



Global International Waters Assessment



Caribbean Sea/ Colombia & Venezuela, Central America & Mexico

GIWA Regional assessment 3b, 3c

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Global International Waters Assessment

Regional assessment 3b, 3c Caribbean Sea/Colombia & Venezuela, Caribbean Sea/Central America & Mexico



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Design & graphics: Joakim Palmqvist

**Global International Waters Assessment
Caribbean Sea/Colombia & Venezuela, Caribbean Sea/Central
America & Mexico, GIWA Regional assessment 3b, 3c**

Published by the University of Kalmar on behalf of
United Nations Environment Programme

© 2006 United Nations Environment Programme

ISSN 1651-940X

University of Kalmar
SE-391 82 Kalmar
Sweden

United Nations Environment Programme
PO Box 30552,
Nairobi, Kenya

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CITATIONS

When citing this report, please use:

UNEP, 2006. Isaza, C.F.A., Sierra-Correa, P.C., Bernal-Velasquez,
M., Londoño, L.M. and W. Troncoso. Caribbean Sea/Colombia
& Venezuela, Caribbean Sea/Central America & Mexico, GIWA
Regional assessment 3b, 3c. University of Kalmar, Kalmar, Sweden.

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Publishing house: Kirjastusaktiaselts MATS, Tallinn
Printed in Estonia by Tallinna Raamatutrükikoda, 2006

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Executive summary

Regional Definition

The GIWA Caribbean Sea region is part of the Wider Caribbean and includes all or parts of 28 island and mainland states – Antigua & Barbuda, Anguilla, Aruba, Belize, Bonaire, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Costa Rica, Curaçao, Colombia, Dominica, Grenada, Guatemala, Guadeloupe, Honduras, Martinique, Mexico (Quintana Roo state), Montserrat, Nicaragua, Panama, Saint Vincent & the Grenadines, Saint Kitts & Nevis, Saint Lucia, Trinidad & Tobago, Turks & Caicos, United States Virgin Islands and Venezuela. For the GIWA assessment, the region was divided into three sub-systems: the Small Islands (3a); Colombia & Venezuela (3b); and Central America & Mexico (3c). This report presents the results of the assessment of sub-systems 3b and 3c.

The Caribbean Sea is a semi-enclosed ocean basin bounded by the Lesser Antilles to the east and southeast, the Greater Antilles (Cuba, Hispaniola and Puerto Rico) to the north, and by Central America & Mexico to the west and southwest. Water flows from the Atlantic Ocean into the Caribbean Sea mostly through the Grenada, Saint Vincent, and Saint Lucia passages in the southeast, continuing westward as the Caribbean Current – the main surface water circulation in the Caribbean Sea – then out into the Gulf of Mexico via the Yucatan Channel between

ocean currents. The rivers discharging to the Caribbean Sea from the Central America & Mexico sub-system are small by comparison, though some of them, such as the San Juan River at the borders of Nicaragua and Costa Rica, are transboundary systems.

The Colombia & Venezuela (3b) and Central America & Mexico (3c) sub-systems are characterized by a wide variety of terrestrial and marine ecosystems with rich biodiversity. In the Colombia & Venezuela sub-system, most of the marine ecosystems of the tropical Western Atlantic are represented, including coral reefs, seagrass beds and mangroves. The Central America & Mexico sub-system has the second largest coral barrier reef in the world, extending along Belize's coast, as well as coastal wetlands subject to regional conservation initiatives. Its terrestrial biodiversity represents the confluence of flora and fauna from two biogeographical regions, the Nearctic of North America and the Neotropical of South and Central America, including the Caribbean.

Of the two sub-systems assessed, Colombia & Venezuela has the higher population (60.4 million), with 62% of this in Colombia. The urban population index is the highest in the Caribbean Sea region, with 75% and 87% living in urban areas in Colombia and Venezuela respectively. The inhabitants of Colombia are classified as having medium-low

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