

Agoa Sanctuary: Protecting Marine Mammals in the French West Indies

Agoa Santuario : Proteger los Mamíferos Marinos en las Antillas Franceses

Sanctuaire Agoa: Conservation des Mammifères Marins aux Antilles Françaises

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

***Agoa*: A Marine Protected Area Devoted to Marine Mammal Conservation**

Over twenty species of marine mammal frequent the sanctuary's waters: toothed whales (odontoceti) like sperm whales and pantropical spotted dolphins, and baleen whales (Mysticeti) like humpback whales which come to breed and give birth in the warm Caribbean waters.

We know little about the offshore, ocean part of *Agoa* and even less about the way marine mammals live in this area. We do have a little more knowledge about parts nearer to the coast where the animals use lagoon areas, rocky slopes, and canyons in various ways. These more coastal zones are also used for maritime practices, i.e. fishing, boating, and shipping, which are sources of pressure and potential threats for the marine mammals.

Marine mammals are popular with the general public but much remains to be learned in terms of scientific knowledge. Improving knowledge is thus one of the *Agoa* sanctuary's key goals.

Human Activities and Cetaceans: Striving for Cohabitation in Harmony

- i) Shipping and boating can cause collisions.
- ii) Large-area pollution builds up along the food chain and causes a high level of contamination in cetaceans due to their position as top predators.
- iii) Observation of cetaceans can be a source of disturbance and must be done respectfully to ensure their tranquility.
- iv) Military maneuvers and submarine works generate noise disturbance, as does marine traffic to a lesser extent. This sound pollution is detrimental to cetaceans' orientation and communication and can sometimes lead to stranding.
- v) Fishing can be a source of incidental catches of small and large cetaceans, which, although not always fatal, considerably reduce the animals' capacities and vitality.
- vi) Waste can hamper the animals or be ingested (causing asphyxia, blockage, etc.).

To manage or reduce all these sources of pressure, *Agoa* develops awareness actions and federates sea stakeholder initiatives; its management board may also suggest regulatory measures.

***Agoa*'s Actions**

The *Agoa* sanctuary aims to ensure good marine mammal conservation by protecting both the mammals and their habitats from the direct or indirect, potential or proven, adverse impacts of human activities. Action is guided by five principles set out in the declaration establishing the sanctuary: protect, understand, share, inform and cooperate.

- i) Restrict negative interactions between human activities (direct or indirect, potential or known) and marine mammals and find innovative ways of limiting the impact these activities have. (Declaration § 5 & 6).
- ii) Enhance knowledge of marine mammal populations and their habitats and of potential or known human-induced pressures and threats facing these species. (Declaration § 7).
- iii) Disseminate knowledge (information, awareness-raising, education) and promote the *Agoa* sanctuary, marine mammals and the marine environment in general. (Declaration § 8).
- iv) Implement the resources required to monitor the sanctuary within the framework of pooling State resources. (Declaration § 9).
- v) Cooperate with the other States in the Caribbean and particularly with the Parties to the Cartagena Convention and its Protocol on Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA) as well as States sharing marine mammal populations, to foster the introduction of conservation and management measures that are coherent with those of the *Agoa* sanctuary. (Declaration § 12).

Dedicated Local Governance

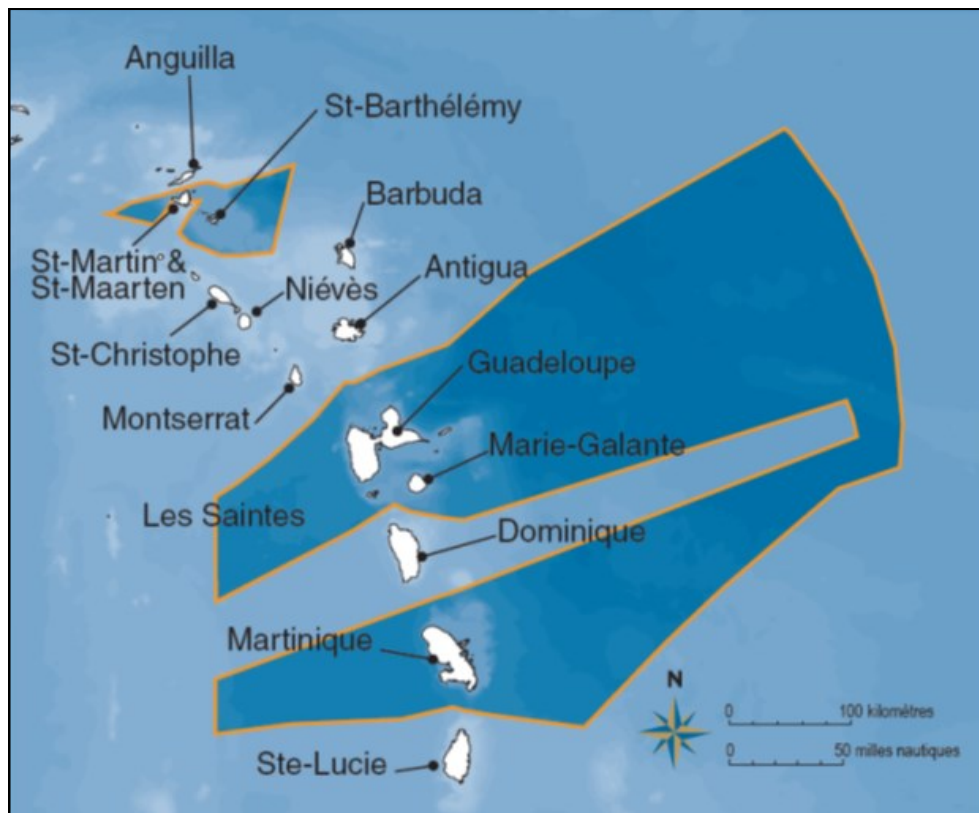
Agoa is governed by a management board which has 53 members, representing the diversity of the islands of Guadeloupe, Martinique, Saint-Martin, and Saint-Barthélemy. It consists of sea stakeholders : local officials, professional fishermen, leisure users, tourism businesses, environmental protection societies, experts and Government services.

The management board defines the sanctuary's policy: management plan, program of action, and monitoring and assessment via the dashboard implementation. It prepares proposals for the competent government authorities concerning the supervision or regulation of activities which negatively impact marine mammals.

Beyond Borders

Marine mammal conservation and management issues go beyond national geographic confines owing to the great mobility of these species and the often underestimated dimensions of their *living areas*.

A regional and international approach is thus necessary to manage any marine mammal sanctuary. From the outset, *Agoa* adopted an open approach to the way it works, to foster cooperation with existing (and future) sanctuaries in the Caribbean and with countries that share marine mammal populations. Together, we improve knowledge of the populations and facilitate the adoption of coherent, large-scale protection measures.



***Agoa*'s surface area — 143,256 km²**