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Sixth Meeting of the Contracting Parties (COP) to the  
Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and  
Wildlife (SPA W) in the Wider Caribbean Region

Montego Bay, Jamaica, 5 October 2010

**REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN  
FOR THE CONSERVATION OF MARINE MAMMALS  
IN THE WIDER CARIBBEAN REGION**

**Note by the Secretariat**

1. In October 2008, the Fifth Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife in the Wider Caribbean Region (SPA W COP 5) adopted the Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Mammals (MMA P) in the Wider Caribbean Region (UNEP, 2008). The Parties also established five priority actions to be implemented during the period 2008-2009 subject to the availability of funding:
2. The aim of the present report is to present an account of the activities developed in response to these priorities and to propose new priorities for the period 2010-2011.

**Actions to be Taken:**

1. The Sixth SPA W COP (COP6) is invited to review this report prepared by the Secretariat and the SPA W-RAC, in consultation with members of the existing electronic Working Group on marine mammals.
2. The SPA W COP6 is invited to consider the recommendations provided by the members of the electronic Working Group and decide on the approval of priorities for implementation during the 2010-2011 biennium as outlined in Section 8 of this Report.

*For reasons of economy and the environment, Delegates are kindly requested to bring their copies of the Working and Information documents to the Meeting, and not to request additional copies.*

## 1. Introduction

The priority actions identified by the SPAW Parties for implementation during the 2008-2009 biennium include:

- Updating and expansion of the existing electronic Marine Mammals Expert Group;
- Organisation of three workshops to respond to marine mammal strandings;
- Development of a workshop on watching activities of marine mammals in the wild and associated best practices;
- Planning of a workshop on pollutants and contaminants capable of negatively affecting the health of marine mammals; and
- Harmonisation of reports regarding the captures (incidental and targeted) of marine mammals linked to fishing.

## 2. Updating of the Mandate of the Expert Group on the Marine Mammal Action Plan and Exchanges following SPAW COP 5

**2.1** Further to the adoption of the MMAP by SPAW COP 5, the electronic Expert Group continued discussions until the end of 2008 before a relatively long pause at the outset of 2009; while there were fewer exchanges, activity did not cease completely.

**2.2** The Group was then reactivated in mid-2009 and discussion topics relating to implementation of the MMAP were proposed to the Group by the Regional Activity Centre for the Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife Protocol (SPAW-RAC) and the Secretariat as follows: strandings workshops, workshop on watching of marine mammals in the wild and the creation of a database on the distribution of marine mammals. This was following the request for financing submitted by the Secretariat to the U.S. Marine Mammal Commission on these two latter subjects.

**2.3** In order to address the necessary evolution of the electronic Marine Mammals Expert Group after completion of its role in drafting the MMAP with representation of all the SPAW Contracting Parties and stakeholders, the following proposals were submitted to the Group's members at the beginning of January 2010:

- To reconfirm their interest in participating in discussions within the Group;
- To offer an opinion on the new mandate for the e-Group as proposed by the Secretariat and the SPAW-RAC as follows:
  - To exchange information on the initiatives taken by the Parties and stakeholders on the implementation of the MMAP;
  - To follow up the implementation of the priority actions contained in the MMAP;
  - To assist with the dissemination of information on the threats encountered by marine mammals in the region, as well as on the importance and objectives of the MMAP among the community of researchers and administrators but also within the general public;
  - To identify topics of common interest and assist in the development of projects to address them at the appropriate scale;
  - To assist in the gathering of information, data and expertise on specific subjects pertinent to the MMAP, such as pollution and the health of marine mammals, current marine mammal watching practices, etc., including relevant data and information for development of the regional database on marine mammals.
- To create sub-groups for discussions on specific subjects, bringing together members of the MMAP Group, as well as additional experts invited on a temporary basis. Each sub-group would be given a mandate and an exact schedule and its results and propositions would be presented to the MMAP group. After completion of its work, each sub-group would be disbanded. None of these sub-groups have been created to-date.
- The MMAP group would continue to work in the form of electronic exchanges, as well as in regular meetings if this were to prove feasible.

**2.4** The Group's members confirmed their approval of this new mandate and of the reviewed objectives proposed to them, which therefore constitute the Group's work at present.

**2.5** Regular information was presented to the MMAP group regarding implementation of MMAP priority actions, particularly on the convening of the strandings workshops and preparations for the workshop on marine mammal watching, as well as on the financing obtained by the Secretariat to facilitate implementation of the MMAP. The reports from the strandings workshop held in the Netherlands Antilles, Guadeloupe and Panama were submitted to the Group and it was invited to propose new priorities for implementation of the MMAP, in order that the latter could be submitted to the Sixth Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife in the Wider Caribbean Region (SPAW COP 6). The SPAW-RAC and the Secretariat likewise informed the group of different events organised in the Caribbean on marine mammals and that contributed to the MMAP's objectives.

**2.6** Additionally, as outlined above, in order to capitalise on the experience of the MMAP Group's exchanges, as well as to benefit from the geographical representation of the Group and the activities already carried out within the Group, a proposal was made to transform the MMAP Group's mandate to include the new tasks of information sharing and development of methodologies. Non-member experts may be invited into any sub-groups that might be formed from this main MMAP group, as appropriate to achieving the mandate of the sub-group. This is also in keeping with priorities 2.5.3 and 2.5.4 (outlined below) of SPAW COP 5:

2.5.3 To compile a list of experts to review existing research and follow-up methods and to recommend standard methods;

2.5.4 To create a forum, such as a Marine Mammal Expert Group, in which the experts, scientists and administrators belonging to Contracting Parties to the SPAW Protocol or working in the region can discuss and share information on marine mammals. To assemble this central group in order to update information as needs require.

**2.7 Summary and perspectives:**

1) Now that the implementation of the MMAP process has been initiated and that different sources of financing have been secured to implement concrete actions in various priority areas of interest for the MMAP, it would be appropriate to organise a 'physical' meeting of the Expert Group as soon as possible, in order to facilitate exchanges and proposals and subsequently, to create several specific sub-groups on the main subjects. The composition of the Group would nevertheless merit review, as certain countries have little or no representation.

2) Noting financing opportunities and planned opportunities (See Section 7), it would be useful at this point to create a sub-group on 'Methods and Data on Marine Mammal Distribution', as well as sub-groups aiming to re-examine and analyse information available on certain categories of pressures and impacts (in particular, pollution, collisions with ships, good practices for whale watching and interactions with fishing grounds).

**Table 1. Number of Exchanges between Group Members During the Period 2008-2010**

	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
<b>2008</b>	13	20	6	11		2	5	1	2	26	2	27
<b>2009</b>	3		1			4	7	2	4	4	11	4
<b>2010</b>	17	12	4			5						

**3. Workshops on Responses to Marine Mammal Strandings**

**3.1** Three regional workshops to strengthen countries' capacities to respond to marine mammal strandings were organised in 2009 and 2010 as priorities identified under SPAW COP 5. These three workshops formed part of the follow-up of an initial workshop organised by the Eastern Caribbean Cetacean Network (ECCN) in 2005 for the English-speaking Caribbean:

- Workshop for the Dutch territories (Curacao, 5-7 November 2009);
- Workshop for French-speaking countries and territories, including Haiti (Guadeloupe, 8-10 January 2010); and

- Workshop for Spanish-speaking Caribbean countries (Panama, 22-23 April 2010)

**3.2** The general objective of these workshops was to undertake a review of the techniques and protocols for marine mammal strandings response and to facilitate collaboration and harmonisation within French-speaking, Spanish-speaking, Dutch-speaking and English-speaking networks in the Wider Caribbean Region and between these networks. Another aim was to investigate ways of establishing centralised archives for samples gathered during strandings and necropsies, accompanied by a regional database for the results of analyses carried out by the different countries and territories. More specifically, the objectives of each workshop included the following:

- Implementation of standard data collection methods and development of a centralised database;
- Training persons likely to respond to strandings, in order to maximise the chances of recovering beached animals (or dead floating carcasses);
- Training participants in standard techniques and protocols for the preparation, handling, transport and storage of samples collected from strandings, in order to guarantee quality, consistency and comparability;
- Establishment of crisis management systems in each country and territory;
- Reinforcement of national and regional coordination for response to strandings, data analysis capacities and exchange of information and technologies;
- Creation of a link with other infra-regional stranding networks, such as the ECCN and the Southern Caribbean Cetacean Network (SCCN), in order to guarantee better communication and inventory of strandings.

**3.3** A detailed report and a summary report were produced for each workshop. They were all distributed to the MMAP group for information and feedback on the recommendations.

**3.4** The recommendations of the three workshops are very similar. They refer both to the reinforcement of capacities for coordination, research, communication and raising public awareness and to the financing of strandings networks. They cover both short-term and medium-term objectives.

**3.5** *Summary and perspectives:* The recommendations of the strandings workshops identify actions to be implemented as priorities within the context of the next SPAW Workplan. These actions have been proposed by the SPAW-RAC to the MMAP group for opinion and comment. They are as follows:

- Consolidation of current capacities of strandings networks and the enhancement of capacity where lacking;
- Improvement for each country and territory to access information and tools, including the equipping of each sub-network with stranding kits and training support at the local level;
- Provision of facilities for sample preservation and storage;
- Development of a regional database containing all the inventories of strandings events and results of analyses results, to be accompanied by contact lists including all resource persons on the most local level possible, with their details;
- Development of teaching materials in several languages; and
- Gathering of data on strandings in a uniform manner by adopting the level A form introduced by the ECCN.

**3.6** Comments received were positive and also noted the need to assess at some point the cost effectiveness of the formation of these networks and their value with regard to marine mammal conservation in the region.

#### **4. Watching Operations of Marine Mammals in the Wild and Associated Activities**

**4.1** Included among the priority actions of the MMAP, as identified by the SPAW COP 5, is the organisation of a trilingual workshop on practices relating to the observation of marine mammals in the wild (marine mammal watching) and associated activities.

**4.2** The objectives of this workshop were threefold:

- To quantify the current observation activity of marine mammals in the wild and to identify the development opportunities of the same;
- To assess the potential impacts on marine mammals and their environment and to undertake a review of current

observation practices;

- To propose a code of conduct for the region, to be discussed and validated during the workshop. These best practices will be subsequently recommended for implementation for SPAW Contracting Parties.

**4.3** The expected outcomes of the workshop, in its current preparation stage, are as follows (in order of importance):

- The evaluation of problems and needs and the identification of opportunities in existing marine mammal observation operations/businesses;
- The identification of areas in which the potential for developing watching operations/businesses exists;
- A regional code of good practices for observation of marine mammals in the wild based on existing information and experiences from the region and elsewhere.

**4.4** Associated objectives are to:

- Develop a training programme for observation professionals within the Caribbean;
- Compile an inventory of existing training materials.
- Harmonise formats for data gathering used by some observation professionals in order to improve knowledge of the distribution and status of marine mammals;
- Explore the relevance and feasibility of creating a common database enabling these data to be shared;
- Develop information and education materials for the people who go on whale-watching tours.

**4.5** The workshop can only meet its objectives if preparatory technical work to inventory marine mammal watching activities and describe existing practices in Caribbean countries and territories has been undertaken, and a draft code of good practices prepared, on the basis of existing frameworks and guidelines in certain areas in the Caribbean and elsewhere in the world.

**4.6** UNEP-CAR/RCU and the SPAW RAC have secured some level of funding for the workshop. However, supplementary financing sources must be identified prior to any further planning and organisation, in order to enable the preparatory technical work outlined above. In this context, the Workshop has been postponed to the first half of 2011.

## **5. Priority Actions Not Yet Implemented**

**5.1** Two of the actions identified by the SPAW COP 5 as priorities have not as yet been implemented due to their complexity, the time necessary to complete them and the limited human and financial resources at the Secretariat. These are:

- Organisation of a workshop on contaminants and pollutants and their impacts on marine mammal health; and
- Harmonisation of reports on the capture (both direct and incidental) of marine mammals and its linkages to fisheries. The delay in implementing this activity is due, inter alia, to the complexity of acquiring existing data from countries and regional fishing organisations, identification of available data, common formats, etc.

**5.2** It is proposed to include these actions as priorities in the new 2010-2011 SPAW Workplan and find the necessary funding, as well as to ensure the mobilisation of SPAW Focal Points to assist, for example, in the identification of key data sources in their respective countries and to raise national awareness of the importance of these activities.

## **6. Other Ongoing Activities Developed**

**6.1** Following the three strandings response workshops and in view of the resulting recommendations, work on drafting a taxonomy identification guide for marine mammals in the region has been initiated, targeted at persons who respond to strandings. This activity also responds to an action implemented within the MMAP. The SPAW-RAC is financially supporting the ECCN for this work, which assisted with the coordination of the three workshops.

**6.2** Steps towards spatial protection of marine mammals are also ongoing with continuation of the marine sanctuary project in waters under French jurisdiction and plans for similar spatial protection in the Dutch West Indies and Aruba. Furthermore, the twinning of sanctuary projects with already existing sanctuaries (e.g., Samana/SilverBank and Stellwagen) continues to be explored.

**6.3** The revised version of the Regional Management Plan for the West Indian Manatee, adopted by the SPAW COP 5, has been finalised and is available in English and soon in Spanish. A feasibility study on the reintroduction of the manatee in Guadeloupe, supported by the Guadeloupe National Park, received favourable feedback from the SPAW COP 5 and plans are underway to conduct this study. Partnerships and networking connections have been drafted and studies aiming to reinforce the knowledge on populations of manatees in French Guiana, Colombia and Mexico are in the preparatory stages. A regional workshop on manatee conservation to be organised in November 2010 in Costa Rica by the Mesoamerican Company for Biology and Conservation will be used to gather additional inputs and feedback from experts.

**6.4** Finally, a number of events on marine mammals have been organised by partners and stakeholders in support of the MMAP objectives:

- Two “Ocean Life Symposia” were organised by the Eastern Caribbean Coalition for Environmental Awareness (ECCEA) with the support of the Pew Environment Group in Dominica in March 2009 and in Grenada in May 2010. A symposium was also organised in February 2010 in Martinique by ECCEA and Pew, with local support, on ‘Opportunities for Constructing Local and Sustainable Blue Tourism and Fighting Threats to Marine Mammals in the Caribbean’ (<http://www.eceea.org/index.php/conferences>).
- CariBwhale (association of whale-watchers) also held its general assembly in St. Lucia in May 2010, during which the issues of using standardised data formats for collecting information on marine mammals, and of sharing them in a common database, were discussed.
- A training seminar on strandings was organized by Sea Vida and local partners in Venezuela as a follow up to the Panama workshop. The seminar was held on June 23, 2010 and was supported by Fundacite Aragua, endorsed by the SPAW RAC and had the participation of the Ministry of Environment and the Parks Institute of Venezuela. As a result, a regional stranding network is being organized.

## **7. Identification of Financing Sources by the Secretariat and the SPAW RAC for MMAP Implementation**

**7.1** The Secretariat and the SPAW RAC have worked towards raising funds for implementing the priority activities and for the MMAP as a whole as follows:

- Project proposal (grant approved in 2010) to the U.S. Marine Mammal Commission for the development of the regional database and development of the workshop on marine mammal watching and relevant documents (USD 50,000);
- Project proposal under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) LifeWeb initiative (<http://www.cbd.int/lifeweb/>) (funded by Spain) for the protection of habitats and migration corridors of marine mammals in the South East and North West Pacific and the Caribbean (USD 500,000 for both regions);
- Commitment of a € 40,000 contribution from the French Marine Protected Areas Agency to the workshop on marine mammal watching.

**7.2** Furthermore, for the period 2009-2010, the SPAW RAC contributed a total of € 50,000 of its own funds (originating from the French Government) for implementation of the MMAP as follows:

- Financing of an additional post at the SPAW RAC dedicated to setting up projects on marine mammals;
- Contribution to French and Spanish-speaking stranding workshops, as well as to the development of the taxonomy identification guide; and
- Development of the framework for the regional database.

**7.3** A contribution of approximately € 15,000 is likely to be made available for implementation of the Regional Management Plan for the West Indian Manatee, specifically for the purchase of acoustic detection material that will

be placed at the disposal of all the countries, and follow-up to training workshops on acoustic follow-up techniques in Colombia and French Guiana.

**7.4** Finally, the SPAW RAC is currently developing an integrated project on the implementation of the MMAP, for which they will be requesting funds from the French GEF, as well as working together with the Marine Protected Areas Agency to prepare a request for support from the 'Interreg' European funds for a project on the strengthening of knowledge on marine mammal distribution.

## **8. Proposals for New Priorities for MMAP Implementation under the 2010-2011 SPAW Workplan**

In keeping with the priorities previously identified at SPAW COP 5 and the progress made to-date with activities implemented since the adoption of the MMAP in 2008, the following is being proposed for implementation dependent on the availability of funding:

### **8.1 *Renewal of the Priorities not Implemented (See Section 5):***

- Implement the trilingual workshop on marine mammal watching operations, including the preparation of and agreement on a regional code of conduct for good observation practices;
- Organise a workshop on the impacts of contaminants and pollution on marine mammals in the region;
- Harmonise and collate reports on the capture of marine mammals linked to fishing.

### **8.2 *Follow-up to Strandings Workshops (See Section 3):***

- Reinforce local stranding network capacities, mainly through technical assistance, including equipment, training and contact lists and the creation of a regional database to enable the integration of all results from strandings' analyses.

### **8.3 *Implementation of the LifeWeb Proposal (See Section 7)***

- Create and expand a regional database assembling information and publications on marine mammals' distribution, abundance, habitats (including cartography) and the threats with which they are faced. In respect of this database, creation of expert sub-groups from the MMAP Group to identify information already available on the different subjects, and define the means and protocols to fill the main gaps in data;
- Improve knowledge on marine mammals' distribution, the quality of their habitats (in the broadest sense) and of their migration corridors with the aim of putting into place spatial protection;
- Encourage the introduction of spatial protection (protected marine areas) for marine mammals as well as cross-border twinning steps in an eco-regional context.

### **8.4 *Other Potential Actions in Support of MMAP Implementation:***

- Undertake, with the MMAP Expert Group, a realistic analysis of the stages and budget required for full implementation of the MMAP in order to facilitate the setting-up of specific projects and research for the appropriate financing. In this context, special attention will be paid to MMAP subjects that have not yet been implemented or only introduced to a small extent, such as collisions with ships or acoustic disturbances, and the necessary budget forecasts will be prepared.
- If possible, prepare one or more regional projects contributing to implementation of the MMAP, mainly concentrating on key areas such as major thoroughfares or protection projects in place or in the process of creation. A meeting of the e-Group members could be organised for this purpose and funding will have to be sourced in this regard by the Secretariat.

### **8.5 *Implementation of the Regional Management Plan for the West Indian Manatee:***

- Reinforce knowledge of the distribution, numbers and status of manatee populations in the different countries in which it is present and where this knowledge is incomplete. Special attention will be paid to countries in Central America and the north of Latin America.

Annex I – Members of the Marine Mammal Action Plan Expert Group

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