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UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.45/INF.13
7 April 2025

Original: ENGLISH

Eleventh 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

Panama City, Panama
30 June – 3 July 2025

**UPDATED PROCEDURE THROUGH WHICH CONTRACTING PARTIES CAN
PROPOSE NEW PROTECTED AREAS TO BE LISTED AS SPA W SITES**

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

ACRONYMS

COP	Conference of the Parties
RAC	Regional Activity Center
SPAW	Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife
SPAW RAC	Regional Activity Centre for the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife for the Wider Caribbean Region
STAC	Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
WCR	Wider Caribbean Region

PROTECTED AREA WORKING GROUP

Mandate

The SPAW STAC Working group on Protected Areas (See document *WG.46_INF.7_Report of the STAC Protected Area Working Group (2023-2024)*) had the following tasks assigned by the STAC:

▪ **Mandatory tasks**

- Review as needed the procedure through which Contracting Parties can propose new Protected Areas to be listed as SPAW sites (“Task 2” for the purposes of this report).

▪ **Specific tasks, as mandated by STAC10**

- The Protected Areas Working Group review the “Guidelines and Criteria for the Evaluation of Protected Areas to be Listed Under the SPAW Protocol” (2010 Guidelines), building on earlier discussions and preliminary recommendations, and prepare suggestions to simplify and streamline the process, including possible modifications to the 2010 Guidelines, for consideration at SPAW STAC11 and COP13 (“Task 3” for the purposes of this report).;

Main outcomes

- Updated “Guidelines and Criteria for the Evaluation of Protected Areas to be Listed Under the SPAW Protocol”

- Updated “Annotated format for presentation reports for protected areas to be listed under the SPAW Protocol”

Chair of the working group: SPAW RAC

I. GUIDELINES AND CRITERIA FOR THE EVALUATION OF PROTECTED AREAS TO BE LISTED UNDER THE SPAW PROTOCOL

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A. INTRODUCTION

1. The goal of the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA W Protocol) is to protect the “*value of rare or fragile ecosystems and native flora and fauna to the Wider Caribbean Region*” (preambular paragraph 6).
2. As implied in preambular paragraph 8 of the Protocol, the listing of protected areas listed under the Protocol enables “*regional co-operation to protect and, as appropriate, to restore and improve the state of ecosystems, as well as threatened and endangered species and their habitats in the Wider Caribbean Region*”.
3. Therefore, protected areas listed under the SPA W Protocol must contribute to meeting the goal of the Protocol. A submission for listing should therefore demonstrate compliance with the provisions of Articles 3, 4, 5, 6 and 13 of the SPA W Protocol.
4. According to Article 7 of the SPA W Protocol, the Parties shall establish a list of protected areas to create a regional network of protected areas and develop a cooperation programme. The purpose of this List is to identify those areas that are of particular importance to the Wider Caribbean region, that are to be accorded priority for scientific and technical research pursuant to Article 17, and that are to be accorded priority for mutual assistance pursuant to Article 18.
5. In nominating a site to be part of the SPA W List of Protected Areas, the Parties will ensure that the protected areas contribute to:
 - Achieving the purposes for which they were established.
 - Protecting and preserving areas, habitats and species with “*special biological, ecological, educational, scientific, historic, cultural, recreational, archaeological, aesthetic, or economic values*” (Article 4.2 d));
 - Protecting “*habitats and their associated ecosystems critical to the survival and recovery of endangered, threatened or endemic species of flora or fauna*” (Article 4.2 b)), in particular those species in Annexes I, II and III of the SPA W Protocol.
 - Protecting species and preventing species from becoming endangered or threatened, in accordance with SPA W Articles 4.2(b), 3.3, and 10.1.

B. PROTECTION, PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT CRITERIA

6. The protected area **must** be subject to a national legal, policy, and institutional framework that facilitates its effective long- term protection, and which is consistent with the SPA W Protocol, including Articles 3, 4, 5 and 6.

7. **Management framework**

- a) The protected area **must** have a current, approved management plan.
- b) The protected area **must** have a fully dedicated management institution with sufficient authority capability and financial resources to implement the management plan.
- c) Conservation and management objectives for the area **must** be consistent with Articles 4, 5 and 6 and clearly defined in nomination documentation and the management plan.
- d) The protected area **must** have legally defined geographical boundaries.
- e) The protected area management plan **should** refer to a larger planning framework of the Party.
- f) The protection measures articulated in the management plan should be based on available and management-oriented traditional, scientific, and technical knowledge and information.

8. **Stakeholders**

The relevant stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples and local communities, **should** be involved through inclusive and participatory processes in the planning and management of the protected area as appropriate. Where appropriate, such participatory processes **should** include institutional arrangements for the effective and inclusive participation and empowerment of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

9. **Implementation Mechanism**

- a) The management plan **should** be supported by standard operating procedures and other management guidelines
- b) The management plan **should** address public awareness, education and engagement programmes for users, decision-makers and the public.
- c) The management plan **must** refer to research and monitoring programs designed to increase understanding of the site and inform management measures.

10. **Evaluation**

The management plan **must** state timeframes and mechanisms to evaluate and report management effectiveness, the state of the ecosystems and the ecological performance of the site.

C. ECOLOGICAL, CULTURAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CRITERIA

11. Only protected areas established consistent with Article 4 will be considered for inclusion on the List. Article 4(1) states that protected areas shall be established “with a view to sustaining the natural resources of the Wider Caribbean region, and encouraging ecologically sound, and appropriate use, understanding, and enjoyment of these areas, in accordance with the objectives and characteristics of each of them.”
12. A Protected Area must contribute to the conservation, including management, of the species, subspecies or populations of flora and fauna present in it, either as permanent residents, or during some life cycle stages, with the objective of preserving them as functioning members of their ecological communities, and preventing them from becoming threatened or endangered, both locally and throughout their range.
13. It must also be adequate to the long-term conservation of the elements for which it seeks to be listed.

14. Ecological Criteria

a) Critical habitats and species :

The area contains populations, habitats or ecosystems that are critical to the survival and/or recovery of endangered, threatened or endemic species, or to species listed in Annex I, II or III of the Protocol.

The area conserves unique or rare species, habitats, or ecosystems. An area or ecosystem is rare if it is among the few of its kind in the country or Wider Caribbean Region or has been seriously depleted across its range. The area may contain habitats that occur in a limited area, or rare, endemic, threatened or endangered species that are geographically restricted in their distribution.

- b) Representativeness - The area includes physiographic features, populations of species, habitats and ecosystem types or ecological processes that are representative of the region.
- c) Disturbance: The area has been protected to a high degree or has not been subjected to human-induced change, and the natural environment is thus relatively free from biophysical disturbance caused by human influence, as well as those caused by pollutants, invasive species or natural disasters.
- d) Diversity: The area contains the variety or richness of species, communities, ecosystems, landscapes, seascapes and genetic diversity necessary for its long-term viability and integrity. This criterion is especially applicable where the area provides habitat for endangered, threatened, endemic and/or migratory species, and species listed in the Annexes to the Protocol.
- e) Connectivity -The area is adjacent to or ecologically connected to other protected areas, or is within an ecological or transboundary ecological or biological marine corridor, and thus contributes to maintaining the ecological integrity of the Wider Caribbean Region. This can apply for Protected Areas within one country or transboundary protected areas.

15. **Cultural and Socio-Economic Criteria**

- a) Cultural and traditional use - The protected area has a special value in a regional context for the conservation, maintenance or restoration of the productivity and biological integrity of natural resources that provide for sustainable traditional or cultural regional activities, such as those of indigenous communities.
- b) Socio-economic benefits - The protected area **has** special value in a regional context for the conservation, maintenance or restoration of the productivity and biological integrity of natural resources that provide for economic or social benefits of user groups such as subsistence fishermen and rural communities, or economic sectors such as tourism.

D. PROCEDURE FOR THE NOMINATIONS AND FOR LISTING

- 16. Each Party making a nomination **must** submit an application to the Secretariat within the first year of the biennium (first year after SPAW COP) in either English, Spanish or French.
- 17. Each Party making a nomination **must** complete the "Annotated Format for presentation reports for protected areas to be listed under the SPAW Protocol"
- 18. The nomination for inclusion of an area or areas in the SPAW Protected Areas List will be assessed by the STAC according to the Protocol Provisions and the criteria set out in Sections B, and C of this document. To this end, the STAC may request assistance of the SPAW RAC

II. ANNOTATED FORMAT FOR PROTECTED AREAS TO BE LISTED UNDER THE SPAW PROTOCOL

A. OBJECTIVE

B. CONTENT

C. SUBMISSION OF APPLICATION

D. APPLICATION

- I. AUTHORITY SUBMITTING APPLICATION
- II. PROTECTED AREA IDENTIFICATION
- III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
- IV. ECOLOGICAL, CULTURAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CRITERIA
- V. PROTECTION, PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT CRITERIA

A. OBJECTIVE

1. The objective of this Annotated Format is to guide and help SPAW Contracting Parties to facilitate the listing process as established in Article 7 of the SPAW Protocol, and to provide the necessary information for the adequate evaluation of the conformity of the proposed site with the Guidelines and Criteria for the Evaluation of Protected Areas to be Listed under the SPAW Protocol.

B. CONTENT

2. The Guidelines and Criteria for the Evaluation of Protected Areas to be Listed under the SPAW Protocol were adopted at the SPAW COP 5 in September 2008 and will be **updated at SPAW COP 13 in the last quarter of 2025.**
3. The application must include the following main information on: (I) Authority submitting application, (II) Protected Area Identification, (III) Executive Summary, (IV) Ecological, Cultural and Socio-Economic Criteria, (V) Protection, Planning and Management Criteria

C. SUBMISSION OF APPLICATION

4. Each Party making a nomination **must** submit an application to the Secretariat within the first year of the biennium (first year after SPAW COP) in either English, Spanish or French.
5. The full application **must** be sent in electronic format in A4 or letter-sized format.
6. The application **must** include the following:
 - Copies of legal instrument that formally designated the site “in force”
 - Copy of the latest (or most updated) management plan
7. The application could include the following, if available:
 - Existing inventories of flora and fauna species (with scientific names)
 - List of the main publications concerning the site, and any relevant information available
 - List of operational guidelines and public engagement strategies
 - Other strategic or operational plans (if any) that support the main management plan
8. With respect to the Guidelines and Criteria, all fields below are mandatory.
9. Use of annexes and existing documents: for all sections below, if existing documents already present the information that is requested, please attach them to your submission and please also provide a brief summary of the most relevant information in the core report.

D. APPLICATION

I. AUTHORITY SUBMITTING APPLICATION

a - Country:

b - Main authority submitting the application:

c - Contact person for the submitting authority:

Name(s), position(s) and email address(es) of the person(s)

d - Contact of focal point of the SPAW Protocol:

Name(s), position(s) and email address(es) of the person(s)

SIGNATURE (S) AND DATE

On behalf of the State(s) Party/Parties making the proposal.

II. PROTECTED AREA IDENTIFICATION

a - Country:

b - Name of the protected area:

c - Date of legal establishment:

d - Geographic location (include a map and a link to a database website providing the most accurate information about the boundaries of the protected area, if available):

e - Size (sq. km):

f - Management institution (including the website address if available):

III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (250 words maximum)

10. Present briefly the proposed area and its principal characteristics, and specify the purpose for which the site was designated.
11. Explain why the proposed area should be listed under the SPAW Protocol.

IV. ECOLOGICAL, CULTURAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC Criteria (Guidelines and Criteria Section C)

12. A protected area must contribute to the conservation, including management, of the species, subspecies or populations of flora and fauna present in it, either as permanent residents, or during some life cycle stages, with the objective of preserving them as functioning members of their ecological communities, and preventing them from becoming threatened or endangered, both locally and throughout their range.

a - General features of the site (100 words maximum)

- Terrestrial surface under protection, excluding wetlands (sq. km):
- Wetland surface (sq.km):
- Marine surface (sq.km):

Include a brief description of the main physical characteristics in the area (geology, topography, underwater formations, landscapes, seascapes, for example).

b - Ecological features (250 words maximum)

- **Habitats: describe briefly the dominant and particular habitats (marine and terrestrial):**

List here the habitats and ecosystems that are representative and/or of importance for the Wider Caribbean Region (i.e. mangroves, coral reefs, seagrass beds, etc).

If possible, detail for each habitat/ecosystem the area it covers or, if it is not known with accuracy, provide a rough estimate of the area.

- **Flora: describe briefly the main plant assemblages significant or particular in the area**

- **Fauna: describe briefly the main fauna populations and/or those of particular importance present (resident or migratory) in the area**

Provide in annex the list of fauna and flora species within the site that are in SPAW Annex I, II and III. Where possible, provide an estimate of the population sizes for each species within the lists above and specify the endemism of the species.

c - Cultural and traditional use (250 words maximum)

Describe traditional or cultural regional activities, such as those of local and Indigenous communities.

d – Socio-economic benefits (250 words maximum)

Describe economic or social benefits of user groups such as subsistence fishermen and rural communities, or economic sectors such as tourism

e – Disturbance (both within and around the protected area) (250 words maximum)

- Describe population, current human uses of the protected area, and development adjacent to or likely to impact the protected area.
- Describe of disturbance caused by human-induced change such as pollution, extraction of natural resources, development, recreation, fragmentation of the landscape.
- Describe of other disturbance such as invasive species, diseases, climate change impact or natural disasters.

Identify the section in the management plan that explains how the threats will be addressed.

f – Connectivity (100 words maximum)

Describe, if applicable, how the site is connected ecologically to other protected areas, or if it is within an ecological or transboundary ecological or biological marine corridor. If available, include a list of relevant research or evidence to confirm the connectivity of the site.

g - Information and knowledge available: attach a list of the main publications.

V. PROTECTION, PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT Criteria (Guidelines and Criteria Section B)

13. Management framework (Guidelines and Criteria Section B / paragraph 7) (500 words maximum)

The protected area **must** be subject to a national legal, policy, and institutional framework that facilitates its effective long- term protection, and which is consistent with the SPAW Protocol, including Articles 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Provide the relevant documents.

a - Institution with legal authority for managing the site:

b - List any other institution with legal authority for aspects of site management which require an agreed governance agreement:

c - Functional management body with sufficient authority, capability (human, physical, knowledge) and financial resources to effectively manage the site:

Describe human, physical and financial resources

d - Period covered by management plan:

e - Conservation, socio-economic and management objectives for the area (consistent with Articles 4, 5 and 6 of the SPAW Protocol):

Describe how the management framework is adequate to achieve these objectives:

f - Confirm that the management plan was developed based on available and management-oriented traditional, scientific, and technical knowledge and information.

14. Stakeholders (Guidelines and Criteria Section B / paragraph 8) (250 words maximum)

The relevant stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples and local communities, should be involved in the planning and management of the protected area through inclusive and participatory processes, where appropriate.

Describe how the nominated site involves stakeholders and local communities in designation and management, and specify coordination measures or mechanisms currently in place:

Provide in annex the list of stakeholders involved in the management planning process and in site management.

15. Implementation mechanism (Guidelines and Criteria Section B / paragraph 9) (250 words maximum)

With regard to the characteristics specific to the nominated site, the management plan should include measures and provisions to achieve the goals and objectives for which the protected area was created, and address specific threats for that particular area.

Summarize the mechanisms and programmes that are in place in regard to each of the following management tools in the nominated site (fill only the fields that are relevant for your site):

- a - Public awareness, education, and information dissemination programmes:
- b - Capacity building of staff and management:
- c - Research, data storage, and analysis:
- d - Surveillance and enforcement:
- e - Engagement programmes for users, decision-makers and the public
- f - Public use management:
- g - Maintenance (facilities and other infrastructure):
- h - Alternative and sustainable livelihoods:

Provide in annex the list standard operating procedures and other management guidelines.

16. Evaluation (Guidelines and Criteria Section B / paragraph 10) (150 words maximum)

The management plan **must** state timeframes and mechanisms to evaluate and report management effectiveness, the state of the ecosystems and the ecological performance of the site.

a - Summarize the timeframes and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the state of the ecosystems and the ecological performance of the site (including the impact of conservation measures on the status of species populations, habitats and ecological processes, within the protected area and its surroundings):

b - Summarize the methodologies and indicators that are used or to be used to evaluate management effectiveness