

What is the SOCAR and how does it benefit civil society?

What's at stake?

The annual economic value of the ocean to the Wider Caribbean Region^{1,2} is estimated conservatively as **US\$407 billion**, with **US\$53 billion** of this being for the Island States and Territories. Caribbean coral reef-associated tourism is valued at **US\$7.9 billion** and fisheries at **US\$5 billion**

^{1,2} Patil et al (2016). <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/25061>; Spalding et al. 2018. <https://oceanwealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Reef-Adjacent-Tourism-Value-Caribbean-Study.pdf>

Have you noticed the torrents of brown water running down hillsides and through streets after heavy rainfall? Have you seen this runoff enter the sea, making our coastal waters murky and wondered about the harm it might be doing to the fish, corals, or to you? The ***State of the Cartagena Convention Area: An Assessment of Marine Pollution from Land-based Sources and Activities in the Wider Caribbean Region (SOCAR)***³ was conducted to determine exactly that - how pollution from land-based sources (LBS) negatively affects the region's coastal and marine environments and the human communities that depend upon them.

Data from the SOCAR show that the **Caribbean marine environment is acutely degraded by pollution from land**. The report showed that:

- **Plastic waste** is a major problem – **1.3 million tons of plastic were discharged into Caribbean waters in 2015**.
- **Poor water quality and pollution** is higher during the wet season due to increased run off of water from land, resulting in pollution hotspots near river mouths and sewer outfalls.
- **Contaminants emitted by industrial activities bioaccumulate in the marine food chain**; human hair samples from Caribbean islands show high concentrations of mercury.
- **Urgent action is needed to address the increasing threats pollution poses to human health, livelihoods, and important economic sectors**.

³ <http://gefcrew.org/carrcu/SOCAR-Final.pdf>

Key Points

- The Caribbean marine environment is acutely degraded by pollution.
- Pollution poses a significant threat to human health, the environment, and sustainable economic development.
- Controlling pollution should be the top priority for the region.
- Preventing pollution is more cost-effective than addressing its impacts.
- If left unchecked, pollution will cost billions of dollars in economic and human health losses annually.
- We need collaborative, multi-stakeholder approaches, including CSO engagement, to effectively address pollution threats.



What can civil society do to support efforts to prevent, reduce, and control marine pollution?

- **Collaborate** with others to advocate for improved national policies for pollution prevention and the ratification/ implementation of the Cartagena Convention, LBS Protocol, and other regional and global pollution-related agreements.
- **Promote** engagement of all stakeholders who may be involved in generating and/or being impacted by pollution.
- **Assist** in mobilising funding and provide support for initiatives to address marine pollution.
- **Raise awareness** of the sources and impacts of marine pollution among their members, networks, and partners.
- **Participate** in knowledge sharing on innovations to address marine pollution.
- **Engage** in citizen science for pollution monitoring and reporting.