The Establishment of the ACS Sargassum Sub-Commission: Toward a Coordinated and Integrative Approach to Sargassum Management in the Greater Caribbean



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1. Leveraging Regional Sargassum Management Mechanisms

From October 1 to 2, 2024, the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) represented its Member States at the 2nd EU-Caribbean Global Gateway High-Level Forum on Sargassum, held in Grenada. This forum brought attention to one of the most pressing environmental challenges facing the region: sargassum blooms. Since 2011, these blooms have been recognized as a regional crisis[1], severely affecting tourism, fisheries, public health, and marine biodiversity. Sargassum's growing presence threatens the sustainability of livelihoods, coastal communities, and ecosystems across the Greater Caribbean.

As an emerging risk linked to climate change, the sargassum phenomenon calls for a redefinition of ocean governance[2]. Several key stakeholders, including Grenada's Prime Minister Dickon Mitchell, highlighted the critical need for regional organizations to play a greater role in coordinating sargassum management efforts. In particular, the establishment of a Regional Secretariat on Sargassum[3] and a Sargassum Information Hub was advocated to centralize policy development, research, and sustainable management initiatives.

Sargassum management has been prioritized in the ACS 2022-2028 Plan of Action and recognized as an urgent issue within the framework of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). At the 27th Ordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council in May 2024, the creation and operationalization of a Sargassum Sub-Commission was approved, marking a significant advancement in addressing the sargassum

crisis at a regional level.

As part of the establishment process, the ACS has issued a formal call for nominations to the Sargassum Sub-Commission on September 26, 2024. ACS Member States have until October 25, 2024, to nominate up to two subject matter experts to serve on the Sub-Commission, furthering the Commission's mandate to foster a coordinated regional response to sargassum.

2.Coordinating Oceans Affairs: The Sargassum Sub-Commission as an Integrative Mechanism



The need for a region-wide approach to sargassum management was first identified by the Caribbean Sea Commission (CSC) during its 2015 Symposium on the Sustainability of the Caribbean Sea[4]. The symposium underscored the risks posed by sargassum and emphasized the necessity of a coherent strategy across the region. Since then, various initiatives have emerged, but achieving a fully concerted and unified response has remained a challenge.

The Caribbean Sea Commission Sargassum Sub-Commission will act as a consultative body to harmonize norms and best practices across the region, aiming to rationalize and coordinate sargassum management policies among regional stakeholders. While local task forces and collaborative forums like the Sargassum Information Hub[5] , SPAW-RAC[6] and the SARG'COOP

Cluster[7] have been established, there is a need for a unified regional policy for sargassum management.

Sargassum management practices differ widely across the region. Barbados, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic have led efforts in sargassum valorization, while territories like Martinique and Guadeloupe have focused on mitigating its public health and environmental risks. The complexity of the sargassum crisis demands a multidimensional approach that addresses environmental, economic, and social impacts in an integrated manner.

The Sargassum Sub-Commission is designed to facilitate dialogue between decision-makers, researchers, and stakeholders. It aims to align diverse perspectives on sargassum risks and opportunities, establishing a common standard for its management and international value chain development. By fostering collaboration, the Sub-Commission seeks to develop regional strategies and implement projects that mitigate sargassum's impacts on coastal ecosystems, communities, and industries throughout the Greater Caribbean.

Several key priorities have been identified for advancing an integrative approach to sargassum management. These include the development of a comprehensive regional action plan, the alignment of strategies with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Blue Economy Agenda, and advocating for international cooperation and funding. Furthermore, the Sub-Commission will assess the biological and legal status of sargassum blooms to enhance coordination among policymakers, scientists, and private stakeholders.

3. Looking Ahead

Addressing the sargassum crisis offers an opportunity to strengthen regional solidarity and cooperation. The ACS Sargassum Sub-Commission represents a crucial step toward coordinated, sustainable, and integrative sargassum management in the Greater Caribbean. With plans to become fully operational by early 2025, the Sub-Commission aims to translate regional cooperation into targeted projects that address the ecological, social, and economic impacts of sargassum while unlocking new opportunities for sustainable development.

By accelerating the implementation of innovative, sustainable solutions, the ACS Sargassum Sub-Commission will serve as a pivotal mechanism for addressing one of the region's most urgent environmental challenges. Through its work, the Sub-Commission aims to mitigate the negative impacts of sargassum blooms while fostering resilience and sustainable growth across the Greater Caribbean region.

[1] « ACS Secretary General addresses Sargasso crisis at COP28 | ACS-AEC », URL : https://acs-aec.org/index.php?q=press-center/releases/2023/acs-secretary….

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[3] « Grenada to Lead Fight against Sargassum Seaweed | IOCARIBE OF IOC UNESCO », URL :

https://iocaribe.ioc-unesco.org/en/media-gallery/videos/grenada-lead-fig….

[4] « Caribbean Sea Commission | ACS-AEC »,
URL : https://acs.sibetasite.com/en/about-us/structure-and-organisations#caribbean-sea-commission-(csc)

[5] « SARGASSUM INFORMATION HUB - Sargassum Monitoring and Forecasting in the Tropical Atlantic », URL : https://sargassumhub.org/.

[6] «SPAW-RAC », URL : https://www.car-spaw-rac.org/.

[7] « SARG'COOP CLUSTER », URL : https://sargcoop.org/en/accueil-en/