

**Joint Communiqué of the United States-Panama Environmental Affairs Council and
Environmental Cooperation Commission**

October 3, 2018

Panama City, Panama

On October 3, 2018, the United States and Panama held the second meeting of the Environmental Affairs Council (Council) under the United States-Panama Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA) and the second meeting of the Environmental Cooperation Commission (Commission) under the United States-Panama Environmental Cooperation Agreement (ECA).

The Minister of Environment Emilio Sempris chaired the meetings for Panama. Brian Doherty, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Environment for the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, Department of State and Laura Buffo, Director for Environment and Natural Resources, Office of the United States Trade Representative, co-chaired the meetings for the United States.

The Council reviewed progress made by Panama and the United States in ensuring effective implementation of, and compliance with, the obligations in the Environment Chapter of the TPA. The Council exchanged information and views regarding efforts to enforce environmental laws and improve environmental protection, with a particular focus on wildlife trafficking, illegal logging, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

Panama presented the accomplishments so far on environmental matters like the implementation of the “*Alianza por el Millón de Hectáreas* (One Million Hectares Alliance)”; the online system for environmental evaluation and supervision PREFASIA; the establishment of the *Ecological Force* through an Executive Decree, and the joint enforcement operation coordinated with all the Governmental Security Agencies to combat illegal logging and wildlife trafficking. Panama reported that it collected a record amount in fines for environmental violations in 2018 of over \$680,000.

The United States highlighted actions taken to improve U.S. levels of environmental protection, including by implementing the Seafood Import Monitoring Program to combat illegal fishing and seafood fraud, and implementation of the END Wildlife Trafficking act to combat wildlife trafficking. The United States also reported on environmental enforcement actions taken by the United States Department of Justice, the United States Environmental Protection Agency, and other agencies which resulted in the recovery of almost \$5 billion in penalties, fines, and other payments in 2017.

The Council also officially launched the United States-Panama Secretariat for Environmental Enforcement Matters (SEEM), which will play an important role in promoting public participation in the monitoring and enforcement of environmental laws

in Panama. In addition, the Council approved the Working Procedures for the SEEM and a work plan for the upcoming year, which includes further outreach to educate the public about the SEEM's public submission mechanism.

The Commission discussed environmental cooperation projects completed under the Environmental Cooperation Work Program for 2014-2017 and the status of ongoing and upcoming environmental cooperation projects, including projects to address IUU fishing; illegal logging; wildlife trafficking; environmental management at ports; air quality; environmental impact assessment; and the adoption of cleaner production practices by micro, small, and medium-sized businesses. The Commission also approved its second Work Program for 2018-2022, which establishes the following priorities for cooperative activities: strengthening the capacity to develop, implement, and enforce environmental laws and regulations; biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of protected areas and other ecologically important ecosystems; improved private sector environmental performance and compliance with environmental laws; and environmental education, transparency, and public participation to improve environmental protection and enforcement of environmental laws.

The Parties held a public session on October 3, in accordance with the TPA Environment Chapter and the ECA, which included representatives from civil society, business, and academia. The public session reflects both countries' commitment to maintaining an open dialogue and strong public engagement. Both delegations informed the public about the implementation of the Environment Chapter and ongoing and future environmental cooperation under the ECA. The session provided an opportunity for members of the public to offer comments and ask questions about implementation of the TPA Environment Chapter and ECA.

Additional Resources

TPA Environment Chapter: <https://www.state.gov/e/oes/eqt/trade/panama/188498.htm>

United States-Panama Secretariat for Environmental Enforcement Matters:

<https://sala-seem.org/en-us/>