



CARI'MAM stranding network survey report

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1. CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

Strandings are an underutilized source of data regarding marine mammal biology/ecology and anthropogenic impacts (pollution, bycatch, etc.) in the Wider Caribbean Region. Effective stranding networks have been developed in several countries of the region and capacity building and training workshops have been held in the region in the past. However, strandings remain poorly attended and processed in many countries and territories and regional collaboration is weak. As a consequence, the scientific and technical analysis of the 2008 Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Mammals in the Wider Caribbean region, made the following recommendations¹:

- enhance collaboration between existing stranding networks,
- enhance capacity among regional stakeholders on marine mammal stranding procedures, data/sampling collection and storage.

Additionally, at the end of 2020, several CARI'MAM members expressed a strong interest in the strengthening of the stranding networks in the Wider Caribbean Region and collaborations on that topic.

As a result, the SPAW RAC sent to CARI'MAM members a survey that was developed under the MAMACOCOSEA (Marine Mammal Conservation Corridor for Northern South America) project in 2014. The questionnaire aimed at assessing the status (organization, resources, gaps...) of stranding networks in the region. The main purpose was to identify priority actions to be implemented to support the strengthening of the local networks but also to develop regional collaboration on that topic.

A link to the questionnaire, under the form of a google form, was sent on December 9 to CARI'MAM members via the TeamWork platform and CARI'MAM WhatsApp group:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScgarKSfNluX9Scy9FH2SPJAMNCiebu5jY9RbWu4YeKHffQtg/viewform?usp=sf_link

Spanish and French speakers could complete the questionnaire in their preferred language and a translation of the questions in French and Spanish was available via the following link:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1zL5x1Z4TmX9Y9ueJ192m05Y2pSMCZFBUY2PRUI-8LiA/edit?usp=sharing>

Another message was sent on January 11 to remind those who wished to complete the questionnaire to do so before the end of January.

The questionnaire was closed at the beginning of February. The results were then formatted and briefly analyzed. They are presented below and followed **by a list of actions that SPAW-RAC and Agoa could implement in the coming years** in collaboration with CARI'MAM members.

¹SPAW-RAC. (2020). Implementation of the Action Plan for Marine Mammals in the Wider Caribbean Region: A Scientific and Technical Analysis. Authored by Vail, C. and Borobia, M. UN Environment, Caribbean Environment Programme, Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife Regional Activity Centre. 158 pp.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Respondents

Thirteen people responded to the survey: eight NGO representatives, two University/research center representatives, two Government representatives and one Veterinary doctor.

These respondents were involved in the stranding networks of 13 countries and territories: Mexico, Venezuela, Belize, Puerto Rico (US), Jamaica, Haiti, Aruba, Saba and St Eustatius (Netherlands), Saint Martin, Saint Barthelemy and Guadeloupe (France), Turks and Caicos (UK).

This sample is small but it is representative of the diversity of the Wider Caribbean Region territories, as nine nationalities were represented, including both continental (N=3) and island territories.

2. Stranding network general organization

In half of the 13 countries and territories, there is no formal and organized network; that is, no global coordinator and the use of various and/or no formal protocol and database (Table 1). This implies potential difficulties to provide quantitative information on strandings at the scale of the territories and to collect a significant number of comparable samples in order to perform analyses.

However, $\frac{3}{4}$ of the network are associated with an organization (NGO, a University or other) that could serve as a basis for the development and/or strengthening of the stranding networks in voluntary countries and territories (Figure 1).

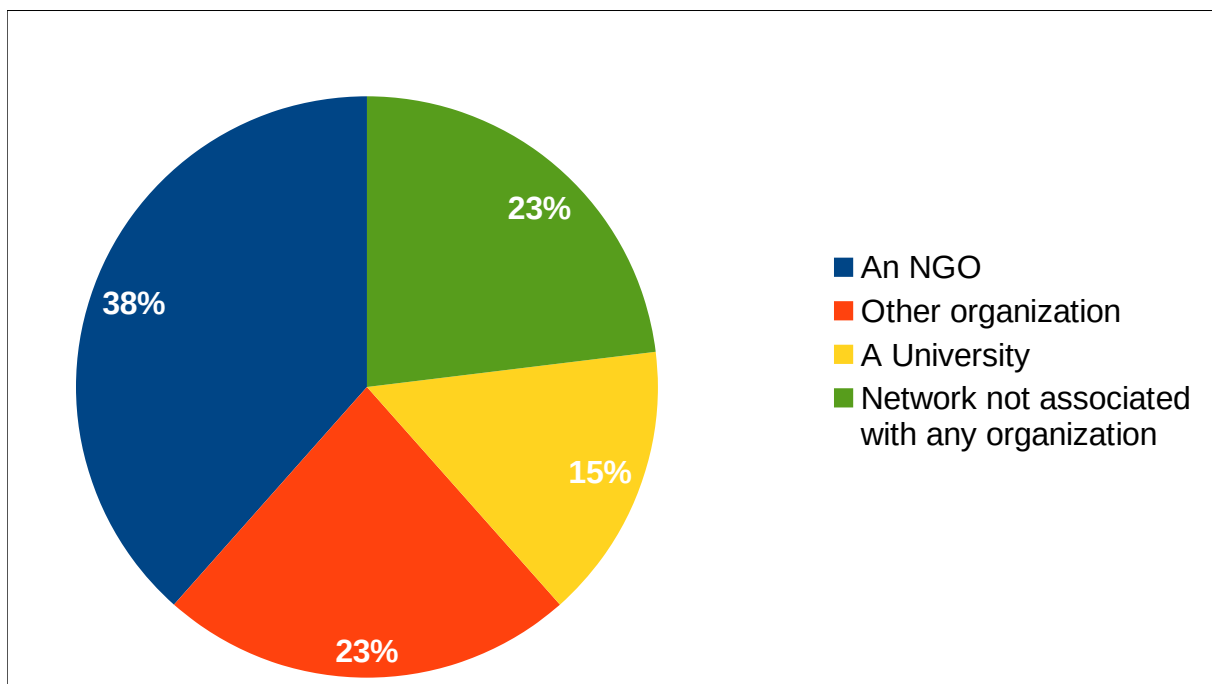


Figure 1: Answers given to the question: "Is the existing stranding network associated with:?"

Table 1: Questions related to the general organization of the stranding networks and the corresponding answers

| Question | Answer | | |
|---|-----------|---|-----------|
| | YES | NO | No answer |
| <i>Is there a formal stranding network in your territory?</i> | 54% (N=7) | 46% (n=6) NB: If no formal stranding network, most of the time, strandings are being processed but by various actors and with various protocols. | ----- |
| <i>If yes, is there a stranding network coordinator (person and/or organization) for the whole territory?</i> | 31% (N=4) | 38% (N=5) | 31% (N=4) |
| <i>Are people using the same stranding protocols in your whole territory?</i> | 46% (N=6) | 46% (N=6) | 8% (N=1) |
| <i>Do you have a database for your stranding data?</i> | 62% (N=8) | 38% (N=5) | ----- |

3. Stranding network resources

Fifty-four percent of the respondents (N=7) said they could count on staff to collect data and samples (Figure 2). Few respondents (8 to 15%) answered they had the required equipment to process strandings or to store samples. Besides, 92% (N=12) of the respondents answered it would be interesting to train more people in their territory.

Sixty-nine percent of the respondents (N=9) answered data and samples are not regularly analyzed in their territory. Two main reasons were given: lack of funds and lack of laboratory and/or research organization (Figure 3).

It seems thus important to support the networks in capacity building for stranding response and data/samples analysis. Financial support to buy equipment and supplies to handle strandings also seems relevant.

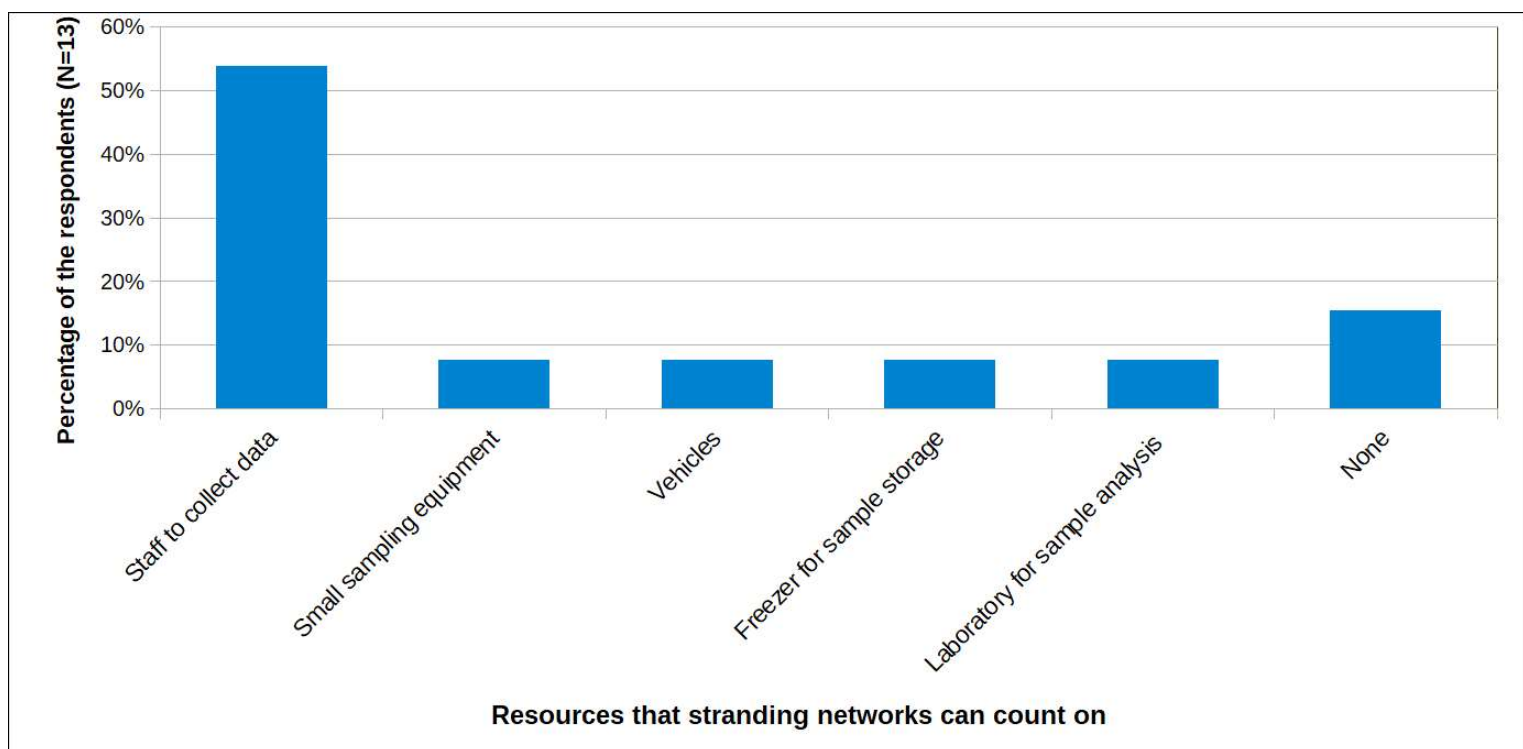


Figure 2: Answers given to the question "what resources can you count on?"

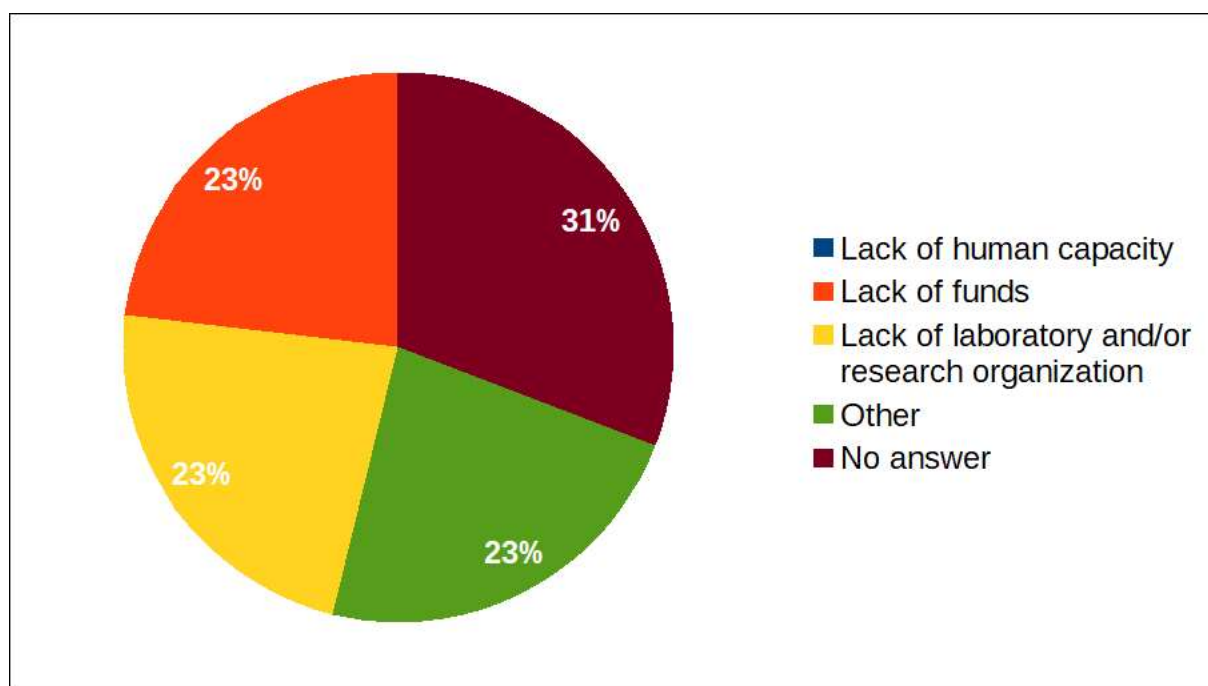


Figure 3: Answers given to the question "If data and samples are not regularly analyzed in your territory, do you know the reason why?"

4. Regional collaboration

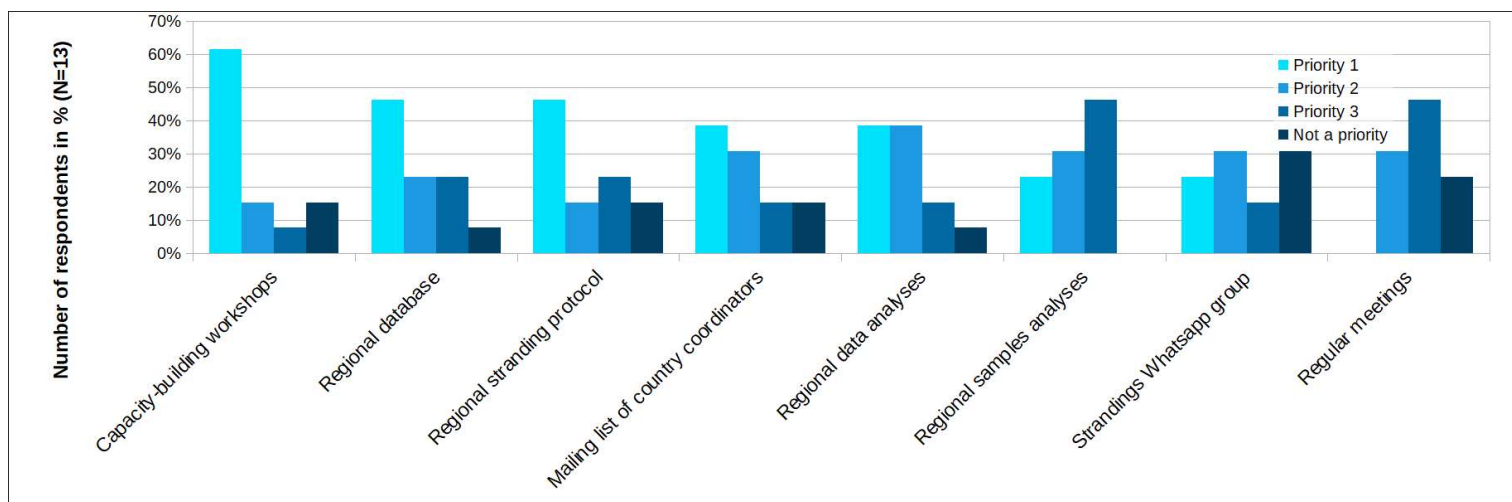


Figure 4: Answers given to the question "Regarding regional collaboration related to strandings, what achievements do you think we should be working on? "

The respondents were asked to classify by order of priority a set of actions that were proposed to strengthen regional collaboration. According to the given answers (Figure 4), the actions could be classified the following way, by decreasing order of priority:

1. Capacity-building workshop
2. Common regional database accessible via the Internet
3. Common regional stranding protocol
4. Mailing list of countries coordinators
5. Regional data analysis
6. Regional samples analysis
7. Stranding WhatsApp group
8. Regular meetings

3. ACTION PLAN

From the questionnaire results, the SPAW-RAC and Agoa propose to implement the action plan below in order to strengthen local stranding networks but also to develop regional collaborations on that topic. Most of these actions could be implemented during the last year of the CARI'MAM project (year 2021). We are currently seeking funds for actions planned afterward (years 2022 and 2023).

| Objectives | Actions to be implemented by SPAW-RAC and Agoa | Provisional agenda |
|---|--|--|
| Facilitate exchanges and collaborations between the stranding networks of the Wider Caribbean region. | Create a mailing list of country coordinators/contacts | first half of 2021 |
| Increase the number of people capable of processing strandings in their territory. | Buy some equipment and supplies for local networks | second half of 2021 |
| Ensure data and samples collected on stranded animals can be compared between organizations and territories and combined for future analyses | Organize a stranding training workshop | second half of 2021 (If sanitary conditions allow it) |
| | Provide the networks with standard tools used by other networks: guides, stranding field sheets, database... | first half of 2021 |
| Support the analysis of stranding data in each territory and at the regional level to strengthen knowledge on species and threats | Identify available data | 2021 |
| | Support the implementation of a regional analysis of stranding data | 2022-2023 |
| Support the implementation of regional studies based on samples collected on stranded animals, to strengthen knowledge on species and threats | Increase the use of the online CARI'MAM stranding metadatabase (https://www.car-spaw-rac.org/?Identify-a-stranding) | 2021 |
| | Identify available samples | 2022 |
| | Define a strategy for the analysis of these samples (main issues to be addressed, reference laboratories, cost of analysis, type and quantity of samples required...) | 2023 |