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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

SPA W and the International Whaling Commission: A Strategic Partnership for Marine Mammal Conservation

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

**SPAW and the International Whaling Commission:
A Strategic Partnership for Marine Mammal Conservation**

The SPAW Protocol (Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife) under the Cartagena Convention plays a key role in the conservation of marine biodiversity in the Wider Caribbean Region. Its partnership with the International Whaling Commission (IWC) has grown significantly over the past decade, focusing on the shared goal of protecting cetaceans through science, policy, and capacity-building.

Observership and Coordination

SPAW has regularly participated as an observer at IWC meetings, with reciprocal engagement by the IWC in SPAW forums. This two-way observership fosters information exchange and has laid the groundwork for deeper collaboration. Although a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was drafted between the two organizations to formalize the partnership, it could not be finalized due to legal and procedural constraints on both sides. As an alternative, a Letter of Intent was agreed upon to establish the basis for continued coordination and joint action on marine mammal conservation in the Wider Caribbean.

Joint Workshops and Trainings

Entanglement and Ship Strike Workshops (2012–2014): SPAW and IWC co-hosted regional workshops in Mexico, Saint Martin, and Panama to train government officials and marine park managers in responding to whale entanglements and reducing vessel collisions. These sessions led to the formation of regional response networks and mitigation toolkits tailored for Caribbean use. Co-organization of six training workshops in late 2023 to strengthen the capacity of cetacean stranding monitoring networks in the Caribbean region (CAMAC project). Work is ongoing to provide additional strandings response resources and equipment and should be completed by the end of 2025.

Sanctuary and Regional Integration

SPAW and the IWC actively support the AGOA Marine Mammal Sanctuary in the French Caribbean, a designated SPAW site and member of the Sister Sanctuary Partnership. The IWC contributes scientific guidance and international coordination, especially in AGOA's efforts to monitor and mitigate human threats like shipping and noise pollution.

Looking Ahead

A Letter of Intent between SPAW and the IWC has been formalized, reflecting their shared commitment to marine mammal conservation, allowing both organizations to continue working closely and a draft work plan was prepared (see Annex I). Through joint initiatives, technical exchanges, and region-wide coordination, SPAW and the IWC are strengthening protection efforts for cetaceans in the Wider Caribbean and setting a model for transboundary cooperation.

Annex I – Draft Workplan

Areas of Cooperation	Proposed Activities
<p>Identify and develop synergies, and ensure effective cooperation in pursuit of common goals and objectives within each Parties respective mandates and governing rules and regulations</p>	<p>Continue to develop and support the regional network of natural resource practitioners/MPA managers actively involved in marine mammal research, management and conservation through the use of various platforms to provide sustainability and synergies between various stakeholders in the WCR.</p> <p>Support and promote transboundary cooperation initiatives at the sub-regional and regional levels, such as the Caribbean Marine Megafauna and Anthropogenic Activities (CAMAC) project (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.43/INF.36) and the "Protecting Blue Corridors" Initiative (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.43/INF.42), for the development of transboundary studies to assess and monitor Caribbean marine mammal populations.</p> <p>Strengthen collaboration with the Marine Pollution Sub-Programme and its Protocols Concerning Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities (LBS) and Co-operation in Combating Oil Spills (Oil Spills) including through greater collaboration among the Secretariat RACs. This will include the potential impacts of oil exploration and exploitation of protected species, including cetaceans and associated habitats.</p>

<p>Improve information and data sharing on the status and abundance of cetacean species</p>	<p>Support Contracting Parties in the development of their national strategies and frameworks including National Conservation and Recovery Plans for marine mammal conservation by considering the revised “Action Plan for the Conservation of Cetaceans (MMA) in the Wider Caribbean” 2022.</p> <p>Support national assessments of marine mammal bycatch by Contracting Parties and synthesize these assessments into a report evaluating marine mammal bycatch risk in the WCR.</p> <p>Support compliance with the SPAW Protocol and other marine mammal catch and captivity requirements.</p> <p>Strengthen regional capacity to mitigate and monitor anthropogenic impacts on cetaceans as indicated in the revised “Action Plan for the Conservation of Cetaceans (MMA) in the Wider Caribbean”</p> <p>Improve awareness of and compile data on the effects of bycatch and entanglements, pollution, and ship strikes, on marine megafauna and especially cetaceans in the Wider Caribbean Region working with Contracting Parties and, when appropriate, in collaboration with the IWC, fishery organizations and other relevant intergovernmental organizations.</p>
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<p>Promote and encourage the conservation and management of key cetacean species and population</p>	<p>Promote the national and regional implementation of the Overarching Principles and Best Practice Guidelines for Marine Mammal Watching in the Wider Caribbean Region (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.38/INF.13), the Toolkit for implementing Marine Mammal Watching Guidelines in the Wider Caribbean Region (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.32) and the digital educational kit for whale watchers.</p> <p>Promote the inclusion of cetaceans in MPA management plans and enhance the capacity of managers involved in marine mammal conservation.</p>
<p>Enhance collaboration on research, prevention of, and response to anthropogenic threats</p>	<p>Implement strategies to mitigate the effects of bycatch and entanglements, pollution, and ship strikes, on marine megafauna and especially cetaceans in the Wider Caribbean Region working with Contracting Parties and, when appropriate, in collaboration with the IWC, fishery organizations and other relevant intergovernmental organizations. In the framework of the CAMAC project.</p>