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(SPA/W) in the Wider Caribbean Region

Panama City, Panama  
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## **Analysis of the Functioning of the Cartagena Convention Working Groups and Recommendations for Improvement**

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# **Analysis of the Functioning of the Cartagena Convention Working Groups and Recommendations for Improvement**

**Olga Koubrak, Consultant**

**December 2024**

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## **Abbreviations**

**AGEM** – Ad hoc Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean

**CEP** – Caribbean Environment Programme

**COP** – Conference of Parties

**CORMON** – Correspondence Group on Monitoring

**COR ESA** – Correspondence Group on Economic and Social Analysis

**CP** – Contracting Party

**FP** – Focal Point

**HELCOM** – Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

**ICES** – International Council for the Exploration of the Sea

**IUU** – Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing

**JWGBIRD** – Joint OSPAR/HELCOM/ICES Expert Group on Seabirds

**LBS** – Land-based Sources of Marine Pollution Protocol

**MAP** – Mediterranean Action Plan

**MED POL** – Programme for the Assessment and Control of Marine Pollution in the Mediterranean

**MMAP** – Marine Mammal Action Plan

**OEWG** – Open-ended Working Group

**OSPAR** – Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic

**RAC** – Regional Activity Centre

**REMPEC** – Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea

**RNPSAP** – Regional Nutrients Pollution Reduction Strategy and Action Plan

**SOCAR** – State of the Convention Area Report

**SPAW** – Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife Protocol

**STAC** – Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee

**TOR** – Terms of Reference

**UNEP** – United Nations Environment Programme

**WECAFC** – Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission

**WG** – Working Group

## Executive Summary

The working groups under the Cartagena Convention have been instrumental in providing specialized expertise and enabling in-depth deliberations that are impractical at the plenary level. Over time, the use of these groups has evolved in scope and complexity from foundational tasks like deciding on procedural guidelines for different activities to developing action plans and recommendations for their implementation. The changes were particularly noticeable in the Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA) Protocol working groups and reflected in a jump in the number of delivered documents. Until recently, the Land Based Sources of Marine Pollution (LBS) Protocol working group primarily focused on completing the State of Convention Areas Report (SOCAR) on marine pollution. It remains to be seen how the group will adapt to its new expanded mandate.

The updated mandates stem from the recent changes to the functions of the SPA and LBS working groups. The SPA working groups were reconstituted following a recommendation from the 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of the SPA Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) in 2018. The Secretariat through the SPA Regional Activity Centre (RAC) and four Contracting Parties intersessionally developed the groups' Terms of Reference (TORs) that were adopted at STAC 9. The Open-ended Working Group (OEWG) on Monitoring and Assessment in support of the LBS Protocol was established by the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Cartagena Convention in 2019, continuing the work of the Interim Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment. The working group members are currently reviewing and updating the group's TORs.

A number of similarities and significant differences can be observed between the institutional structures of the working groups supporting the LBS and SPA Protocols. Key similarities include the overall purpose of informing the STACs and sometimes the COPs on technical questions, and consensus-based decision-making. Key differences lie in the groups' structures, leadership and membership. The LBS has one working group with thematic sub-groups. It is chaired by one of the Contracting Parties, and its membership is open to the Contracting Parties of the Cartagena Convention. LBS working group members participate in the work in their official capacity. There are four working groups under the SPA Protocol, all of which are chaired by the SPA RAC. Membership in the group is open to the Contracting Parties of the SPA Protocol and Observers. Members participate in the work in their individual capacity.

Interviewed working group members generally agreed that working groups made tangible contributions to the Cartagena Convention such as completing the SOCAR and shaping SPA Annexes. But while the LBS working group was seen as effective overall, the perceived effectiveness of the SPA working groups varied. Limited resources, high turnover, uneven engagement, and misalignment of skills to tasks were identified as common barriers to productivity. Interviewees also noted with concern low participation from small island states and Spanish-speaking countries.

The review of three comparative examples demonstrated that there are diverse models for engaging specialized expertise. Each model tailored its structure and membership to its objectives and needs. Although in all three instances Contracting Parties nominated most of the experts, a limited number of external experts were invited to participate as well. Experts participated in their official or individual capacity, depending on the group.

The following actions are recommended to improve the functioning of the Cartagena Convention working groups. They are aimed at streamlining institutional structures, expanding access to expertise, and enhancing engagement and collaboration and are intended to be implemented by the Secretariat, Contracting Parties, and the RACs:

- Merge the four SPAW working groups into one working group with thematic sub-groups;
- Create a mechanism to bring together experts from the LBS and SPAW working groups;
- Formulate the requests to the working groups in a manner that promotes an integrated approach;
- Explore options to establish a joint working group with WECAFC and/or other intergovernmental organizations in the region;
- Create a database of experts who are willing to contribute on an ad hoc basis;
- List specific expertise/skills needed to complete tasks when soliciting new working group members;
- Organize a listening session with the Contracting Parties to discuss barriers and incentives to working group participation, and identify solutions to increase involvement;
- Engage with Contracting Parties on a bilateral, ministerial level to emphasize the importance and benefits of working group participation, and facilitate sufficient support for involvement;
- Engage in discussions with academic programs in the relevant fields to explore synergies;
- Provide professional incentives for experts to participate, such as opportunities to publish work in peer-reviewed journals;
- Develop training materials for new working group members to bring them up to speed;
- Distribute the working groups' meeting reports in the official languages promptly after each meeting and continue to provide interpretation services;
- Express commitment at STACs and COPs to participate in the working groups;
- Hold a side event for working group members at a STAC/COP meeting to give them an opportunity to network;
- Explore options for more in-person meetings of the working groups;
- Announce working group meetings and deadlines far enough in advance.

## **1. Methodology**

The objective of this project is to analyse existing governance structure and functioning of Working Groups under the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols and propose guidelines for their operations in accordance with the Rules of Procedure for the Cartagena Convention and recommendations on how they could be improved to support the work under the Convention and its Protocols.

To accomplish this objective, a three-part methodology was adopted. The first part consisted of a document review. The second part involved interviews with some working group participants. And the third part identified comparisons in other Regional Seas Programmes. STAC and COP reports and decisions for the LBS and SPAW Protocols, as well as the Cartagena Convention were reviewed for references to working groups. The review covered a period from 2000 to 2023, but was limited to the documents available online and discoverable on the UNEP-CEP website. The text of the Convention and its Protocols, in addition to the Terms of Reference for the working groups, were also analysed.

Fourteen working group participants, including representatives from the Secretariat and RACs, were contacted with a questionnaire about their experiences with the working groups. Participants were selected based on their length of experience and a record of active engagement. English speakers were asked for an online interview; ten individuals agreed. Spanish speakers were asked to complete the translated questionnaire in writing, but none of the three individuals contacted responded.

Three Regional Seas Programmes were identified as potential comparisons. The Mediterranean and the North- East Atlantic programmes were selected because of their innovative approaches to regional environmental governance. The Mediterranean also has a legal structure similar to the Caribbean. The Pacific region was looked at because, like the Caribbean, it includes many small island states. However, no interesting working group examples were found in that region.

Three sets of recommendations to improve the work of the working groups were developed based on the collected information.

## **2. History of the Working Groups**

Throughout history, working groups have made valuable contributions to the work of the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols. Working groups have been predominately used intersessionally to complete work that requires specialized expertise and/or dedicated sustained support in response to STAC recommendations or COP Decisions. These are flexible mechanisms that enable more in-depth assessments, research and deliberations than would be feasible at the plenary level.

The history of the Cartagena Convention working groups can be divided into three periods marked by increases in the scope of tasks assigned to the working group, in particular under the SPAW Protocol.

### ***Period from 2000 to 2008***

The first period, starting from the Cartagena COP6/IGM9 2000 and up until the Cartagena COP10/IGM13 in 2008, saw a limited use of the working groups. It should be noted that the documents from this period are difficult to find online, potentially underestimating the activities of the working groups.

#### **LBS Working Group**

The first working group addressing assessment and management of the land-based sources of pollution was established at Cartagena COP6/IGM9 in 2000, before the LBS Protocol came into force.<sup>1</sup> This working group, composed of government-designated experts, was to function as the interim STAC until the Protocol came into force. It was also invited to coordinate through the Secretariat with the existing programs to avoid duplication of efforts. The working group was to report to the Cartagena COP/IGM on regular basis.

#### **SPAW Working Group**

The first working group in support of the SPAW Protocol was established at SPAW STAC1 in 2001 to continue developing the criteria for listing species under the annexes of the SPAW Protocol.<sup>2</sup> This was after the SPAW COP1 gave SPAW STAC the mandate to establish ad hoc working groups “to deal with those themes that, owing to their complexity or level of specialisation, thereby require.”<sup>3</sup> The working group was open to nominees from the Contracting Parties, countries undergoing the ratification process, as well as scientific and NGO Observers. It was to report to the SPAW STAC on regular basis.

Available reports do not have information on the work done by these working groups. During this time, the Cartagena COP/IGM also relied on working groups for a number of intersessional periods to draft the Rules of Procedure for the Caribbean Environment Programme and develop guidelines for the operations of the RACs and RANs.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Period from 2010 to 2017***

Based on the available documents, the second period can be delineated from Cartagena COP11/IGM14 in 2010 until Cartagena COP14/IGM17 in 2017. During this period, three thematic working groups – Protected Areas, Species, and Exemptions – supported the work of the SPAW Protocol. The assigned tasks were limited to developing criteria for listing species and protected areas, assessing listing proposals, and formulating guidelines for assessing and reporting exemptions. Nevertheless, the work of

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Meeting Cartagena COP6, Annex IV, Decisions of the Meeting, UNEP(DEC)/CAR IG.17/5.

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Meeting SPAW STAC1, Annex II, Recommendations of the Meeting, UNEP(DEC)/CAR WG.23/6.

<sup>3</sup> Decisions of the Meeting SPAW COP1, Decision I.7, UNEP(DEC)/CAR IG.20/7.

<sup>4</sup> Report of the Meeting, Cartagena COP7, UNEP(DEC)/CAR IG.22/8; Report of the Meeting, Cartagena COP9, UNEP(DEPI)/CAR IG.26/4.



the Species working groups was in particularly contentious during this time, as experts repeatedly failed to reach consensus on the adequacy of the listing proposals for certain species of sharks and rays. On the LBS side, the Protocol came into force in 2010, and the previously established working group was asked to continue its work on monitoring and assessment of the water quality in the Convention area by contributing to the development of the SOCAR report. The tasks focused on refining approaches to sensitive data sharing, monitoring methods, and water classification. See Table 1 at the end of this document for a more detailed description of the tasks and outputs from 2010 to 2017.

### ***Period from 2019 to Present***

The third period, beginning with Cartagena COP14/IGM15 in 2019 and continuing today, is approximately marked by the development of the new TORs for the SPAW working groups, reconstitution of the Interim WG on Monitoring and Assessment as the OEWG, and establishment of a joint LBS-SPAW WG on Sargassum. Following the TORs update, the output from the Species WG significantly increased and expanded in scope from assessing listing proposals to identifying gaps in protections and recommending management measures. There was also an increase in the scope of work done by the Protected Areas WG to include discussions on the potential implementation of two reports completed by consultants. The Exemptions WG focused on facilitating exemption reporting by the Contracting Parties. The Marine Mammal WG is mentioned in the reports; however whether it has been established is unclear. Under the LBS, the SOCAR report was substantially completed, and the OEWG is currently adjusting its procedures to operate effectively under the new format. See Table 2 at the end of this document for a more detailed description of the tasks and outputs from 2019 to present.

## **3. Institutional Structure of the Working Groups**

### ***Legal Framework***

Article 16(2)(e) of the Cartagena Convention gives authority to the Cartagena Convention COP to establish working groups as needed to consider matters related to the Convention, its protocols and annexes. The LBS and SPAW Protocols are both silent on this specific matter. However, both LBS and SPAW Protocols give their respective COPs residual authority “to conduct such other business as appropriate.”<sup>5</sup> There is a slight difference in the residual mandates given to the STACs. The SPAW STAC is responsible for providing advice to the Contracting Parties on “any other matters relating to the implementation of the Protocol, including those matters referred to it by the meeting of the Parties,”<sup>6</sup> while the LBS STAC is instructed to “carry out other function related to the implementation of this Protocol which is assigned to it by the Contracting Parties.”<sup>7</sup>

### ***Terms of Reference***

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<sup>5</sup> LBS Protocol, Article 15(2)(g); SPAW Protocol, Article 23(2)(i).

<sup>6</sup> SPAW Protocol, Article 20(3)(g).

<sup>7</sup> LBS Protocol, Article 14(3)(j).

SPAW Protocol<sup>8</sup>

The need to develop new TORs for the SPAW working groups was identified at SPAW STAC8 in 2018. The Contracting Parties asked the Secretariat carry out this task through SPAW RAC and with the participation of Colombia, France, the Netherlands, and the US.<sup>9</sup> The subsequent SPAW COP10 in 2019 endorsed the STAC recommendations pertaining to the TORs and specified that the recommendations should be submitted to the STAC, rather than the COP for approval.<sup>10</sup> The TORs were finalized in the following intersessional period.<sup>11</sup>

Currently there are four working groups established by the SPAW STAC dedicated to Protected Areas, Species, Exemptions, and Sargassum. They are to continue for as long as the STAC deems necessary. The STAC also has authority to establish additional working groups, as needed.

## Scope of work

The scope of the work of each working group is divided into mandatory tasks and specific tasks. Both types are assigned by the STAC and may be revised as necessary. Working groups are intended to “address specific issues or questions identified by the STAC to facilitate continued discussions on topics of interest to the STAC.”<sup>12</sup> The Contracting Parties, with the support from the SPAW RAC and the Secretariat, are to review and update the tasks of the working groups within 30 days following each SPAW COP.

As an example, for the 2021-2022 biennium, the assigned tasks were as follows:<sup>13</sup>

- Protected Areas WG
  - o Mandatory tasks: Review proposals listing proposals from the CPs and make recommendations on their inclusion; review as needed the procedure for listing proposals.
  - o Specific tasks: Review Aruba’s proposal to include Parke Marino Aruba to the SPAW list of Protected Areas; review the recommendations in the Assessment of the Impact and Effectiveness of CaMPAM and the Evaluation of Connectivity Between the SPAW-Listed Protected Areas to Guide the Development of a Functional Ecological Network of Protected Areas in the Wider Caribbean and present implementation recommendations; and review the site listing procedure with a view to simplify and streamline the process.
- Species WG

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<sup>8</sup> Terms of Reference for the SPAW STAC *Ad Hoc* Working Groups, UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.12 Rev.1.

<sup>9</sup> Report of the Meeting, SPAW STAC8, UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG. 40/7, Annex III, Recommendations II-IV.

<sup>10</sup> Report of the Meeting, SPAW COP10, UNEP(DEPI)/CAR IG.40/4, Annex II, para. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Report of the Meeting, SPAW STAC9, UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/9, para. 85.

<sup>12</sup> Terms of Reference for the SPAW STAC *Ad Hoc* Working Groups, at para. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Included in the Terms of Reference for the SPAW STAC *Ad Hoc* Working Groups.

- Mandatory tasks: Review proposals from the CPs to add new species to the SPAW Annexes or change the status of the currently listed species.
- Specific tasks: Strengthen the conservation and management of species listed on SPAW Annexes, taking into account, as appropriate, the recommendations on sawfish, Nassau grouper, sea turtles, and sharks and rays submitted to SPAW STAC9; revise and update the Marine Mammals Action Plan considering new information available since 2008 and including the Scientific and Technical Analysis of the Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Mammals (MMAP) in the Wider Caribbean also submitted to SPAW STAC9.
- Exemptions WG
  - Mandatory tasks: Review the exemptions reports submitted by CPs.
  - Specific tasks: Make recommendations on the ways to facilitate reporting of exemptions.
- Sargassum WG
  - Mandatory tasks: N/A.
  - Specific tasks: Not requested.

#### Membership

The membership in the SPAW working groups is open to the experts nominated by the Contracting Parties and Observers. Contracting Parties may nominate up to two experts, while Observers may nominate one expert each as long as the total number of observer experts in the group does not exceed the total number of Contracting Parties. Additional experts may be invited to contribute or advise on a task, but their participation is limited to that particular task. The Secretariat and SPAW RAC may participate in the work of the working groups in their official capacity.

Experts are nominated or invited to participate based on the following factors: 1) scientific and/or technical competence; 2) availability and responsiveness; and 3) coverage, as much as possible, of the geographical and thematic scope of the tasks. Except for the Secretariat and SPAW RAC, all experts are expected to participate in their individual capacities, and not represent the official views or positions of the Contracting Parties or Observers that nominate them.

#### Leadership and decision-making

The SPAW STAC designates Chairs of each working group for a term of one biennium. An expert nominated by a Contracting Party or a representative of the SPAW RAC or the Secretariat could hold a position of a Chair. So far, SPAW RAC has been chairing all working groups.

Under the TORs, the SPAW RAC is to consult with each working group on the priorities for the SPAW Workplan and Budget, as well as possible new tasks for the next biennium.

Consensus is the preferred method of decision-making in the working groups. If consensus cannot be reached, the Chair has to provide an overview of the different opinions expressed by the experts in the materials presented to the STAC.

#### Working methods and budget

English is the working language of the working groups, although TORs allow for the interpretation during meetings and translation of draft documents if resources are available. Work is to be conducted virtually using an online collaboration platform. The TORs indicate that there are not funds in the structural budget to support the work of the working groups.

#### LBS Protocol<sup>14</sup>

The OEWG on Monitoring and Assessment to support the work of the LBS Protocol was established at the Cartagena COP15/IGM18 in 2019. The Contracting Parties to the Cartagena Convention were invited to nominate experts. Once convened, the group was asked to develop its own TORs.<sup>15</sup> The TORs are currently being revised with OEWG members providing feedback on a draft document.

The OEWG includes three Thematic Sub-groups. The Nutrient and Wastewater Sub-Group focuses on standards and criteria, including for Class I and II waters. The Information Management Sub-Group is dedicated to managing information from reports and papers on monitoring and assessment for future capacity building. The Emerging Issues Sub-Group is to address the future planning of emerging issues such as freshwater management, microplastics and sargassum. The OEWG members are also discussing mechanisms for designating additional sub-groups on as needed basis.

The OEWG is to continue its work unless instructed otherwise by a decision of a Cartagena Convention COP.

#### Scope of work

According to the Draft TORs, the OEWG will provide technical input and guidance for the completion and disseminations of SOCAR and other technical reports, as requested by the STAC, and for the development and implementation of the strategies, action plans, investment plans, and other documents requested by STAC, including the Regional Nutrient Pollution Reduction Strategy, Action Plan and Investment Plan, as well as the Caribbean Environment Programme Regional Strategy.

The working group will also provide technical input or recommendations on the adequacy of current measures and methodologies; plan and programs; and common criteria, standards and/or guidelines within the LBS Protocol, on national and regional capacity building opportunities, regional laboratory

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<sup>14</sup> Draft document shared by the Secretariat on October 14, 2024.

<sup>15</sup> Decisions of the Meeting, Cartagena COP15/IGM18, UNEP(DEPI)/CAR IG. 42/6, Decision III.

capacity for water quality parameter measurements, and, as appropriate, other issues relating to the prevention, reduction and control of pollution in the Wider Caribbean Region in accordance with the obligations of the LBS Protocol.

Finally, the working group will provide input to the agenda for the upcoming LBS STAC and COP meetings.

### Membership

Membership in the OEWG is open to the representatives of the governments of the Cartagena Convention Contracting Parties. RAC-CIMAB and RAC-IMA participate as part of the Secretariat. Representatives of Regional Activity Networks (RANs) are also invited to participate in the work of the OEWG.

The Draft TORs do not provide for observer membership, although there are suggestions that observers, especially from academia, should be allowed to participate. It is further suggested that the number of observers should be limited, and they should be nominated by a Contracting Party or the Secretariat. The Draft TORs allow the working group to request external experts to provide input or advice on specific issues. For comparison, the old TORs for the Interim WG on Monitoring and Assessment were silent on observer participation.<sup>16</sup>

### Leadership and decision-making

The Draft TORs indicate that the work of the OEWG is led by a Chair and a Vice-Chair selected by consensus of the OEWG members. While both positions have to be filled by representatives of the Contracting Parties, the Chair has to be a Contracting Party to the LBS Protocol. Leaders of the Thematic Sub-groups are also selected by consensus from the OEWG members and may include Observers.

Consensus is the preferred method of decision-making within the OEWG. If consensus cannot be reached, then the recommendation has to be presented to the STAC showing opinions for and against the proposal. STAC recommendations are made by a quorum consisting of half of the Contracting Party representatives, plus one.

The OEWG has to confirm the outputs from the Thematic Sub-Groups, while the STAC reviews and evaluates all OEWG recommendations before they are forwarded to the LBS COP for consideration.

### Working methods and budget

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<sup>16</sup> Report of the Interim Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, LBS COP1, UNEP (DEPI)/CAR WG.33/INF.5/Rev 1, Annex I.

The OEWG is to complete its work virtually using teleconferences and email for discussion. The working language is English, although the TORs indicate that the Secretariat should make an effort to translate key documents into French and Spanish.

The TORs are silent with respect to the available budget.

### ***Comparison***

Examining the text of the Cartagena Convention, its Protocols, and the TORs for the LBS and SPAW working groups reveals several similarities and differences. Looking at the similarities first, both sets of working group have a similar purpose which to assist their respective STACs with technical questions and discussions and provide recommendations for considerations of the COPs as appropriate. The working groups under both Protocols prefer to make their recommendations based on consensus. When consensus cannot be reached, the expectation is that a balanced report outlining the different opinions will be presented to the STACs for further discussion before being forwarded to the respective COPs. Also, all working groups conduct their work virtually with English as the working language. Both TORs allow for translation or interpretation into other working languages if resources are available.

An analysis of the TORs reveals no noticeable differences in the scope of work assigned to the LBS and SPAW working groups. In both instances, working groups provide technical input and recommendations for review and consideration by the STAC. However, historically, the work of the LBS working group has focused on supporting and guiding the consultant who produced the SOCAR report, and has since provided input into technical documents related to nutrients and emerging issues such as microplastics. On the SPAW side, the working groups are asked to make binary decisions to approve or reject proposals or reports from the Contracting Parties, which makes consensus building more difficult.

Other differences are also observed. One such difference is the way the working groups under LBS and SPAW were originally created. The text of the Cartagena Convention indicates that the Cartagena COP has authority to establish working groups to consider matters related to its Protocols. The LBS approach aligns well with these provisions, as the OEWG was established by a Cartagena COP/IGM decision. The approach taken by SPAW to establish its working groups presumably relies on the SPAW COP's residual authority to conduct other business which was delegated to the SPAW STAC.

There is also an apparent difference in the structure and leadership of the working groups. There is only one working group supporting the LBS Protocol and four supporting the SPAW programme. The LBS OEWG officially has three thematic sub-groups on standards and criteria, information management, and emerging issues. The original LBS working group that guided the SOCAR development also had a sub-group on data led by the vice-chair. In the SPAW working groups members informally divide into sub-groups, if needed, based on the assigned tasks. The Sargassum WG is different from the other working groups because while established under SPAW, it integrates the OEWG sub-group on sargassum in its activities. Although both sets of TORs allow a Contracting Party to assume one of the Chair positions, in

practice this has not been the case in the SPAW working groups. SPAW RAC has been chairing all of the SPAW working groups, while different Contracting Parties have chaired the LBS working group over the years.

Guidelines around membership eligibility vary significantly between the LBS OEWG and SPAW working groups. Membership in the OEWG is open to the Contracting Parties to the Cartagena Convention; and there is no limit on the number of representatives nominated by each Contracting Party. Membership in the SPAW working groups is open to the Contracting Parties to the SPAW Protocol, with each Party allowed to nominate up to two experts. Observers to the SPAW Protocol may also nominate one expert to each working group, as long as the total number of observer experts in the group does not exceed the total number of Contracting Parties to the SPAW Protocol. Provisions in the TORs with regards to Observer participation in the LBS OEWG are currently being discussed by the group's membership, including an option to engage external experts on specific issues. The roles of working group members also differ between the LBS and SPAW working groups. Members in the SPAW working groups participate in their individual capacity as independent experts, whereas members in the OEWG represent their governments.

	<b>LBS</b>	<b>SPAW</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	Inform and assist STAC and COP	Inform and assist STAC and COP
<b>Structure</b>	1 WG with 3 sub-groups on standards and criteria, info management, and emerging issues	4 WGs – Protected Areas, Species, Exemptions, and Sargassum
<b>Chair</b>	LBS CP	SPAW RAC
<b>Membership</b>	Cartagena CPs	SPAW CPs and SPAW Observers
<b>Nominators</b>	CPs No limits on number of reps.	CPs and observers 2 reps per CP, 1 rep per Observer Total number of observers can't exceed the number of SPAW CPs
<b>Members working capacity</b>	Official	Individual
<b>External experts</b>	Could be invited by WG	Not specified
<b>Decision-making</b>	Consensus	Consensus
<b>Pros</b>	Broad regional representation through membership allows comprehensive data input into reports  Structure makes it easy to integrate and coordinate work internally and externally  CPs committed to work through chairmanship and members working in official capacities	Members could provide independent scientific/technical advice  Reliable access to external expertise through Observers' nominees

<b>Cons</b>	Non-Parties to LBS have a say in recommendations that have policy implications for LBS CPs	Structure makes it difficult to integrate and coordinate work within and outside SPAW

#### 4. Interview Summaries

Overall the interviewees felt that the working groups made tangible contributions to the work of the LBS and SPAW Protocols. The LBS Working Group was instrumental in the completion of the SOCAR, while the SPAW Species Working Group played a significant role in the development of the original annexes. The working groups were said to generate valuable ideas, although Contracting Parties often did not have the resources to implement them.

##### *Terms of Reference*

The LBS members found it difficult to comment on the adequacy of the TORs while they were under review. They emphasized the need for TORs that set clear objectives, organizational structure, and administration of the working group to ensure its effectiveness. Additionally, an organizational structure that reflected the workload, such as through the use of co-chairs, was also seen as desirable.

On the SPAW side, members generally felt that the TORs were adequate, although some questioned the clarity of the overall objective. They noted that the stated objective was a list of tasks rather than an overarching goal. Some members also noticed that sometimes there were misalignments between the TORs, COP decisions, and working group tasks.

##### *Engagement*

The OEWG convenes approximately every 2 months, whereas the meeting frequency in the SPAW working groups varies depending on the group. Some SPAW working groups meet once per month, while others convene once or twice per biennium.

In terms of participation, some members are more active than others in both the LBS and SPAW working groups. In SPAW, the level of engagement varies by the group and the task at hand. In general, experts nominated by the NGO observers tend to be more active compared to experts nominated by the Contracting Parties. In LBS, it was noted that the OEWG members were more active in sub-group activities than the plenary sessions. Furthermore, some OEWG members contributed to the work of the group through the RACs.

Nevertheless, in both the LBS and SPAW working groups more experts were nominated than actively participate in the activities. Possible explanations offered by the interviewees include lack of incentive to participate, disengagement due to a perceived ineffectiveness of the work, and misalignment between



experts' expertise and the skills needed to complete the task. The absence of working group members from smaller countries was also noted with concern. Lack of available resources to support participation and misalignment between available skills and working group tasks were identified as some of the reasons for their limited engagement.

There were differing views on the sufficiency of communication from the working group chairs and/or the Secretariat. Some interviewees felt that communications lacked details about the skills needed to complete the tasks, there was ambiguity around expectations, and at times, questions went unanswered. Concerns were also raised about the adequacy of the meeting lead times. Some found them to be insufficient, especially when other experts needed to be consulted in preparation. At the same time, the organizers indicated that they were frequently communicating with the Focal Points and working group members about the work but often received no response.

High turnover in working group members was observed in both the LBS and SPAW programmes. While this was seen as an opportunity to bring new perspectives and skills to the groups, it also affected workflow while new members became familiar and comfortable in their roles.

Some interviewees mentioned the importance of formal and informal leadership within the working groups as factors influencing engagement. Group dynamics needed to be effectively managed to prevent discussions from being dominated by a few participants. It also helped to have working group members who could assist others in accessing data and resources.

### ***Nature and Roles of the Participants***

The RACs have different roles in the LBS and SPAW working groups. In OEWG, the two RACs provide updates on activities and research happening in the region, as well as contribute ideas to the discussions. They also offer capacity building opportunities to countries that otherwise would be unable to contribute and complete some of the assigned tasks. The work completed by the RACs is reviewed by the OEWG before being forwarded to the Focal Points. On the SPAW side, the RAC chairs all of the working groups due to a lack of interest from the Contracting Parties. Some interviewees expressed a view that the SPAW RAC was too deferential to the Contracting Parties, which interfered with its effectiveness. On the other hand, the RAC participates in the working groups in its official capacity, and its efforts are bound by the mandate.

In both sets of working groups, the Secretariat's role was seen as essential in supporting the work of the RACs by providing administrative support, guidance, and subject-matter expertise. An effective Secretariat was recognized as a key catalyst to working groups' success. There was also an acknowledgment that the Secretariat was doing its best given its limited resources.

Interviewees noted that the tasks within the working groups required a range of skills and expertise that were not always readily available. This raised concerns within the SPAW programme that decisions were made without adequate scientific and technical input. Observer participation was viewed as a means of broadening access to expertise, especially if observers were from academic and technical organizations. At the same time, Contracting Parties had concerns about the extent of observer influence on decision-

making, reflected in the limits on the number of observer experts allowed to participate in the working groups.

All SPAW working group members observed that despite the TORs requiring experts to participate in their personal capacity rather than as representatives of their governments or observer organizations, political considerations were influencing the discussions. Opinions were divided on whether this improved or hindered the work. Some felt that political considerations introduced pragmatism and led to recommendations that could be realistically adopted by the governments. Others saw them as distorting the scientific and technical basis of the recommendations leading to inadequately informed decisions.

### ***Nature of Work and Work Format***

In general, interviewees felt that the LBS working group was effective in implementing its mandate, while the effectiveness of the SPAW working groups varied by group. Some SPAW working group members expressed frustration over the uneven contributions to the assigned tasks by the group members, while also recognizing that the SPAW RAC and some Contracting Parties had limited capacity to contribute. In addition, some expressed concern about the high workload assigned to the SPAW working groups without adequate support and prioritization. It was pointed out that some SPAW tasks were inefficiently organized leading to unnecessary complications.

Some interviewees observed that the work in the SPAW working groups lacked proactive activities such as modeling and forecasting, especially for issues related to climate change and sargassum. They noted that the focus remained on the longstanding unresolved problems, while new challenges, such IUU fishing and invasive species, were left unaddressed. Others thought that the SPAW working group workplan was too narrowly defined based on the STAC recommendations leading to a lack of continuity in activities and logic. As examples, they referred to marine mammal, sea turtles, and oceanic whitetip shark not being included in the 2023-2024 workplan because they were not explicitly mentioned by the STAC. Working groups' mandates and limited resources were seen as the main obstacles to pursuing these broader areas of work.

In terms of technology used for SPAW working group activities, some found the interactive platform challenging to navigate. They had trouble with saving and sharing functions, as well as difficulty orienting themselves in the document finalization process. Additionally, some pointed out the need to consider whether a technology was accessible in different countries when selecting online tools.

Both the LBS and SPAW working groups use English as the working language, and members observed that Spanish-speakers were less active than English-speakers. This was seen as problematic for a number of reasons, including creating barriers to participation, limiting access to expertise, and introducing bias into discussions. However, in the 2023-2024 biennium, the Cartagena Convention Secretariat with the SPAW RAC, provided interpretation services for the first series of the working group meetings. Due to a low number of Spanish-speaking participants, the services were not in demand, and the need to offer guaranteed interpretation was reassessed. Subsequently, SPAW RAC reached out to working group

experts in preparation for the meetings to confirm whether such services were needed but did not receive any feedback. Participation from Spanish-speaking countries in these meetings continued to be minimal, and the decision was made to pause the provision of interpretation services.

### ***Recommendations***

The interviewees offered many recommendations to improve the work of the working groups. These ideas are incorporated into the final recommendations made at the end of this report. In general, the suggestions proposed by the interviewees address structural issues, like the length of workplan cycles and task design; identify potential incentives to participation, for example by offering publishing options; and seek capacity building opportunities, such as an onboarding package for new members.

## **5. Comparisons**

To identify potential comparisons, three other Regional Seas Programmes were reviewed: the Mediterranean, the North-East Atlantic, and the Pacific. Three examples stand out from this review for their interesting use of specialized groups to advance the work of the organizations. The first one is the Correspondence Groups used in the Barcelona Convention system to implement the ecosystem approach; the second example is the Ad hoc Group of Experts, also from the Barcelona Convention, used to strengthen the MPA network; and the final example is from the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR Commission) where working groups are used for cooperation among regional organizations.

### ***Examples 1: The Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Groups***

The Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention use correspondence group and working groups in the governance mechanism to implement the ecosystem approach. Two sets of correspondence groups – the Correspondence Groups on Monitoring (CORMON) and the Correspondence Group on Economic and Social Analysis (COR ESA) – support the work of the Ecosystem Approach Coordination Group composed of the Convention’s Focal Points.

#### **Composition and Function**<sup>17</sup>

Three thematic CORMONs are dedicated to Pollution and Marine Litter, Coast and Hydrography, and Biodiversity and Fisheries. They are composed of national experts possessing the necessary expertise designated by the Contracting Parties. The work is coordinated by the Secretariat and supported by the Programme for the Assessment and Control of Marine Pollution in the Mediterranean (MED POL) and

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<sup>17</sup> Ecosystem Approach Governance ToRs, (2022) UNEP/MED WG.521/4.

two RACs.<sup>18</sup> Although the TORs are silent on observer participation, observers were present at at least some of the meetings.<sup>19</sup>

The general mandates of the CORMONs focus on negotiating and preparing guidelines, protocols, criteria, and methodologies related to monitoring activities. They also have the mandate to review national and regional implementation of monitoring activities, as well as develop capacity building materials.

Meeting modality (virtual or in-person) and frequency depend on the agenda, the volume of work, and documents to be considered. It is unclear whether interpretation is provided at the CORMONs meetings; it appears that meeting reports and working documents are translated into some, but not all, official languages.<sup>20</sup> Work products undergo a complex system of review and approval before they are presented to the decision-making bodies, such as the COP.

The CORMONs may establish informal Online Working Groups in order to provide specific scientific inputs. These working groups are composed of a restricted number of experts nominated by the Contracting Parties, who may be supported by additional experts mobilized by the Secretariat or the RACs. The tasks and deliverables are defined by the CORMONs, and these working groups report to the CORMONs. The TORs indicate that “every effort should be made to maintain geographical balance of the [working groups] and mobilise high level expertise.”<sup>21</sup>

The COR ESA is composed of national experts designated by the Contracting Parties, as well as international experts invited by the Secretariat. Representatives from the RACs and MED POL are also invited to participate. COR ESA’s work is coordinated by the Secretariat and supported by one of the RACs.<sup>22</sup> The group’s mandate focuses on preparing and guiding socio-economic assessments, which includes developing the necessary tools; contributing to the Mediterranean Quality Status Report; and supporting Contracting Parties in their national-level analyses. The group’s work products also undergo a complex system of review and approval before they are presented to the decision-making bodies. No additional details about the work of COR ESA are available online.

### ***Example 2: The Ad Hoc Group of Experts***<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> MED POL supports the Pollution and Marine Litter CORMON; the Priority Actions Programme Regional Activity Centre (PAP/RAC) supports the Coast and Hydrography; and the Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC) supports the Biodiversity and Fisheries.

<sup>19</sup> See for example, Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON) Biodiversity and Fisheries, (2024) UNEP/MED WG.592/CRP.1 Rev.1.

<sup>20</sup> Meeting reports are available in English and French. Arabic, English, French, and Spanish are the official languages of the Barcelona Convention.

<sup>21</sup> Ecosystem Approach Governance ToRs, at para. 16.

<sup>22</sup> The Plan Bleu Regional Activity Centre (PB/RAC).

<sup>23</sup> Report by the Chair of the Ad hoc Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (AGEM) on the group’s works during the biennial period 2022-2023, (2023) UNEP/MED WG.548/11; Draft Terms of reference for the Ad hoc advisory group of experts for MPAs in the Mediterranean, (2017) UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.431/8.

The Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention decided to establish a multidisciplinary Ad hoc Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (AGEM) to provide scientific and technical guidance to the Secretariat and the Parties in order to improve the MPA networks in terms of coverage, representativeness, connectivity, and management effectiveness.

#### Composition and Leadership

The AGEM is composed of 16 independent experts with expertise in MPA management, MPA planning, marine biology/ecology, law and regulation, socio-economics, fisheries, nature-based tourism, and financing. The Contracting Parties select AGEM members from a geographically-representative pool of qualified candidates prepared by the supporting RAC. The Contracting Parties may also propose candidates. Group members are appointed for a period of 2 years.

In addition to the experts mentioned above, one representative from the following organizations is invited to participate in the AGEM:

- the Scientific Committee of the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area (ACCOBAMS);
- the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM);
- the Marine working group of the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA-Marine) of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN);
- the Scientific Committee of the Network of Marine Protected Areas Managers in the Mediterranean (MedPAN);
- the marine conservation team of the Mediterranean Programme of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF Mediterranean).

Members of the AGEM contribute in their personal capacity and not as representatives of their countries or organizations.

At each of its first meetings, members elect a chair and a vice-chair. The RAC provides administrative support.

#### Tasks and Work Format

To achieve its broad objectives, the AGEM is tasked with the following:

- Regularly review the state of Mediterranean MPAs with a view of evaluating progress towards set goals;
- Assess the representativeness of the Mediterranean MPA network, identify gaps, and offer recommendations for improvement;
- Assess the financial needs and gaps and propose innovative funding approaches;
- Identify potential MPA sites;

- Assess MPA governance and management effectiveness and identify barriers impeding effective functioning;
- Evaluate current MPA monitoring systems and propose improvements;
- Provide scientific information to national authorities when requested;
- Develop policy tools to improve the sustainability of the MPA governance systems in the region; and
- Develop harmonized technical tools such as guidelines, standards, and indicators.

The AGEM meets in person or virtually, depending on the tasks and available financial resources. Working languages are English and French.<sup>24</sup> Although the draft TORs are silent, meeting reports show that AGEM uses working groups for in-depth discussions.

The chair and vice-chair present the group's recommendations to the Focal Points of the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean at their bi-annual meetings.

***Example 3: The Joint OSPAR/HELCOM/ICES Expert Group on Seabirds (JWGBIRD)***<sup>25</sup>

The JWGBIRD brings together representatives from the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR), the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM), and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) to work on sea bird issues.

Composition

Experts interested in participating in the JWGBIRD seek nomination from their national delegations to OSPAR, HELCOM or ICES. The co-chairs of the working group are also authorized to invite experts who have skills necessary for a specific task. The three co-chairs represent each of the OSPAR, HELCOM and ICES; the co-chairs are selected based on the criteria established by each of the organizations.

Tasks and Work Format

The work plan for 2021-2023 has the following tasks:

- Database and data products – identifying compatible data formats; resolving issues with the database or specific data sets; developing data products for assessments, advice and public use; and others.
- Monitoring – developing coordinated protocols; updating programs and guidelines; and providing advice on the development and implementation of new monitoring strategies and guidelines.
- Assessments – coordinating information flow between the three organizations; developing indicators; carrying out assessments; and others.

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<sup>24</sup> Arabic, English, French, and Spanish are the official languages of the Barcelona Convention.

<sup>25</sup> OSPAR-HELCOM-ICES Joint Working Group on Marine Birds (JWGBIRD), Work programme 2021–2023, <https://www.ices.dk/community/groups/Pages/jwgbird.aspx>.

- Ad hoc expert consultation – providing expert opinion when requested by the parent organizations.
- Provision of expert input to ICES advisory process.

The JWGBIRD meets annually in person or virtually. Thematic sub-groups may be established for completing substantive tasks that could take several meeting cycles to complete. The group's work is presented in annual reports and summarized in an overview at the end of the work plan. It also reports to the subsidiary bodies of the parent organizations. According to the TORs, the group aims to publish some products in academic journals and present them at conference, where possible and appropriate.

### ***Key Findings***

The comparative review showed how different approaches to membership allowed the Contracting Parties to create the desired combinations of expertise, perspectives, and control in the working groups. In all three examples, the Contracting Parties maintained control over the selection of the majority of the working group participants. A small number of invited experts were allowed to participate, but who had the authority to invite these experts varied from group to group. For example, CORMONs consisted of national experts, and they could establish small informal working groups for specific tasks and invite external experts to contribute. COR SEA also consisted of national experts, and the Secretariat had authority to invite external experts to participate. In AGEM, the Contracting Parties selected working group members from a pool of qualified candidate assembled by the RAC, and certain observers were allowed to nominate an expert. In JWGBIRD, members were nominated by their national delegations and the working group co-chairs had authority to invite external experts as needed.

The mechanisms for review and inclusion of the working groups' outputs into the work of the overall organization also differed depending on the group's mandate. For CORMONs and COB ESA, the TORs outlined steps that had to be followed before a product was presented to the Barcelona COP. The steps varied depending on the nature of the product and its potential impact on policy and budget. By comparison, the AGEM's chair presented the group's work to the meeting of the Focal Points of the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean, while members of JWGBIRD published an annual report and presented their work to the subsidiary bodies of their parent organizations.

In terms of work modalities, all three examples used a combination of virtual and in-person meetings, depending on the agenda, volume of work, and budget. In the Barcelona Convention, which has four official languages, there was assistance with interpretation/translation into some, but not all official languages.

## **6. Recommendations**

Working groups are a flexible mechanism that can be used to carry out a number of functions. A review of the comparisons shows that they can take many forms with different structures, objectives, and membership criteria. In the context of the Cartagena Convention, the structure and function of the

working groups need to reflect the binding nature of the treaty, as well as address the challenges of the region. As a result, the Contracting Parties should have a level of control over who gets nominated to the working groups in order for them to recognize the validity of the groups' outputs and act on it. But the level of control should be balanced with the need to access external expertise given some Parties' limited capacity to participate. The membership criteria in the LBS and SPAW working groups reflect different approaches to balancing control with access. In LBS, the SOCAR consultant and invited experts contributed external expertise needed to complete the report. In SPAW, experts nominated by Observers bring expertise that the Parties do not have. In both instances, the Contracting Parties nominate the majority of the experts and the respective STACs provide technical review and oversight of the groups' products and recommendations. Either approach is appropriate for a binding convention where Contracting Parties have varying capacities.

Based on the information contained in this report, three sets of recommendations are proposed.

### **1. *Streamlining institutional structures***

Simplifying working group structures could help with efficiency, as well as make it simpler to collaborate within the Cartagena Convention and with other organizations. It could also help move the Convention towards implementing an ecosystem approach. To accomplish this, the Contracting Parties, Secretariat, and the RACs could consider the following actions:

- |           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |             |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| <b>A)</b> | Merge the four SPAW working groups into one working group with thematic sub-groups like the LBS OEWG. Thematic sub-groups could be formed based on assigned tasks, bringing together experts on species, protected areas, exemptions, and sargassum, as needed. Having one comprehensive SPAW working group would make it simpler to collaborate on joint activities with the LBS OEWG. This change would require negotiating new TORs.                                  | Short-term  |
| <b>B)</b> | Create a mechanism to bring together experts from the LBS and SPAW working groups. This could be one or several workshops on a joint topic assigned by the STACs/COPs. The output from the workshop(s) would be reviewed by each of the working groups and presented to their respective STACs. In addition to agreeing on administrative and procedural matters, it should be considered whether the TORs need to be aligned on membership and roles.                   | Short-term  |
| <b>C)</b> | Formulate the requests to the working groups in a manner that promotes an integrated approach, rather than assigning a series of discrete tasks. The requests should also include objectives, targets, and deliverables, and be accompanied by sufficient resources to complete the work. Contracting Parties could also consider making working group assignments for a period longer than one biennium. Longer cycles would allow for interim reviews and adjustments. | Medium-term |
| <b>D)</b> | Explore options to establish a joint working group with WECAFC and/or other intergovernmental organizations in the region to engage new experts and build capacity. The work with WECAFC could focus on Annex III species and their                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Long-term   |



ecosystems, such as parrotfishes and corals. Both SPAW and LBS experts would be able to contribute given the complexity of the issue and the need for holistic solutions.

## **2. Expanding access to expertise**

The working groups of the Cartagena Convention are meant to provide scientific and technical input into the decision-making processes. However, limited capacities and incentives to participate make it difficult to access the right expertise. In order to expand the pool of qualified experts and increase participation, the Contracting Parties, Secretariat, and the RACs could consider the following actions:

- |           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |             |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| <b>A)</b> | Organize a listening session with the Contracting Parties to discuss barriers and incentives to working group participation, and identify solutions to increase involvement. Observers could be engaged in due course to assist with the implementation of the proposed solutions.                                                                                                           | Short-term  |
| <b>B)</b> | Engage with Contracting Parties on a bilateral, ministerial level to emphasize the importance and benefits of working group participation, and facilitate sufficient support for involvement. Continued discussion could explore capacity building opportunities to enhance domestic expertise and integrating working group participation into government job descriptions.                 | Long-term   |
| <b>C)</b> | List specific expertise/skills needed (ex. MPA management, socio-economic analysis) to complete tasks when soliciting new working group members to make it easier for Contracting Parties and Observers to nominate the right people. For working groups that allow observer participation, consider giving preference to observer nominees who would fill skill gaps.                       | Medium-term |
| <b>D)</b> | Create a database of experts who are willing to answer specific questions or otherwise contribute to specific tasks. They do not need to be working group members and instead, could be consulted on an as needed basis. WECAFC is currently building a registry of experts to support its working groups. TORs would need to give the working groups authority to consult external experts. | Long-term   |
| <b>E)</b> | Engage in discussions with academic programs in the relevant fields, such as the University of West Indies, Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES), to explore synergies.                                                                                                                                                                                         | Long-term   |
| <b>F)</b> | Provide professional incentives for experts to participate in the working groups, such as opportunities to publish work in peer-reviewed journals or present it at conferences. The TORs would need to be amended to set parameters where such activities would be appropriate and outline the approval process.                                                                             | Long-term   |

## **3. Enhancing engagement and collaboration**

High turnover of participants, multilingual nature of the region, and virtual format of work make it difficult for working group members to build professional connections and collaborate. To address this, the Contracting Parties, Secretariat, and the RACs could consider the following actions:

- |           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |              |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>A)</b> | Develop training materials for new working group members to bring them up to speed. This package could include a copy of the Terms of Reference; an explanation of the relationship between the working group, Secretariat, RAC(s) and RANs, and STAC/COP; a brief history of the working group and a particular task; and contact information of experienced members who could answer questions. | Short-term   |
| <b>B)</b> | Distribute the working groups' meeting reports in the official languages promptly after each meeting to help mitigate gaps in understanding. Continue to provide interpretation in the working groups and seek resources to support this measure. Availability of interpretation/translation would make it easier to engage experts within and outside the Cartagena Convention.                  | Short-term   |
| <b>C)</b> | Express commitment at STACs and COPs to participate in the working groups. This would increase transparency and accountability among the Contracting Parties and promote discussions about the resources needed to build capacity and support participation.                                                                                                                                      | Short - term |
| <b>D)</b> | Hold a side event for working group members at a STAC/COP meeting to give them an opportunity to network. This would allow participants to gain insight into each other's work and enhance cross-working group collaborations.                                                                                                                                                                    | Long-term    |
| <b>E)</b> | Explore options for in-person meetings. This format would be particularly valuable at the start of a working cycle or a complex task. And it would also help with managing group dynamics.                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Long-term    |
| <b>F)</b> | Announce working group meetings and deadlines far enough in advance to accommodate very busy schedules.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Short-term   |

**Table 1: Working Groups Tasks, Leadership and Products 2010 - 2017**

Working Group	Task	Chair	Product
WG on the Guidelines and Criteria for Protected Area Listing under SPAW	At SPAW COP6 (2010) requested to continue work on the protected areas database and listing of additional areas	SPAW RAC	No activity noted but a lot of documents are missing  Based on WG review National Park Cayos de San Felipe added to SPAW PA list at SPAW COP9 (2017) - UNEP(DEPI)/CAR IG.37/5
WG in charge of the Review of the Criteria for the Listing of Species in Annexes to the SPAW Protocol	At SPAW COP6 (2010) requested to develop a short-list of species for listing in the SPAW Annexes based on input from CPs and other EMA listings  At SPAW COP8 (2014), WG re-established; requested to elaborate on listing guidelines  At SPAW COP9 (2017) extended to review new and outstanding proposals	Not specified – Secretariat and SPAW RAC asked to support  At SPAW COP9 SPAW RAC id as lead	Report of the WG on the Application of Criteria for Listing of Species under the Annexes to the SPAW Protocol ( <i>Includes Species Proposed for Listing in Annexes II and III</i> ) - UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.38/4 presented at SPAW STAC7 (2016)  A number of species were added to SPAW Annexes at SPAW COP9 – UNEP(DEPI)/CAR IG.37/5  Report of the WG on the Evaluation of Species for Listing under the Annexes to the SPAW Protocol ( <i>Includes Species Proposed for Listing in Annexes II and III</i> ) UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.40/3 presented at SPAW STAC8
Ad Hoc WG on Exemptions	At SPAW COP6 (2010) requested to draft criteria for assessment of exemptions under Article 11 SPAW  At SPAW COP8 (2014) work extended to develop reporting format  At SPAW COP9 (2017) work extended to consider Curacao case and assist Sec with collection and review of other reports – at IGM17 scope limited to reporting only on the format of the Curacao case	SPAW RAC	Report of the WG to Develop Criteria and Process to Assess Exemptions Under Article 11(2) of the SPAW Protocol ( <i>includes draft guidance document</i> )- UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.36/5 presented at SPAW STAC6 (2014)  At SPAW COP9 exemption format approved –UNEP(DEPI)/CAR IG.37/5
Interim WG on Monitoring and Assessment	At IGM14(2010) requested to continue to work on monitoring and assessment to improve effluent reporting and assessment of water quality in the Convention area – SOCAR framework  At LBS COP1/IGM15 (2012) work extended to work on SOCAR – recommended additional topics for discussion such as sharing of sensitive data  At LBS COP2/IGM16 (2014)work extended to advise Sec on SOCAR development – asked to refine ranges, parameters and methods for monitoring and assessment  At LBS COP3/IGM17 (2017) work extend until SOCAR finished – LBS STAC3 Recommendation II directs to review existing classifications of marine waters and methods	Jamaica  U.S. became Chair around LBS COP3 (2017)  Sec and LBS RACs support	Report of the Interim WG on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment  UNEP(DEPI)/CAR/INF.5/Rev 1 presented at LBS COP1  Detailed meeting documents for STAC2/COP2/IGM16 not available  Report of the WG on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (SOCAR)- UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.37/INF.6 Rev.1 presented at LBS STAC3 (2016)

**Table 2: Working Groups Tasks, Leadership and Products 2019 - Present**

Working Group	Task	Chair	Product
<p>Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG)</p> <p>Sub-groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Standards and criteria</li> <li>- Info management</li> <li>- Emerging issues</li> </ul>	<p>Established at Cartagena COP15/IGM18 (2019) to support the work of LBS Protocol and provide technical guidance to the Sec</p> <p>LBS STAC5(2021) requested:</p> <p>Est. sub-group to support Regional Nutrients Pollution Reduction Strategy implementation</p> <p>Provide oversight and input into tech info paper on nutrient discharge limits from domestic wastewater</p> <p>Est. sub-group to explore Integrated Water Resource Management and Sec's role in its national implementation</p> <p>Est. sub-group integrating different issues such as nutrient discharge, water management, sargassum (w/SPAW), and remote sensing. Consider incl. experts from academia and private sector</p> <p>Id priorities for lab capacity building and training in monitoring and assessment using reports like GEF IWeco</p> <p>Consider including additional monitoring parameters to those in SOCAR and propose monitoring methodology</p> <p>Sec w/OEWG and RACs prepare an info paper on possible amendments to the Protocol or Annexes based on recommendation in the Tech Paper on Freshwater and Nutrients</p> <p>LBS COP5(2021) requested:</p> <p>Provide tech support and oversight to the implementation of the RNPSAP at national and regional levels, subject to funding</p> <p>Est. sub-groups on standard and criteria, info management, and future planning. Invite CPs to nominate experts and actively participate</p> <p>Strengthen integration b/w LBS and SPAW</p> <p>LBS STAC6(2023) requested:</p>	<p>U.S.</p> <p>Trinidad and Tobago became Chair in 2022</p>	<p>Report on the Ad-Hoc Open-Ended Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment – submitted to LBS STAC5 –UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.41/INF.6</p> <p>Report of the Open-Ended Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (2021 – 2022) – submitted to LBS STAC6 – UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG. 44/INF.6</p>

	<p>Provide support to Sec and RACs on implementing project activities in 2023-2024 workplan. CPs nominate more experts</p> <p>Support Sec in implementing RNPSAP</p> <p>Provide tech oversight and input for the tech info papers</p> <p>Est. sub-groups to support the development of regional marine and coastal water quality criteria</p> <p>Est. sub-group under Emerging Issues to raise awareness of the impact of microplastics in the region</p> <p>Guide the development of the next SOCAR to be done w/ State of Marine Habitat Report (SPAW)</p> <p>Con't to work on the info paper on possible Protocol/Annexes amendments</p> <p>LBS COP6(2023) requested:</p> <p>Provide tech oversight to Sec on updating SOCAR and potentially developing a portion of the report w/ SPAW</p> <p>Provide tech assistance in prioritizing actions on previously unaddressed pollutants</p>		
Ad Hoc WG on Sargassum	<p>Established at SPAW STAC8 (2018)</p> <p>Requested to develop objectives and responsibilities, as well as coordination/collaboration with other bodies and initiatives</p> <p>SPAW COP10 (2019) recommended:</p> <p>LBS members are included</p> <p>Look into potential risks from heavy metals</p> <p>SPAW STAC10 (2023) requested:</p> <p>Survey CPs on the sargassum management needs and how influxes affect their implementation of obligations under Cartagena Convention and Protocols</p> <p>Update workplan priorities based on the survey</p>	SPAW RAC	<p>Report of the STAC WG established for Sargassum submitted to SPAW STAC9 – UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/7</p> <p>Sargassum White Paper 2021 – submitted to SPAW STAC9 –UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.35</p>

Ad Hoc WG on Protected Areas	<p>Re-endorsed intersessionally before SPAW STAC9 (2021) and requested:</p> <p>Review proposal to add Parke Marino Aruba to SPAW List</p> <p>Id synergies with ACP MEA III Project</p> <p>Review recommendations in CaMPAM effectiveness report and connectivity report and present options for implementation of recommendations</p> <p>Simplify the nomination procedure for site listing</p> <p>SPAW STAC10 (2023) requested:</p> <p>Assess Aruba's response regarding Parke Marino Aruba nomination</p> <p>Propose recommendations to simplify the PA nomination process</p> <p>Work with Ad Hoc WG on Species on Nassau Grouper conservation task</p>	SPAW RAC	<p>Report of the STAC WG on Marine Protected Areas –submitted to SPAW STAC9 –UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/5</p> <p>Review of the Dominican Republic's Proposal for Listing of the Cotubanama National Park Under the SPAW Protocol – submitted to SPAW STAC9 – UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG. 42/INF.22</p> <p>Report of the STAC Protected Area WG – presented at SPAW STAC10 – UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.43/INF.12</p> <p>Rationale and Information Paper on CaMPAM and Development of an Ecological Network of SPAW-listed Protected Areas – submitted to SPAW STAC10 –UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.43/INF.10</p> <p>Review of the Proposal for listing Parke Marino Aruba under the SPAW Protocol – submitted to SPAW STAC10 – UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.43/INF.13</p> <p>Review Of the Response Of Aruba Representing The Kingdom Of The Netherlands On Three Key Points In Their Nomination Of Parke Marino Aruba For Listing Under the SPAW Protocol – submitted to SPAW STAC10 – UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.43/INF.13 Add 1</p> <p>Review of France's Proposal for Listing Martinique's Marine Nature Park under the SPAW Protocol– submitted to SPAW STAC10 –UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.43/INF.14</p>
Ad Hoc WG on Exemptions	<p>Re-endorsed intersessionally before SPAW STAC9 (2021)</p> <p>Requested to consider ways to facilitate exemption reporting</p>	SPAW RAC	<p>Report of the STAC Exemptions WG – submitted to SPAW STAC9 – UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/6</p> <p>Exemptions Ad Hoc WG – Compliance to the SPAW Protocol – submitted to SPAW STAC9 –UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.21</p> <p>Report of the SPAW STAC Exemptions Working Group – submitted to SPAW STAC10 – UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.43/INF.33</p> <p>Recommendations for STAC10 to facilitate the reporting of exemptions– submitted to SPAW STAC10 – UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.43/INF.35</p>
Ad Hoc WG on Species	<p>Re-endorsed intersessionally before SPAW STAC9 (2021) – work products delivered based on the new TORs – requested:</p> <p>Revise and update the MMAP</p> <p>SPAW STAC10 (2023) requested:</p> <p>Assist Sec and RAC with implementation of Recommendations for preventing sawfish extinction submitted at SPAW STAC9</p>	SPAW RAC	<p>Report of the STAC WG on the Listing of Species under the Annexes to the SPAW Protocol – submitted to SPAW STAC9 –UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/4</p> <p>Proposal for potential inclusion of all parrotfishes (Perciformes: Scaridae) in Annexes of the Protocol on Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife in the Wider Caribbean Region of the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment in the Wider Caribbean Region (SPAW Protocol) – submitted to SPAW STAC9 – UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.15</p>

	<p>Work with Ad Hoc WG on Protected Areas on Nassau Grouper conservation task</p> <p>Develop recommendations for conservation and management of parrotfishes</p> <p>SPAW COP12 (2023) requested:</p> <p>Develop conservation and management recommendations for whale shark, giant manta ray and hammerhead sharks</p>		<p>Species-specific recommendations submitted to SPAW STAC9: Sharks and rays - UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.24 Sawfish - UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.25 Sea turtles - UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.39 Nassau grouper - UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.38</p> <p>Toolkit for implementing marine mammal watching guidelines in the WCR – submitted to SPAW STAC9 – UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG 42/INF.32</p> <p>Recommendations to support sustainable marine mammals watching in the wider Caribbean region – submitted to SPAW STAC9 – UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG 42/INF.31</p> <p>Implementation of the Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Mammals (MMA) in the Wider Caribbean: A Scientific and Technical Analysis – submitted to STAC9 - (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG 42/INF.29 Addendum 1</p> <p>Report of the SPAW STAC Species Working Group on the Listing of the Species under the Annexes to the SPAW Protocol – presented at SPAW STAC10 – UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.43/INF.16</p> <p>Recommendations for the Protection and Recovery of Caribbean Sea Turtles. A response to UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.39 – submitted to STAC10 - UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.43/INF.24</p> <p>Recommendations for the conservation of Sawfish (Pristidae) in the Wider Caribbean Region: A report of the SPAW species Working Group – submitted to STAC10 - UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.43/INF.25</p> <p>Recommendations for conserving the Nassau Grouper in the Wider Caribbean Region – submitted to STAC10 - UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.43/INF.26</p> <p>Update of the Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Mammals in the Wider Caribbean Region – submitted to STAC10 - UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.43/INF.31</p>
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