



*Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense*  
*Asociación Interamericana para la Defensa del Ambiente*

## **ICRI Member's update**

### **Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense –AIDA**

Reporting period January 2018 – October 2019

AIDA is the only regional organization in Latin America with the mission to strengthen people's ability to guarantee their individual and collective right to a healthy environment, via the development, implementation, and effective enforcement of national and international law. Our legal arguments have been used to strengthen our partners' domestic advocacy, helped us advocate at international bodies to create stronger environmental standards, increase government accountability, and promote public participation in decision-making. We build networks, publish reports, host conferences, and provide technical assistance, empowering communities and policymakers with scientific and legal information that is needed to make responsible choices.

Since 2018, AIDA is working towards the implementation of the Reef Fish Conservations Project, an initiative that seeks the legal protection and effective management of herbivorous fish and fish spawning aggregations in seven countries to ensure the conservation of coral reefs and the marine organisms they sustain. This project argues that despite the importance of these fish species, overfishing and the inadequate regulation of fisheries is threatening their survival. AIDA is supporting communications and the legal advocacy for ecosystem-based management to protect herbivorous fish and fish spawning aggregations in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Colombia, and Panama. In addition, AIDA is also working to raise awareness among national and international decision-makers and encouraging the creation of legal protections for these fish and other initiatives, to effectively manage fisheries to sustain healthy ocean habitats.

Some of our achievements include:

1. The Coral Reefs Decree for Costa Rica was signed during the World Oceans Day Celebration on June 8, 2019. This Decree includes such measures as the creation and implementation of science-based strategies and policies to confront the effects of climate change, initiatives for the restoration of degraded reefs, and the prohibition of harmful activities like the extraction and commercialization of reefs, dumping of waste, and anchoring. AIDA supported the development of the Decree providing scientific and

technical recommendations, as well as broad legal arguments to support the protection of coral reefs and herbivorous fish species. AIDA is now actively participating in the required national working group to ensure compliance.

2. AIDA developed a scientific and technical report for the Fisheries Unit in Guatemala, advocating to extend the Ministerial Decree 175-2015 and prohibit the parrotfish fisheries in Guatemala's Caribbean region. This report was developed in partnership with the NGO Healthy Reefs Initiatives and expands on the need to extend the aforementioned Decree and provide scientific data, and specific criteria to protect these key species at a national level for healthy coral reefs habitats.
3. In Colombia, CORALINA's a legally-binding Regulation No. 369 was signed on July 15, 2019. This regulation prohibits the capture and commercialization of 14 species of parrotfish, four of surgeonfish, five butterfly fish and six species of angelfish. It also prohibits commercial fishing using harpoons and/or similar fishing gears, as well as the commercialization, possession, storage, and transfer of these groups of species to other areas of the country. AIDA supported CORALINA's initiative since its inception, providing technical, scientific and legal information; and advocated for the inclusion of international and regional commitments that protect these fish.
  - In August 2019, AIDA also supported CORALINA's communications and outreach campaign in San Andres, and in coordination with the education team, visited several fishermen's committees, schools, and restaurants. AIDA also participated in a meeting with the Inter-Institutional Committee on Environmental Education, which was attended by representatives of the government, the police, and the tourism and education sectors. Compliance of Regulation No. 369 was broadly encouraged among the different stakeholders.
4. Following our participation as an observer at the Scientific Committee meeting of the SPAW Protocol, and raising awareness on the need to include different species of herbivorous fish to the Protocol, we attended the Conference of the Parties (COP10) that took place in Roatán, Honduras. In this meeting, the SPAW Protocol approved the recommendation of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) to urgently define the objectives, activities, and strategies to protect parrotfish and other herbivorous fish, species that are associated with coral reefs, seagrasses, and mangroves in the Wider Caribbean Region. This initiative will define important conservation efforts for herbivorous fish to the signatories to the SPAW Protocol, which include several countries of the Wider Caribbean Region. AIDA will enforce compliance with signatories to the SPAW Protocol.
5. At a regional level, AIDA and the Regional Director of the Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization coordinated a technical meeting with members of the Fisheries Authorities of several countries of the Central America Integration System. Participating countries included Belize, El Salvador, Nicaragua y Panamá, and all of the countries presented and discussed their current legislation for coral reefs and herbivorous

fish species, or their lack of legal tools to protect these important ecosystems and species. As a concluding remark, all countries expressed their interest and need for new in-country laws, as well as scientific data and criteria for improved management. Furthermore, the countries expressed their interest to develop a regional legal tool to harmonize herbivorous protection at a regional level. AIDA is developing a report that integrates information on current legislation in the Central American countries and will follow up the next steps with the Regional Director of the Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization.

6. Some of our communication products include:
  - A fact sheet for decision-makers and other key stakeholders. This document includes scientific data on herbivorous fish species, threats, and recommendations to protect herbivorous fish and reefs.
  - A brief, 3-minute whiteboard video that will support advocacy efforts with stakeholders and targeting widespread public audiences on the importance herbivorous fish species. We developed a [Spanish](#) and [English](#) version.
  - Webinar: “*Fish spawning aggregations and existing regulations*”.
  - [Press release](#): “*In a historic decree, Costa Rica legally protects its corals*”.
  - [Press release](#): “*Resolution provides measures to protect corals in the Colombia Caribbean*”.

### **AIDA’s General Information**

AIDA was founded in 1998, with the mission to strengthen people's ability to guarantee their individual and collective right to a healthy environment, via the development, implementation, and effective enforcement of national and international law. AIDA’s marine program in Latin America is aware of the global significance of reef ecosystems and is currently advocating for their legal protection in several countries, including the protection of herbivorous fish and other important ecosystems as mangrove forests and seagrass beds. AIDA is also supporting the development of regulations to reduce plastic pollution in our oceans.

Contact us at <https://aida-americas.org/en/contact-us>

#### ICRI’s focal points:

**Gladys Martinez**

Senior Attorney

[gmartinez@aida-americas.org](mailto:gmartinez@aida-americas.org)

**Maria Jose Gonzalez-Bernat**

Scientific Advisor

[mjgonzalezbernat@aida-americas.org](mailto:mjgonzalezbernat@aida-americas.org)