

# *Cuba, Seychelles to boost cooperation on environmental conservation, sustainable fishing*

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Seychelles, September 13 (RHC-Seychelles News Agency)- Cuba and Seychelles are expected to develop a cooperation program on environment conservation, natural resource management and sustainable fishing, following the recent visit of a Cuban delegation to the archipelago country in the Indian Ocean.

The Cuban delegation, which included the director of The Ocean Foundation for the Caribbean Region, Fernando Bretos and the director of the Cuban Protected Area System, Carlos Díaz, met with local partners in the areas identified for cooperation.

In statements to reporters after the meeting, the Principal Secretary for Environment in Seychelles, Alain Decommarmond, said: “environmental conservation, particularly in reference to protected areas, is a key concern for both countries and solutions could better be found when countries facing the same challenges sit down to talk.”

Decommarmond noted that both Seychelles and Cuba, as small islands states surrounded by waters, believe in protecting their marine resources and designated protected areas to ensure sustainability.

He stressed that both countries can further learn from each other by sharing knowledge on how to further protect the marine resources.

Seychelles, a group of 115 islands in the western Indian Ocean, is seen as a Blue Economy champion. The island nation has designated 26 percent of its territorial waters as marine protection areas to complete the second phase of the debt-for-conservation finance deal with The Nature Conservancy.

The director of The Ocean Foundation for the Caribbean Region, Fernando Bretos commended Seychelles for this. He said: "This is a brilliant concept that Seychelles has adopted and has the knowledge in. The concept is all about protecting the ocean and the marine resources and Cuba is all for that and is ready to learn from Seychelles on how to build the foundation."

Bretos noted that just like Seychelles, Cuba relies heavily on its coastal and marine resources as a source of income.

"Recreational fishers from the Caribbean region come to Cuba year after year to fish in the country's rich waters. The question is how to find solutions to maintain a balance to ensure that everything is being done in a sustainable manner. Seychelles is doing great so far in protecting its marine resources and we are very keen to learning from their experience," Bretos said.

Another potential area of cooperation between the two countries is sustainable tourism.

"The two countries rely heavily on tourism. One key aspect that lures visitors to the two destinations is the environment. This is another thematic area where the two countries can work together to advance further," said Decommarmond.

Tourism is the top contributor to the Seychelles' economy.

A draft for the Memorandum of Understanding between the two countries is expected to be finalized by the end of this year and signed next year when a Seychelles delegation travel to Cuba in a follow-up visit.

The visit of the Cuban delegation took place from September 1st through the 6th. They met with officers of the Seychelles National Parks Authority, the environment and tourism departments, and the Seychelles Fisheries Authority, among others.

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