

## **Joint Communiqué of the U.S.-Panama Environmental Affairs Council and Environmental Cooperation Commission**

PANAMA – On December 5, 2022, the United States and Panama held the third meeting of the Environmental Affairs Council (Council) under the United States-Panama Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA) and the third meeting of the Environmental Cooperation Commission (Commission) under the United States-Panama Environmental Cooperation Agreement (ECA). Parties reviewed progress to implement the Environment Chapter (Chapter 17) of the TPA and environmental cooperation matters under the ECA.

The United States delegation was led by Assistant United States Trade Representative for Environment and Natural Resources Kelly Milton and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs Jennifer Littlejohn. The Panama delegation was led by Minister of Environment Milciades Concepción.

The Council reviewed progress implementing obligations under the Environment Chapter of the TPA by exchanging information regarding recent actions each Party has taken to strengthen environmental protection and effectively enforce their respective environmental laws. The United States highlighted ongoing national efforts fighting the climate crisis, including the historic passage of the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the ratification of the Kigali Amendment, as well as efforts to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and related harmful practices. The United States also shared recent activities by the U.S. Government to enforce its environmental laws. Panama highlighted the passage of the Rights of Nature Law, which strengthens regulations on environmental protection and conservation as well as the law regulating the gradual reduction and replacement of single-use plastics. Panama also highlighted national efforts to address illegal logging, which contributed an increase from 65 to 68 percent of forest cover in recent years. In addition, Panama discussed the launch of its National Action Plan for Marine Litter 2022-2027, which aims to reduce and eliminate the sources of waste generation that threaten biodiversity and the ecosystems of Panama's coasts and seas.

The Council also received an update from the Secretariat for Environmental Enforcement Matters (SEEM) on the status of public submissions under the submissions process provided for in the Environment Chapter. The Council recognized the important role of the SEEM in promoting public participation in monitoring and ensuring effective enforcement of environmental laws, and took note that the SEEM published its first factual record for the *Barú Volcano National Park* public submission on the management and conservation of protected areas. To date, the SEEM has received six public submissions, including submissions related to the management and conservation of protected areas, access to information, and marine oil pollution.

The Commission reviewed implementation of the ECA and discussed environmental cooperation projects completed under the 2018-2022 Environmental Cooperation Work Program, including working with Indigenous Communities to combat illegal logging and associated trade and improve forest management and governance; supporting the Central

American and Dominican Republic Wildlife Enforcement Network (CAWEN) to combat wildlife trafficking and implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES); developing the Panama 2022-2027 National Marine Litter Action Plan; promoting public participation in the Environmental Impact Assessment Process; and building capacity for the sustainable management of ports and implementation and enforcement of the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL).

The Commission also approved the 2023-2026 Work Program, which includes the following priorities for environmental cooperation: tackling the climate crisis; addressing water management and drought resilience; combating wildlife trafficking and other environmental crimes, IUU fishing, and plastic pollution; promoting waste management, and air quality initiatives; strengthening environmental laws and enforcement; and advancing environmental justice in the development, implementation, and enforcement of the Parties' respective domestic laws, regulations, and policies.

Following the Council and Commission meetings, the Parties held a public session in accordance with TPA Chapter 17 and the ECA. The public session included a wide range of civil society and private sector representatives and reflects both countries' commitment to maintaining an open dialogue and strong public engagement. Public participants had the opportunity to engage directly with government officials by offering comments and asking questions about implementation of TPA Chapter 17 and the ECA. The Parties celebrated ten years since the signing of the TPA and the ECA and updated the public about their respective efforts to implement Chapter 17 and environmental cooperation under the ECA. The United States and Panama look forward to continued cooperation to strengthen environmental protection and enforcement of environmental laws and promote active participation in the environmental decision-making process.