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Sixth Meeting of the Scientific Technical Advisory Committee
(STAC6) to the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas
and Wildlife (SPAW) in the Wider Caribbean Region

Cartagena, Colombia, 8 December 2014

**STATUS OF DEVELOPEMENT OF THE REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE CONTROL OF
THE LIONFISH INVASION IN THE WIDER CARIBBEAN REGION**

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I. Background

1. The objectives of the SPAW Protocol are to protect, preserve, and manage in a sustainable way: 1) areas and ecosystems that require protection to safeguard their special value, 2) threatened or endangered species of flora and fauna and their habitats, and 3) species, with the objective of preventing them from becoming endangered or threatened. In that context, invasive alien species are of particular concern for the SPAW Protocol and the SPAW Sub-programme.
2. Lionfishes are venomous species of scorpionfishes, which are native to Indo-Pacific coral reef ecosystems and adjacent habitats. Because of their colorful and dramatic appearance, they are prized by aquarists around the world. Through accidental and/or purposeful release into warm Atlantic waters, they have become established as a highly problematic alien species that poses a serious threat to the Caribbean marine environment. Invasive lionfish populations can reach high densities and cause extreme disruption to native fish communities; they have been shown to reduce biodiversity, are responsible for the decline of ecologically important species, and hinder stock-rebuilding efforts for economically important species.
3. UNEP-CEP and its SPAW Regional Activity Center (SPAW-RAC) have joined efforts with the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) and numerous partners to address the lionfish issue in the Caribbean. An Ad Hoc Committee for the Caribbean Regional Response to Lionfish Invasion (also known as Regional Lionfish Committee - RLC) has been established to that purpose under the auspices of ICRI in November 2010. A Host Advisory Statement was produced on behalf of the ICRI Secretariat by the RLC on the Caribbean Regional Response to the Lionfish Invasion (www.icriforum.org/lionfish). The list of the members of the RLC is included in annex I.
4. The SPAW Workplan for 2012-2014, adopted in October 2012 by the SPAW COP7, included support to regional initiatives for prevention and mitigation of the impacts of invasive species, in particular the two species of lionfish *Pterois volitans* and *Pterois miles*. In particular, it considered supporting the development and implementation of the regional strategy for the control of lionfish to be prepared by the Regional Lionfish Committee.



Lionfish (*Pterois Volitans*)

II. Update of the progress of the invasion of the Lionfish in the Wider Caribbean Region

5. The proliferation of lionfish in the Caribbean over the last twelve years is a real and growing threat to the ecology of tropical and sub-tropical marine areas in the Wider Caribbean Region. Today, the invasion is over and the lionfish has completely invaded all the Great Caribbean, from the Greater and Lesser Antilles, to the continental countries bordering the Gulf of Mexico down to Central America and Latin America and reaching Brazil in 2014.

III. Main regional events and milestones related to management of the lionfish invasion in the Wider Caribbean Region for the period 2012-2014:



Distribution of the Lionfish in the Wider Caribbean in 2013
(http://fl.biology.usgs.gov/lionfish_progression/lionfish_progression.html)

September - December 2012: Finalization, translation and dissemination of the Manual "Invasive Lionfish, a guide to control and management"

6. The Regional Lionfish Committee contributed to a manual of best practices for the control and management of lionfish. The manual has been published in September in English. The translation of the guide into Spanish (December 2012) and French, supported by the SPAW-RAC, facilitated its use by practitioners in all Caribbean countries and territories. Finally, more than a thousand copies were distributed. The main contributors of the Manual were UNEP-CEP, the SPAW-RAC, ICRI, NOAA, REEF and GCFI.

September 2012 - December 2013: Development of the "Regional Strategy for the Control of Invasive Lionfish in the Wider Caribbean"

7. The RLC coordinated the development of the lionfish regional strategy. Following a first writing workshop supported by UNEP that was held in San Juan, Puerto Rico from 3 to 6 September 2012, RLC and Caribbean lionfish experts continued in the coming months to work on the strategy via e-mail and telephone conferences to improve and enrich the document that was completed in January 2013, then translated in Spanish in August 2013 and in French in December 2013 with SPAW RAC support to be distributed in all the Caribbean using regional and international forums (ICRI, GCFI, WECAFC). The final document is available at: <http://www.car-spaw-rac.org/?International-partners-launch-plan,474>.
8. The regional strategy is intended to allow regional understanding of the problem across social, economic and environmental sectors, provide basis for regional coordination and collaboration among relevant countries, organizations, and institutions for minimizing negative impact of the lionfish, while generating the synergies needed to establish technical and scientific cooperation among the affected countries and to help to develop local actions plans.

January 2014 - November 2014: Two regional workshops to support the development of subregional and national action plans in Central America for strategy implementation to control invasive lionfish

9. Two regional workshops under the coordination of SPAW-RAC with financial support from UNEP have been completed to support the development of subregional and national action plans for strategy implementation to control invasive lionfish in Belize, Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama and Colombia and involving 60 key representatives of those countries (authorities, academia, managers, fisheries, conservation actors, private sector).
10. The first workshop has been organized in Guatemala City in May 22-23, 2014 with local coordination and support from MARFUND (www.marfund.org) which aims to build the first draft action plan and sub-strategy for the control of the lionfish in the MesoAmerican Reef Region (Belize, Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala). A second version is under development, with the working group formed during the event to be finalized in December 2014.
11. The second workshop, similar to the first in its construction and development, has been held in Panama in June 26-27 with 30 key representatives from Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama and Colombia and with the local coordination and support of the MarViva Foundation (www.marviva.net). It also aims to start the development of a sub-strategy for the region of Colombia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama and takes into account what is currently being developed for the Mesoamerican Reef region.
12. Those events also caught the attention of local authorities and decision makers at the final press conferences, which brought together many local medias (TV and radio) with "tasting" sessions involving local restaurants. Both workshops were facilitated by Ricardo Gomez Lozano, Regional Director for the Yucatan (CONANP México and ICRI national representative) and Dr. Ruben Torres, Director of REEF CHECK in Dominican Republic, both members of the Regional Lionfish Committee and recognized as experts on this issue.
13. In addition to the actions and meetings above, the main activities developed by the RLC during the period 2012-2014 include:
 - Development and update by SPAW-RAC of a regional list of contacts including experts on marine invasive species, marine resource managers, fisheries experts, scientists, and lawyers, with the aim of exchanging experiences and information. So far the list has 280 contacts including every countries and territories in the Wider Caribbean Region; and
 - A Lionfish Web portal: under development, with support from the US Government

IV. Next steps towards Action Plans and local strategies for the Control of the Lionfish Invasion in the Wider Caribbean Region

14. The RLC will continue to work in close partnership with Caribbean governments and other stakeholders to implement many of the actions identified in this strategy and raise funds. Local government, coastal communities, NGOs and marine industries will play an important role in implementing on-ground actions to reduce lionfish impacts and enhance the resilience of reefs in the Wider Caribbean Region.
15. Also, the Strategy will be evaluated and reviewed on a regular basis to include further actions according to regional developments on this issue. These regular reviews are expected to play a key role in determining future priorities as the lionfish invasion progresses and social and policy priorities evolve.
16. A draft decision of the Parties to the Cartagena Convention is presented in Annex III for review and recommendations by SPAW STAC 6 and SPAW COP 8 before it is presented to the Sixteenth Intergovernmental Meeting on the Action Plan for the Caribbean Environment Programme (IGM16).

ANNEX I : LIST OF MEMBERS OF THE REGIONAL LIONFISH COMMITTEE

Co-chairs

Mexico

Ricardo Gomez Lozano, Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas (CONANP)

USA

Christine Dawson, Department of State

UNEP CEP

Alessandra Vanzella-Khouri, SPAW Programme Officer, UNEP/CAR-RCU

Franck Gourdin, SPAW Regional Activity Center

Anne Fontaine, SPAW Regional Activity Center

France

Jean-Philippe Marechal, Observatoire du Milieu Marin Martiniquais

Members

ICRI Secretariat

Masako Iwamoto, Assistant, Ministry of the Environment - Japan

Niphon Phongsuwan, Inspector general, Department of Marine and Coastal Resources - Thailand

Reef Check Dominican Republic

Ruben Torres

NOAA

James A. Morris, Jr.

CABI

Naitram (Bob) Ramnanan

University of the West Indies – Jamaica

Dayne St. A. Buddo

ANNEX II : COVER PAGE OF THE "REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE CONTROL OF INVASIVE LIONFISH IN THE WIDER CARIBBEAN"

**Regional Strategy
for the Control of
Invasive Lionfish
in the
Wider Caribbean**



International Coral Reef Initiative

**Estrategia Regional
para el Control del
Pez León Invasor
en el Gran Caribe**



Iniciativa Internacional sobre los Arrecifes Coralinos

**ANNEX III : DRAFT DECISION OF THE PARTIES TO THE CARTAGENA
CONVENTION WITH REGARD TO THE LIONFISH REGIONAL
STRATEGY AND NEXT STEPS**

Decision

Urging immediate Regional Coordinated Action to address Lionfish Invasion

9 December 2014

Acknowledging that the countries and territories of the western Atlantic Ocean from South America to the northern Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and southeastern United States depend on the health of coral reefs and related ecosystems as they are a primary source of food, income and are part of our culture;

Concerned that the Invasive lionfish (*Pterois miles* and *Pterois volitans*) pose a serious threat to coral reef ecosystems and associated biodiversity in the western Atlantic Ocean from South America to the northern Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and southeastern United States. Lionfish, native to the Indo-Pacific oceans, have no known native predators in the western Atlantic and Caribbean. Invasive lionfish populations can reach high densities and cause extreme disruption to native fish communities.

Recognizing that the lionfish invasion in the Caribbean region is a mounting threat to the biodiversity and ecological integrity of the region's coral reef ecosystems;

Acknowledging that identifying and implementing measures to control the lionfish invasion, while minimizing other harm to marine ecosystems, are desirable;

Acknowledging the decision taken at the 7th Conference of Parties to the SPAW Protocol in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, October 2012, to support the development and implementation of the regional strategy for the control of lionfish by the Regional Lionfish Committee;

Emphasizing the importance of collaboration and coordination with all Caribbean countries and territories, and other key stakeholders in the region;

Recognizing the important role of international and regional organizations, initiatives and networks;

The Parties urge that immediate regional action be taken to control the lionfish invasion in collaboration with relevant international and regional partners and initiatives and in particular encourage the implementation of the following actions:

1. **Consider** supporting the Regional Lionfish Committee, through active collaboration and exchanges, and promotion of the Committee in relevant fora;
2. **Promote** the use and application of the "Regional Strategy for the Control of Invasive Lionfish in the Wider Caribbean" to generate local lionfish control sub-strategies and action plans.
3. **Encourage** implementation and sharing of research and monitoring to increase knowledge, in order to generate more and better control and management actions;
4. **Raise** public awareness about the lionfish invasion across Wider Caribbean, especially in coastal communities, through outreach, education and capacity building.