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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

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CONSERVATION OF SAWFISH
(Pristidae) IN THE WIDER CARIBBEAN REGION
A REPORT OF THE SPA W SPECIES WORKING GROUP**

This meeting is being convened virtually. Delegates are kindly requested to access all meeting documents electronically for download as necessary.

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Context

For this biennial, the SPAW STAC Working group on Species has been assigned three tasks by the STAC via the document “2021-2022 Tasks and Chairs of the SPAW STAC ad hoc Working Groups”.

The present document was prepared by the species working group in response to Task 2, Subtask Sawfish: “Strengthen work on the conservation and management of species listed in the Annexes of the Protocol, taking into account the recommendations in: paragraph 4 of UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.25, recommendations of the species working group for preventing sawfish extinction”.

ACRONYMS

IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
MPA	Marine Protected Areas
RAC	Regional Activity Center of the SPAW protocol
RPOA	Regional Plan of Action
SPAW	Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife protocol
SSG	Shark Specialist Group
STAC	Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee of the SPAW protocol
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
WCR	Wider Caribbean Region
WECAFC	Western Central Atlantic Fisheries Commission

Recommendations for the Conservation of Sawfish in the Wider Caribbean

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Overview

1. Article 10 of the 1990 Protocol to the Cartagena Convention concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW Protocol) specifies that Parties “carry out recovery, management, planning and other measures to effect the survival of [endangered or threatened] species” and regulate or prohibit activities having “adverse effects on such species or their habitats”. Article 11 declares that each Party “shall ensure total protection and recovery to the species of fauna listed in Annex II”.
2. Both Caribbean-occurring species of sawfish – smalltooth sawfish (*Pristis pectinata*) and largetooth sawfish (*Pristis pristis*) – are classified on the IUCN Red List as Critically Endangered and have been listed on Annex II of the SPAW Protocol since 2017 and 2019, respectively. The 2018 update to the IUCN Shark Specialist Group (SSG) Global Sawfish Strategy highlighted the Wider Caribbean as a key region for preventing sawfish extinction. The SSG considers sawfish to be still present in five SPAW Parties: Bahamas, Colombia, Cuba, Honduras, and Panama. These countries are recognized as priorities for sawfish research and/or improved policy. Colombia, Cuba and Panama were also identified by Yan et al. (2021) for priority sawfish research and policy action.
3. The survival of sawfish is jeopardized primarily by fishing. Destruction and degradation of their coastal habitats also poses a threat.
4. The Annex to the Terms of Reference of the SPAW STAC *Ad Hoc* Working Groups (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.12) includes the following additional task for the Species Working Group: “Develop priorities and strategies for regional collaboration on and implementation of management measures to improve protection of species listed under the Annexes of the Protocol.

Recommendations

5. Building upon the *Recommendations for Preventing Sawfish Extinction* (4.i-vi) adopted at the Ninth Meeting of the SPAW Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.25) and based on expert analyses, we propose the following actions, to prevent extinction and promote recovery of Caribbean sawfishes (See Table 1 for summary):
6. ***4.i. National regulations to explicitly and specifically prohibit sawfish fishing, killing, retention, sale, and trade, particularly in Panama, Honduras, and Colombia;***

Leads: SPAW Focal Points, SPAW Secretariat, and SPAW Regional Activity Center (RAC).

Focus: Panama, Honduras, and Colombia are thought to still be range states for sawfish, but do not yet have sawfish-specific legal protections.

Approach: SPAW RAC reaches out to the SPAW Focal Points of the three Parties and reiterates, in writing, the importance of Article 10 (identify endangered and threatened species and ensure their survival) and Article 11 (provide total protection for Annex II listed species, including two species of sawfish). Through dialogue, SPAW RAC and the SPAW Focal Points for each priority Party agree on plans and timetables for expeditiously establishing domestic regulations to protect sawfishes. The SPAW RAC encourages assistance from the United States based on the nation's sawfish conservation success.

Priority: High

7. ***4.ii. Bahamas national regulations to explicitly and specifically prohibit sawfish fishing, killing, retention, and domestic sale;***

Leads: SPAW Focal Point, SPAW Secretariat, and SPAW RAC

Focus: Current Bahamas laws are unclear as to whether sawfish fishing, killing, retention, and domestic trade are prohibited outside of the import/export context.

Approach: SPAW RAC reaches out to the SPAW Focal Point from the Bahamas and outlines, in writing, obligations under Articles 10 and 11 of the SPAW Protocol and the importance of the Bahamas to the recovery of the smalltooth sawfish in the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR). Through dialogue, SPAW RAC and the SPAW Focal Point agree on a plan and timetable to enact the missing protections. The SPAW RAC encourages assistance from the United States based on the nation's sawfish conservation success.

Priority: High

8. ***4.iii. Education and enforcement programs, particularly in the above five priority countries, to implement protections and promote safe sawfish release;***

Leads: SPAW Focal Points, observers, and experts

Focus: The Bahamas, Cuba, Colombia, Panama, and Honduras

Approach: SPAW Focal Points from the priority countries and observers collaborate on identifying education and enforcement needs in each priority country, as well as potential implementation partners. Based on the discussions, the SPAW Focal Points and observers, together with identified partners develop strategies and materials for education and enforcement purposes.

Priority: Medium

9. ***4.iv. Fishery management measures, particularly in priority countries, aimed at minimizing sawfish encounters as well as resulting mortality;***

Leads: SPAW Focal Points, observers, and experts

Focus: The Bahamas, Cuba, Colombia, Panama, and Honduras

Approach: The SPAW Focal Points from the priority countries and observers review the WIDECAST summary report and strategy proposed under Task 4, 8.ii on sea turtle bycatch in nearshore fisheries. Based on the review, the SPAW Focal Points and observers develop complementary strategies to implement sawfish bycatch mitigation measures in priority countries.

Priority: High

10. ***4.v. Research and protections for critical sawfish habitats, particularly mangroves, throughout the region;***

Leads: SPAW observers and experts, together with academic partners

Focus: WCR

Approach: SPAW observers and academic partners review the designated SPAW Protected Areas to determine their suitability as sawfish habitat and identify gaps in coverage. Based on the results, the Leads will make recommendations for new protected areas and improved management at designated sites.

Priority: Medium

11. ***4.vi. A Regional Plan of Action (RPOA) for Sawfish Recovery to raise the species' profile and facilitate alignment, cooperation, information sharing, and capacity building among SPAW Parties.***

Leads: SPAW Focal Points, observers, and experts, in concert with academic partners and sawfish experts

Focus: WCR

Approach: The Leads contract an expert consultant to prepare a draft RPOA and organize various consultations for its development.

Priority: Low

12. **Table 1** (H – high; M – medium; L – low)

Task	Leads	Focus	Approach	Priority
<i>4.i. Strict sawfish protections in priority countries</i>	Focal Points, RAC	Panama, Honduras, Colombia	Dialogue with priority countries	H
<i>4.ii. Strengthen protections in the Bahamas</i>	Focal Points, RAC	Bahamas	Dialogue with the Bahamas	H
<i>3.iii. Education and enforcement programs, particularly in priority countries</i>	Focal Points, observers	Bahamas, Cuba, Colombia, Panama, Honduras	Dialogue and collaboration between the Focal Points from priority countries and observers	M
<i>4. iv. Fishery management measures, particularly in priority countries</i>	Focal Points, observers	Bahamas, Cuba, Colombia, Panama, Honduras	Review of Summary Report on sea turtle bycatch in nearshore fisheries and development of complementary measures for sawfish	H
<i>4.v. Research and protections for critical sawfish habitats</i>	Observers, academic partners	WCR	Review of Protected Areas management plans and published/unpublished literature	M
<i>5.vi. A Regional Plan of Action (RPOA) for Sawfish Recovery</i>	Focal Points, observers, academic partners, sawfish experts	WCR	Review of published/unpublished literature and stakeholder input.	L

References

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- Helen F. Yan, Peter M. Kyne, Rima W. Jabado, Ruth H. Leeney, Lindsay N.K. Davidson, Danielle H. Derrick, Brittany Finucci, Robert P. Freckleton, Sonja V. Fordham, Nicholas K. Dulvy, “Overfishing and habitat loss drive range contraction of iconic marine fishes to near extinction” (2021). *Science Advances* (2021) 7:eabb6026. DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.abb6026