CONTRIBUTION 8.4

Regional Cooperation on Marine Biodiversity and Fisheries Management in the Wider Caribbean Region

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Abstract

The Cartagena Convention is the only regionally binding legal agreement for the protection and sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea. Through its pollution and marine biodiversity programmes, the Convention Secretariat and its Regional Activity Centres (RACs) play a critical role in supporting protection of the marine environment and sustainable use of its resources. With the need for more effective regional policy coordination mechanisms for governance of the Caribbean Sea, the cooperation model established between the Secretariat and the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) should be upscaled and replicated.

Within the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR), several initiatives focus on integrated ocean governance, marine spatial planning, and an ecosystem-based approach to sustainably managing shared living marine resources. Linkages between fisheries management, marine biodiversity conservation and pollution prevention formed an ideal framework for existing cooperation between the Convention Secretariat and CRFM.

The RAC for the Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife Protocol (SPAW) of the Cartagena Convention supports Governments with information, technical expertise and assistance to develop and implement programs and projects for sustainable fisheries.

Through a new initiative – CAMAC, SPAW RAC, builds on the relationship with CRFM to support the: 1) assessment of interactions between human activities and marine megafauna, 2) strengthening of regional cooperation, and 3) identification of recommendations for mitigation. Initial findings show that Caribbean fisheries are mainly artisanal, but fishing techniques and pressures vary between territories, some targeting mainly pelagics on FADs, while others still using nets and traps targeting reef and demersal fish. Most identified significant interaction cases involved sea turtles and sharks, only a few cases were identified for marine mammals and none for seabirds.

This type of cooperation can guide how future programmes and projects are developed and ensure integration across the multiple agencies working on regional ocean governance.

KEYWORDS: SPAW RAC, Cartagena Convention, Biodiversity, Fisheries, Pollution

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1. CONTEXT

The Cartagena Convention

The Cartagena Convention was adopted in Cartagena, Colombia on 24 March 1983 and entered into force on 11 October 1986. It promotes the protection and development of the marine environment of the Wider Caribbean Region and provides a legal framework for the Caribbean Environment Programme (CEP). The Cartagena Convention has been ratified by 26 United Nations Member States. It covers the marine environment of the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean Sea, and the areas of the Atlantic Ocean adjacent thereto, south of 30 north latitude and within 200 nautical miles of the Atlantic Coasts of the States.

The Convention is supported by three technical agreements or Protocols on Oil Spills, Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) and Land Based Sources of Marine Pollution (LBS).

1. The Protocol Concerning Co-operation in Combating Oil Spills in the Wider Caribbean Region was adopted in 1983 and entered into force on 11 October 1986.

2. The Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) in the Wider Caribbean Region was adopted on 18 January 1990 and entered into force on 18 June 2000.

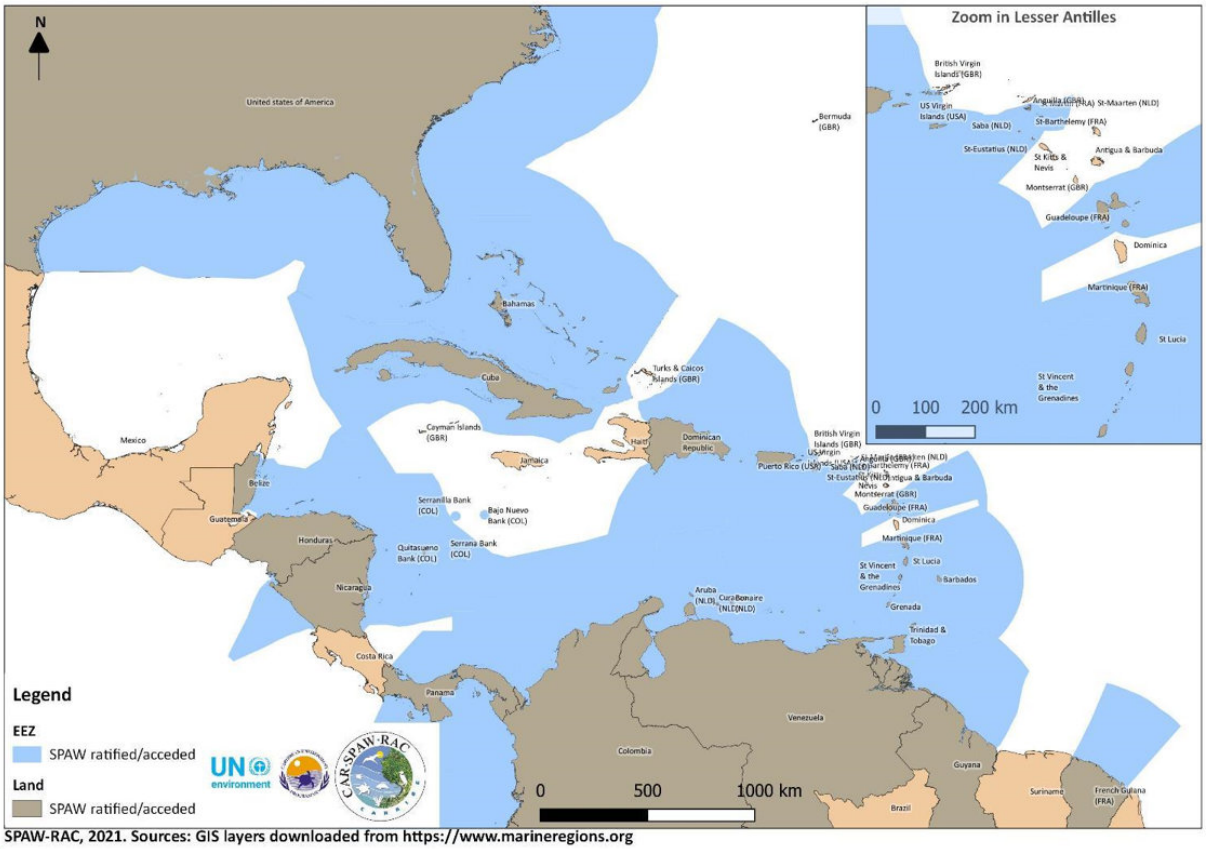
3. The Protocol Concerning Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities was adopted on 6 October 1999 and entered into force on 13 August 2010.

The Regional Coordinating Unit (UNEP-CAR/RCU) was established in 1986 in Kingston, Jamaica and is the Secretariat to the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols. The work of the Secretariat is further supported by four specialized Regional Activity Centres (RACs).

Figure 1. The Cartagena Convention Institutional Structure

The SPAW protocol

Among the three protocols developed within the framework of the Cartagena Convention, the Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) Protocol is dedicated to coastal and marine biodiversity protection and sustainable use. It provides a unique legal framework for the conservation of regional biodiversity. The SPAW Protocol is recognized as a significant tool which supports regional Governments to meet their national obligations under related Global Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) such as the Convention on Biological Biodiversity (CBD) and the Ramsar Convention. Other important regional initiatives that have been launched under the framework of the SPAW Protocol include the reinforcement of protected areas and the conservation of key species. This has been done with in close partnership with multiple stakeholders including governments, Non-Governmental Organizations, (NGO)s, local communities and fisheries organizations.



SPAW-RAC, 2021. Sources: GIS layers downloaded from https://www.marineregions.org

Figure 2. Map of SPAW Contracting Parties

Signed in January 1990, the SPAW Protocol came into effect in June 2000 and is currently ratified by 18 countries.

Under the terms of the Protocol, the Contracting Parties must, in accordance with their national legislation, take all measures to protect, conserve and sustainably manage the zones and the animal or plant threatened species. The Protocol has two main goals :

- The protection, preservation and sustainable management of the zones with particular ecological value; and
- The protection, preservation and sustainable management of threatened or endangered wild species as well as their habitats.

In order to fulfill the objective of protection and sustainable management of threatened or endangered wild species, Contracting Parties have adopted and/or updated appendices of the SPAW Protocol on species requiring protection. This identifies species of flora and fauna which exploitation is forbidden (Appendices I and II), and/or species of flora and fauna which populations must be maintained at a sustainable level (Appendix III). Contracting Parties to the SPAW Protocol commit to establish, among others, national measures and regional cooperation to ensure the protection and preservation of endangered species.

The SPAW-RAC provides scientific and technical support the Contracting Parties to fulfill their commitments under the SPAW Protocol, and to support the Cartagena Convention Secretariat in implementing biannual workplans approved by Parties.

Governance Arrangements

The SPAW Conference of the Parties (COP) is held every two years at which biannual work plans are adopted and Decisions made which guide the work of the Secretariat including strategic priorities, objectives, and detailed activities. Regional and sub-regional fisheries organization participate as observers at these meetings to ensure coherence and synergies.

2. CAMAC: REGIONAL COOPERATION ON MARINE BIODIVERSITY AND FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

In response to recommendations of SPAW Protocol Contracting Parties, the SPAW RAC and the Agoa Sanctuary (French West Indies) have developed a new CAMAC project (Caribbean Marine Megafauna and Anthropogenic Activities, 2023-2027).

The CAMAC project aims at strengthening knowledge, regional capacity, and collaboration, It will provide practical recommendations and tools to reduce the negative impacts resulting from the interactions between human activities and marine megafauna (marine mammals, sea turtles, seabirds, sharks, and rays) in the Caribbean Region.

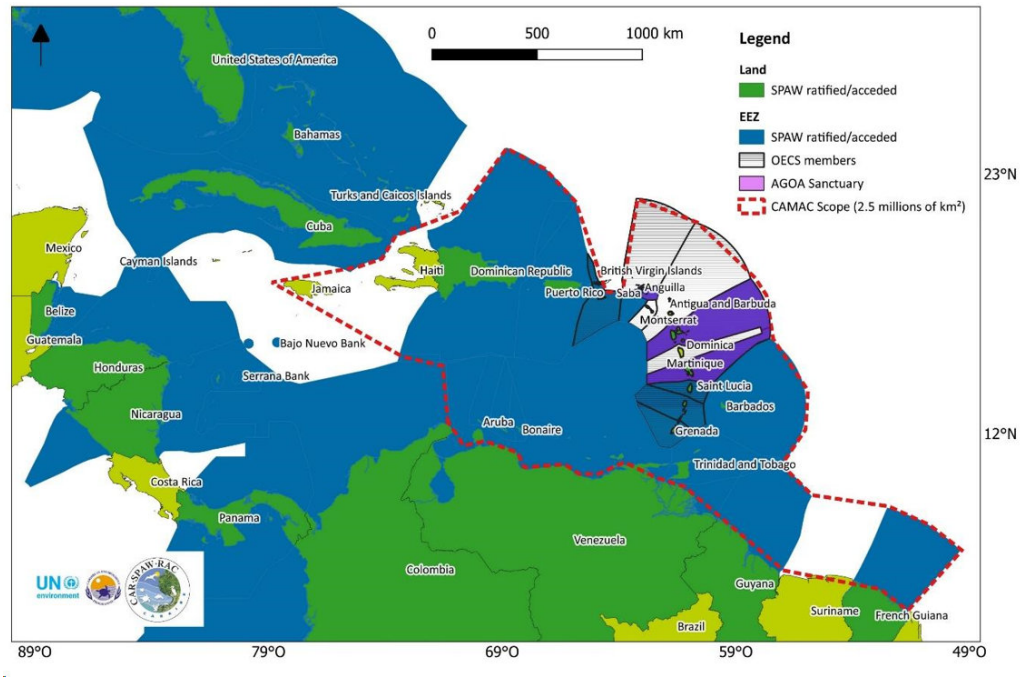


Figure 3. Geographic scope of the CAMAC project

The project is planned for 4 years (2023-2027) and is structured in 2 phases and 4 work packages.

Phase 1 began in January 2023 and will end in December 2023. It focuses on the review of available information and data, on the development of collaboration with regional stakeholders and on the determination of the protocols and needs for Phase 2.

Phase 2 is expected to take place from 2024 to 2027. It will be dedicated to the implementation of the protocols determined during Phase 1, in collaboration with identified partners.

The work packages of the CAMAC project are the following:

- Work package 1-Fishery interactions: Develop and implement, in collaboration with Caribbean fisheries organisations, a programme to assess the interactions between marine megafauna and fisheries and provide recommendations to mitigate them.
- Work package 2-Enhance stranding networks: Enhance knowledge and monitoring of human-origin impacts on marine mammals and marine turtles via the stranding networks.
- Work package 3-Raise awareness: school twinnings to raise awareness on preserving marine megafauna and strengthen environmental education skills.
- Work package 4-Knowledge enhancement: Strengthen knowledge on the biodiversity, abundance, and distribution of marine megafauna of the Caribbean Region via notably regional boat surveys.

One of the main goals of this project is to strengthen links with the fisheries sector and assess the socio-economic and environmental issues related to interactions with marine megafauna. Three principal actions have been implemented during the first phase of CAMAC in 2023: creating a scientific and technical advisory committee for the action, with notably fishing stakeholders; drawing up a mapped status report of regional fishing activities and potential overlap with marine megafauna.

Phase II of the project (2024-2027) will be devoted to enhancing knowledge of interactions between the region's fisheries and marine megafauna through surveys of fishermen and vessels, quantifying and mapping interactions between fisheries activities and megafauna and formulating recommendations for the bycatch mitigation.

In the framework of Work package 1, fishery interactions, three actions were implemented during the first phase of CAMAC in 2023:

1. creating a scientific and technical advisory committee for the action, with notably fishing stakeholders;
2. reviewing available data and information available on fisheries and their interactions with megafauna;
3. identifying priority areas for knowledge enhancement in phase II.

A scientific and technical advisory committee of 28 experts from 17 different CAMAC territories was created.

Detailed data on fisheries (effort and landings per fishing gear) were collected for 9 over the 29 CAMAC territories, and experts from 24 territories provided information on interactions with megafauna. This data suggested that while the vast majority of Caribbean countries have long term fishery monitoring programmes, it is difficult to access data and they are often incomplete.

Very few programs for bycatch monitoring have been developed, and few mitigation projects are conducted. However, there is a strong interest in the topic. Experts' knowledge suggested that significant megafauna bycatch issues are observed in most CAMAC territories, with most fishing gears, and many species.

Target catch was identified as another major issue in the CAMAC area: sea turtles are fully protected in 75% CAMAC territories; shark and ray fishing is banned in 20% of them and finning in 50%; finally, marine mammals fishing is prohibited in 80% of CAMAC countries. Some depredation issues were also raised mainly with sharks.

It was concluded that there is a need in the CAMAC area for enhanced knowledge enhancement to better characterize and assess socio-economic and environmental issues related to interactions between fisheries and marine megafauna, in order to make recommendations for the implementation of efficient mitigation measures. Phase II of the project (2024-2027) will be devoted to meeting this need through a collaborative fisheries research approach in 4 to 6 pilot territories representative of the CAMAC area and with a strong interest in this issue.

3. SPAW-RAC CALL FOR PROPOSALS: ENCOURAGING CONCRETE ACTIONS FOR THE CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY IN THE WIDER CARIBBEAN REGION

The SPAW-RAC plays a critical role by supporting support SPAW Contracting Parties while promoting regional cooperation for the protection and development of the Wider Caribbean Region. The SPAW-RAC leads and participates in several regional networks of experts and managers (CaMPAM, CARIMAM, WECAFC, WIDECAST, GCRMN-Caribbean, etc.).

One mechanism of support is through a call for proposals that enables concrete actions for the conservation of biodiversity in the Wider Caribbean Region at national and local levels.
More specifically, the program provides financial support for actions to:

- improve the conservation status of threatened species, in particular those listed in the SPAW Protocol appendices;
- generate information enabling civil society partners to improve the implementation of protected area management plans (with priority given to SPAW protected areas) and endangered species management measures;
- implement actions to restore ecosystems or populations, with priority given to SPAW protected areas.

Owing to the CoViD-19 pandemic, in 2020 many conservation projects were halted, funding withdrawn, and the capacity of many community-based organizations were reduced. In this context, and to strengthen the capacities of national, community-based and/or regional organizations, the SPAW-RAC implemented a pilot call for proposals for short-term small grants (up to 10,000 euros for periods varying from 4 months to 1 year).

Projects that benefitted those primarily included those that were:

- implemented in countries and territories that are signatories to the SPAW Protocol and/or territories that do not easily benefit from traditional funding (SIDS - Small Island Developing States).

- involved collaboration between several other Caribbean territories;
- backed by medium- (2-5 years) and/or long-term (+5 years) effectiveness monitoring.

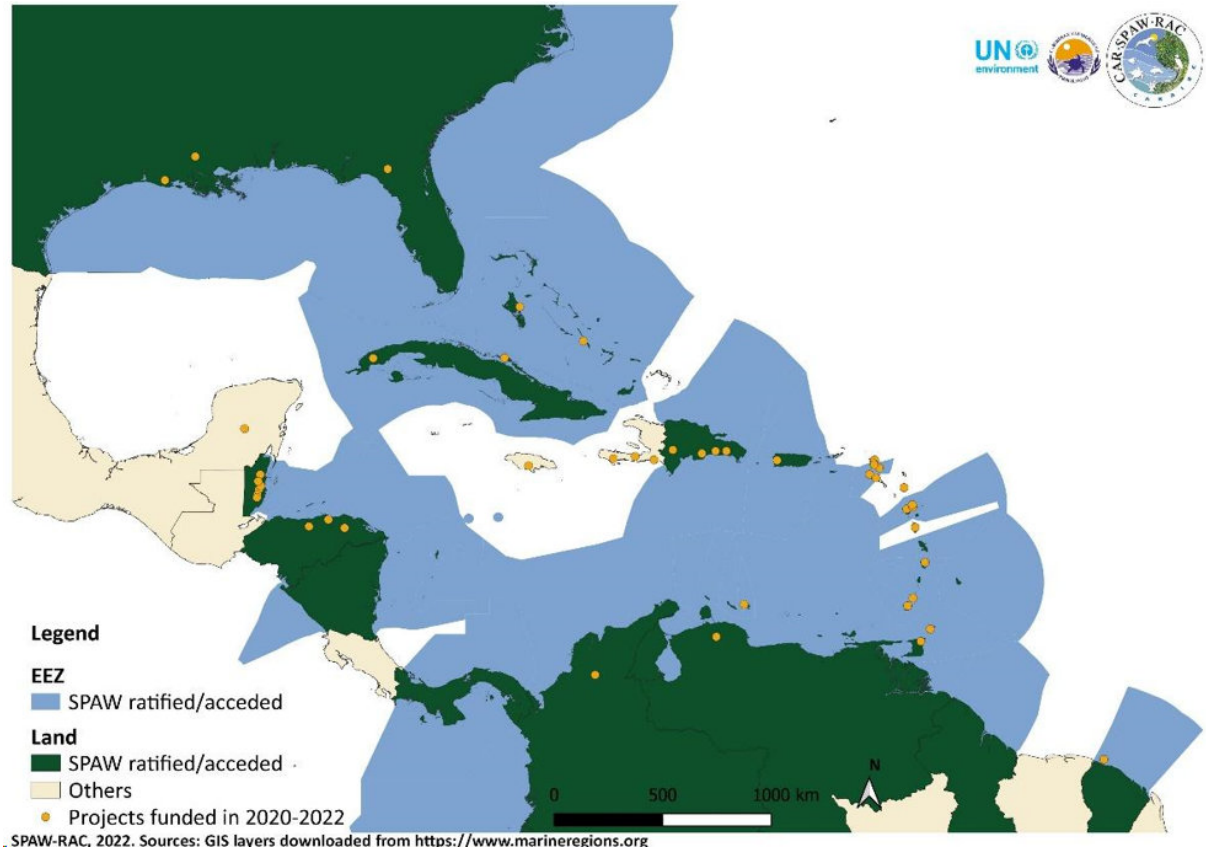


Figure 4. Location of the projects funded by the SPAW-RAC call for proposals between 2020 and 2022

Given the success of this Call for Proposals, which has supported several NGOs in implementing concrete conservation projects in all Caribbean territories, SPAW RAC decided to re-launch a Call for Proposals in 2021, 2022 and 2023.

Since 2020, the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW-RAC) have supported 61 projects in more than 35 Caribbean territories with a total value of 375 500 euros with funding directly from SPAW-RAC and the French Ministry of Environment.

These grants continue to finance training initiatives, regional workshops, research and development programs for innovative solutions, and awareness-raising initiatives and tools. They also facilitate greater collaboration between conservation and fisheries management. Marine protected areas are often supported in their management projects, but also in testing new solutions and developing and/or updating management and action plans.

While NGOs and associations are particularly targeted (70%), governmental organizations, protected area managers, research centers and foundations can also submit projects.

The benefits of this program regarding effective action and visibility in the field are undeniable; To perpetuate and expand the Call for projects programe, the SPAW-RAC is looking to expand the programme with new partners and funders.

CONCLUSION

Within the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR), the several initiatives highlighted in this paper confirm the importance of integrated ocean governance, marine spatial planning, and an ecosystem-based approach to sustainably managing shared living marine resources. Linkages between fisheries management, marine biodiversity conservation and pollution prevention have formed an ideal framework for existing cooperation between the Convention Secretariat and CRFM. This type of cooperation can guide how future programmes and projects are developed and ensure integration across the multiple agencies working on regional ocean governance.

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