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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

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

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



Summary

SPAW COP 12 adopted the recommendations for the conservation of Sawfishes (Pristidae) in UNEP(DEPI) CAR WG.43/INF.25, paragraphs 6-11, and requested the Species Working Group to assist the Secretariat and SPAW-RAC with the implementation of the recommendations, as appropriate.

The Species Working Group acknowledge the request of the STAC. In order to respond to this request and obtain further information on sawfish conservation and on implementation of the SPAW COP 12 recommendations by SPAW Contracting Parties, the experts drawn up a survey.

8 responses were received for the survey, 6 from SPAW Contracting Parties and 2 from non-contracting parties (Jamaica, México). The number of Contracting Parties responding was not as expected by the experts and as the most important sawfish range states were not represented in the survey responses, the experts consider that the information received is not sufficient to elaborate a state of art.

Survey responses highlight the lack of scientific information available on sawfish distribution and biology and the lack of resources dedicated to sawfish conservation and management, followed by the need to build implementation capacity and support public awareness.

To facilitate engagement from a greater number of Contracting Parties, and to address the need for information on sawfish biology, conservation, and management identified in the survey, the Species Working Group recommends that: The SPAW Secretariat invite a sawfish expert to present on sawfish conservation stakes in the Wider Caribbean Region at the next STAC meeting.

ACRONYMS

IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
RAC	Regional Activity Center of the SPAW protocol
SPAW	Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife protocol
SSG	Shark Specialist Group
STAC	Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee of the SPAW protocol
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme

Recommendations for the Conservation of Sawfish in the Wider Caribbean

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Context

1. Article 10 of the 1990 Protocol to the Cartagena Convention concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW Protocol) specifies that Parties “carry out recovery, management, planning and other measures to effect the survival of [endangered or threatened] species” and regulate or prohibit activities having “adverse effects on such species or their habitats”. Article 11 declares that each Party “shall ensure total protection and recovery to the species of fauna listed in Annex II”.
2. Both Caribbean-occurring species of sawfish – smalltooth sawfish (*Pristis pectinata*) and largetooth sawfish (*Pristis pristis*) – are classified on the IUCN Red List as Critically Endangered and have been listed on Annex II of the SPAW Protocol since 2017 and 2019, respectively. The 2018 update to the IUCN Shark Specialist Group (SSG) Global Sawfish Strategy highlighted the Wider Caribbean as a key region for preventing sawfish extinction. The SSG considers sawfish to be still present in five SPAW Parties: Bahamas, Colombia, Cuba, Honduras, and Panama. These countries are recognized as priorities for sawfish research and/or improved policy. Colombia, Cuba and Panama were also identified by Yan et al. (2021) for priority sawfish research and policy action.
3. The survival of sawfish is jeopardized primarily by fishing. Destruction and degradation of their coastal habitats also constitute an important threat.
4. The 2024-2025 Tasks and Chairs of the SPAW STAC *ad hoc* Workings Groups includes the following specific task for the Species Working Group: “Assist the Secretariat and SPAW-RAC with implementation of the recommendations for the conservation of

Sawfishes (Pristidae) in UNEP (DEPI) CAR WG.43/INF.25, paragraphs 6-11, as appropriate”.

Recommendations

5. The members of the species working group acknowledge the decision of the STAC 10 to assist the Secretariat and the SPAW-RAC in implementing the recommendations for the conservation of sawfish (Pristidae) in the UNEP (DEPI) CAR WG.43/INF.25 document, paragraphs 6-11, as appropriate. In order to respond to this request and obtain further information on sawfish conservation and on implementation of the SPAW COP 12 recommendations by SPAW Contracting Parties, the experts drawn up a survey.
6. The survey focus on existing regulatory and enforcement programs, as well as on the needs and main obstacles to sawfish (Pristidae) conservation in SPAW Contracting Parties (Annex II of the SPAW protocol) (Appendix 1).
7. 8 responses were received: 6 from Contracting Parties: Colombia, Netherland (Saba, Sint Maarten), Saint Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, United States of America and 2 from non-contracting parties (Jamaica, México).

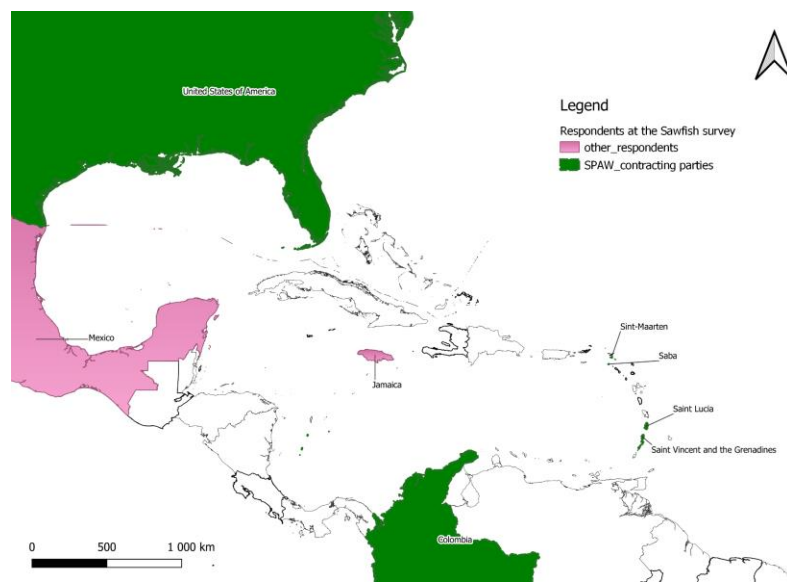


Figure 1- Map of the respondents to the SPAW working group sawfish survey, 2024

8. *Section A : general information*

Four (4) respondents have a sawfish population. 2 have smalltooth sawfish (*Pristis pectinata*) population, 1 largetooth sawfish (*Pristis pristis*) and 1 doesn't know which species are present.

3 Respondents don't know if they have a sawfish population and 1 has no sawfish.

9. *Section B Regulation*

5 respondents have a sawfish national regulation in place. Only one out of 4 respondents who has sawfishes has no regulation; the 3 other respondents have a regulation in place. 2 out of 3 respondents that don't know if they have a sawfish population have regulations in place.

Where national regulations exist, they explicitly prohibit the fishing, killing, possession, sale and trade of sawfish. One respondent indicated that their regulation does not explicitly prohibit the killing of sawfish.

For the respondents who do not have sawfish regulations in place, the major barriers to development or enactment are :

- The respondent does not know if this species is caught/ no knowledge of the species being caught in the waters;
- Sawfish species are not landed or utilized in the fisheries;
- Lack of capacity to monitor species and enforce regulations

10. *Section C Management measures*

2 respondents have a sawfish recovery or management plan in place.

Both management plans contain measures on bycatch reduction. And one (currently being updated) has also measures on fishery, such as closed areas, recovery action plan for sawfish populations, research and protections for critical sawfish habitats (eg mangroves), education and enforcement programs to implement protections and promote safe sawfish release.

For 4 respondents, the main barriers to development or enactment of a management plan for sawfish are the lack of data/information about the species.

But for 2 of them, it's also a lack of human resources, for 1 of them, inadequate resources and another, a lack of financial resources.

Several respondents commented on the difficulty of recording the presence of sawfish species in their waters.

11. *Section D : Survey respondents' needs related to managing Sawfish.*

The priority needs to improve the management and protection of sawfish for 5 respondents are the financial resources and the data and/or scientific research; for 3 of them, it is human

resources and building enforcement capacity (eg education on sawfish management best practices); 1 indicated the need for technical assistance and/or training; and 1 is really concerned about the potential impact of bycatch.

The countries/territories are expecting assistance from SPAW species experts and SPAW-RAC and Secretariat to advance sawfish conservation efforts first, by providing information/resources on sawfish biology, public outreach/educational materials and information/resources on best practices for sawfish management (7 respondents). They are also looking for support to organize workshops/training (5 respondents).

One Contracting Party indicated that, as with any rare species, raising awareness about its existence and possible residence is crucial for building conservation partnerships at various scales from local communities to international programs. SPAW could help develop outreach approaches for countries within the historical range of the species in hopes of building conservation partnerships among SPAW signatories. Audiences could include the general public or those user groups most likely to interact with sawfish such as fishers, boaters, divers, etc.

12. Conclusion and recommendations

The species experts discussed the survey responses and noted that the number of Contracting Parties responding was not as expected and some sawfish range states were not represented in the survey responses.

Of the responses received, common themes were the lack of basic scientific information available on sawfish occurrence and species biology, as well as the lack of resources on sawfish conservation and management, followed by the need to build implementation capacity and support public awareness.

The species experts concluded that enhanced engagement from SPAW Contracting Parties, especially from key sawfish range states, is essential to the successful implementation of the recommendations on sawfish adopted at COP12.

In order to facilitate engagement from a greater number of Contracting Parties, and to address the need for information on sawfish biology, conservation, and management identified in the survey, the Species Working Group recommends that:

The Cartagena Convention Secretariat invite a sawfish expert to present on sawfish populations, biology, and the conservation and management needs of sawfish in the Wider Caribbean Region at the next STAC meeting.

Appendix 1 SPAW Sawfish conservation survey, 2024

Sawfish Conservation Survey

This questionnaire is intended for focal points in countries that are Party to have signed, the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW Protocol). It will enable the SPAW the Species Working Group to obtain information on existing regulatory and enforcement programs, as well as on the needs and main obstacles to sawfish (Pristidae) conservation in SPAW Contracting Parties (Annex II of the SPAW protocol).

The results of the survey will be an invaluable source of information enabling SPAW experts to support countries in implementing the recommendations for the conservation of Sawfishes (Pristidae) in UNEP (DEPI) CAR WG.43/INF.25, paragraphs 6-11 adopted by SPAW COP12.

The results of this surveys will be analyze by the SPAW working group species and presented to the STAC 11.

Content (11 questions) :

Section A: General Information

Section B: Regulation

Section C: Management measures

Section D: Country's needs related to managing sawfish

* Indique une question obligatoire

SECTION A: GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Country *

2. Full name of the reporting institution *

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Sawfish Conservation Survey

3. Name(s) and position(s) of the reporting officer(s)

4. Email address(es)

5. 1. Do you have sawfishes in your country? *

Plusieurs réponses possibles.

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

6. 2. If yes, specify which species

Plusieurs réponses possibles.

- Smalltooth sawfish (*Pristis pectinata*)
- Largetooth sawfish (*Pristis pristis*)
- I don't know

SECTION B: REGULATION

7. 3. Does your country have a sawfish national regulation in place? *

Plusieurs réponses possibles.

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

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Sawfish Conservation Survey

8. 3bis. If yes, specify the instrument

9. 4. If yes, for which species do you have sawfish regulation:

Plusieurs réponses possibles.

- Smalltooth sawfish (*Pristis pectinata*)
- Largetooth sawfish (*Pristis pristis*)
- I don't know

10. 5. If yes, the national regulations explicitly prohibit sawfish:

Plusieurs réponses possibles.

- Fishing
- Killing
- Retention
- Sale
- Trade
- Other

11. 5bis. If other, please specify

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Sawfish Conservation Survey

12. 6. If your country does not have a sawfish regulation in place, what are the major barriers to development or enactment:

Plusieurs réponses possibles.

- Human resources
- Financial resources
- Public acceptance
- Other

13. 6bis. If other, please specify

14. 6ter. Please provide additional detail about the barriers you identified above (optional)

SECTION C: MANAGEMENT MEASURES

15. 7. Does your country have a Sawfish recovery or management plan in place? *

Plusieurs réponses possibles.

- Yes
- No
- In progress
- I don't know

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Sawfish Conservation Survey

16. 8. If yes, does the management plan contain measures on:

Plusieurs réponses possibles.

- Fishery, such as closed areas
- Bycatch reduction measures
- Recovery action plan for Sawfish populations
- Research and protections for critical sawfish habitats (eg mangroves)
- Education and enforcement programs to implement protections and promote safe sawfish release
- Other

17. 8bis. If other, please specify

18. 8ter. Please provide additional detail about sawfish management plan and measures (optional)

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Sawfish Conservation Survey

19. 9. If your country does not have a management plan for sawfish, what are the major barriers to development or enactment:

Plusieurs réponses possibles.

- The regulation is not appropriate
- Lack of data/information about the species
- Inadequate enforcement
- Human resources
- Financial resources
- Public acceptance
- Other

20. 9bis. If other, please specify

21. 9ter. Please provide additional detail about the barriers you identified above (optional)

SECTION D: Countries' needs related to managing Sawfish

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Sawfish Conservation Survey

22. 10. What is the top priority needs within your country to improve management and protection of sawfish (choose up to 3):

Plusieurs réponses possibles.

- Human resources
- Financial resources
- Technical assistance and/or training
- Building enforcement capacity
- Data and/or scientific research
- Public acceptance
- Fishery regulation
- Recovery action plan for sawfish populations
- Other

23. 10bis. If other, please specify

24. 11. What assistance can SPAW species experts and/or SPAW-RAC and SPAW Secretariat provide to help advance sawfish conservation efforts:

Plusieurs réponses possibles.

- Information/resources on sawfish biology
- Information/resources on best practices for sawfish management
- Public outreach/educational materials
- Workshops/training
- Other

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Sawfish Conservation Survey

25. 11bis. If other, please specify

26. 11ter. Please provide additional details about assistance you need from SPAW species working group, SPAW-RAC or Secretariat (optional).

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