

Note on the establishment of a working group on marine conservation in Central and West Africa

1. Context and justification

The marine and coastal ecosystems of Central and West Africa are home to rich biodiversity and provide services that support the economies and livelihoods of coastal communities, with more than 150 million people living in coastal areas (within 100 km of the coastline). However, they are under severe pressure. Pollution, overexploitation of resources, coastal erosion, the effects of climate change and fragmented governance are emerging as challenges, in response to which States and regional integration organisations are supporting the establishment of a mechanism for the conservation of marine biodiversity and marine and coastal ecosystems. Consisting of marine protected areas (MPAs), action plans for the conservation of threatened and/or protected species, and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) that have not yet been officially designated, this regional framework must be strengthened, on the one hand, to ensure that Central and West Africa States effectively meet their international commitments to marine biodiversity conservation and, on the other hand, to support the development of a sustainable and regenerative blue economy that primarily benefits coastal communities.

In this context, various initiatives are being implemented by IUCN, in collaboration with its members, as well as by other organizations, supported by international technical and financial partners. These include the major programs West African Sustainable Ocean Project (WASOP, in which IUCN coordinates the "Conservation and Restoration of Marine Ecosystems" component) and Sustainable Ocean and Blue Economy in Central Africa (ODEBAC, in which IUCN will lead the development of a regional strategy for MPAs and promote the emergence of a regional network of marine conservation practitioners). It is also worth noting the existence of long-standing partnerships such as the PRCM and a regional network of MPAs in West Africa (RAMPAO), which already has 49 member MPAs.

It is also worth noting the international community's recognition of the efforts made by countries in the region to promote marine conservation, as evidenced by the choice of Senegal to host the 6th International Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC6), which will be held in March 2027. Since the adoption of a dedicated resolution at the 8th World Conservation Congress in Abu Dhabi in October 2025, IMPAC has clearly emerged as the leading global event on marine biodiversity conservation (Motion 135: Recognize the International Marine Protected Areas Congress as the global marine protected areas community for effective marine biodiversity conservation). The preparation of this event will require a strong mobilization effort, in which IUCN, its members and its commissions must take part.

On a global scale, WCPA Marine is one of the main entities contributing to the advancement of science, knowledge and tools related to marine biodiversity conservation and MPA network management. However, to date, WCPA Marine has no regional branches, and it would be useful to set up a "blue" working group for the Central and West Africa region. This working group could be composed of IUCN WCPA members with experience in marine conservation and MPAs, but also members of other IUCN commissions with strong

expertise in marine and coastal issues, including the CEM (expertise in coastal resilience), CEESP (expertise in MPA co-management), CSS (expert groups on marine and coastal species conservation), etc.

Such a Blue-Central and West Africa working group could help capitalize on the region's specific experiences in marine biodiversity conservation, MPA management and coastal resilience building, and contribute to the implementation of major ongoing initiatives and the preparation of events such as IMPAC6. This note proposes an approach for its short-term implementation.

2. Objectives of the Blue-Central and West Africa working group

- **General objective** : Strengthening knowledge, governance and conservation of marine and coastal ecosystems in Central and West Africa
- **Specific objectives** :
 - Promote the inclusion of ocean, biodiversity and climate agendas in regional and national Central and West Africa policies, as well as tools developed at the global level to accelerate the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF-KM).
 - Capitalize on the experiences of countries and stakeholders in the Central and West Africa region and promote best practices and the most effective tools for MPA management, marine biodiversity conservation and coastal resilience.
 - Facilitate the mobilization of high-level expertise to support the implementation of major initiatives and the repair and organization of regional and global events related to MPAs, marine biodiversity conservation and coastal resilience.

3. Functioning principles

The group will operate through regular meetings, technical outputs (notes, fact sheets, recommendations) and thematic sub-groups based on the expertise available. It will establish a directory of blue skills for the Central and West Africa region and, where possible, encourage its members to get involved in initiatives in the region and beyond.

A coordination committee will lead the group and develop a proposed workplan based on identified opportunities and member contributions. This committee will monitor activities and produce a periodic briefing note for use by its members, commission chairs, IUCN management and vice-presidents for the region, and partners where relevant

4. Expected members' profiles

The Blue-Central and West Africa working group is established on the initiative of the WCPA, under the leadership of its regional vice-chair. Members of the Blue-Central and West Africa working group must be members of the WCPA and/or other IUCN commissions, with proven experience and strong expertise in marine conservation, MPAs and/or coastal resilience. They may come from research centers, university

laboratories, public institutions, NGOs, marine protected area managers, local communities, or regional or international technical partners. A diversity of expertise and experience is sought.

The group will seek to prioritize experts who are nationals of Central and West Africa countries and/or have proven experience working in the field of marine and coastal conservation in Central and West Africa.

As this is a working group set up on the initiative of the WCPA, its members from other IUCN commissions should be invited to become members of the WCPA.

5. Methodology for members' mobilization

Recognized experts in the field will be directly invited to express their interest in joining the group. At the same time, a mobilization questionnaire will be distributed through various channels (IUCN PACO, IUCN commissions, PRCM networks, RAMP AO, etc.) to gather the necessary information on expertise, availability, thematic interests and expectations (see section 7).

A launch workshop via videoconference will enable the group and its coordinating committee to be established, priorities to be confirmed and a preliminary work plan to be approved.

6. First elements in the perspective of a workplan

The following points are suggestions for activities in which the Blue-Central and West Africa working group and its members could become involved. However, this should be discussed and confirmed as part of a prioritized work plan.

- Contribution to preparatory thematic capitalization efforts around the key areas of IMPAC6.
- Contribution to the organization, preparation of participants and facilitation of IMPAC6.
- Contribution to relevant regional strategic studies (development of the regional MPA strategy, identification and consideration of OECMs in the regional marine conservation system, etc.).
- Support for the internalization and implementation of global agendas.
- Support for the creation of new MPAs and networking processes.
- Support for the capitalization and regional sharing of experiences developed locally by conservation practitioners and local actors.
- Contribution to training and capacity-building activities, the development of educational content and pedagogical support for the strengthening of human skills dedicated to marine conservation.

7. Mobilization questionnaire

Following questions will help structuring the members' mobilization:

- a. Name / Surname: _____
- b. Profession / initial training : _____
- c. Institution / Organization : _____
- d. Function : _____
- e. Country.ies of intervention : _____

f. Contacts : phone-whatsapp (+)

Email :

g. Field.s of expertise:

- ☐ Conservation of marine and coastal biodiversity
- ☐ Management and management efficiency of MPAs
- ☐ Legal framework applicable to MPAs
- ☐ Setting up and management of MPAs networks
- ☐ MPAs shared governance and comanagement processes
- ☐ Spatial data, database, geomatics and cartography applied to MPAs
- ☐ Restoration of coastal and marine ecosystems
- ☐ Climate change, nature-based solutions and coastal resilience
- ☐ Mobilization of local communities for marine conservation
- ☐ Environmental education and communication applied to marine and coastal ecosystems
- ☐ Scientific research applied to marine resources and biodiversity
- ☐ Fisheries management and valorization of MPAs for fisheries sustainability
- ☐ Marine spatial planning applied to conservation
- ☐ Integrated management and conservation of coastal zones
- ☐ Identification and characterization of OECMs
- ☐ Others : _____

h. Would you like to take part in technical works (reports, notes, etc.) ? ☐ yes ☐ No

i. Disponibility to participate (choose) : ☐ Regular to permanent ☐ Periodically ☐ Punctual

j. Your expectations and suggestions : _____

Transmit the form to :

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With copy to Mathieu Ducrocq : mathieuducrocq@gmail.com