SPAW-RAC: regional cooperation, project coordination and technical working groups on biodiversity.
33. The other agents are scientific trainers assigned to technical missions: species, spaces, marine protected areas, derogations. Their positions are financed by various sources of funding that are not permanent.
34. Considering that the plan and the workload are determined during the STAC and COP, the resources available should be organized according to what is possible to achieve. In the event of an "additional" mission, funding should be secured

## **6. Conclusion**

35. The strategic plan (2023-2028) is submitted for advice and validation to the SPAW Protocol Contracting Parties at STAC 10 and COP 9.
36. This strategic plan constitutes a roadmap that should allow the SPAW-RAC to reach its objectives and develop its activity in a virtuous improvement process. A mid-term evaluation will allow to see if the objectives are achieved and/or if one or several action plans need to be modified. The strategic plan is scheduled to be reviewed in 2028.