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Ninth Meeting of the Scientific and Technical
Advisory Committee (STAC) to the Protocol
Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife
(SPA) in the Wider Caribbean Region

Virtual meeting, 17–19 March 2021

REPORT OF THE STAC SARGASSUM WORKING GROUP

For reasons of public health and safety associated with COVID-19, this meeting is being convened virtually. Delegates are kindly requested to access all meeting documents electronically for download as necessary.

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ACRONYMS

ACS	Association of Caribbean States
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CARPHA	Caribbean Public Health Agency
CEP	Caribbean Environment Program
COP	Conference of Parties
GCFI	Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute
GESAMP	Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection
GPNM	Global Partnership on Nutrient Management
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IOCARIBE	UNESCO Sub-Commission for the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions
LBS	Land-Based Sources
MPA	Marine Protected Areas
RAC	Regional Activity Center
RAN	Regional Activity Network
SPA	Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife
STAC	Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
WCR	Wider Caribbean Region

REPORT OF THE STAC SARGASSUM WORKING GROUP

INTRODUCTION

1. The First Meeting of the Contracting Parties (COP) of the SPAW Protocol, Havana (24-25 September 2001), in its Decision I.7, awarded “specific mandate to the STAC for the creation of *ad hoc* Working Groups to deal with those themes that, owing to their complexity or level of specialisation, thereby require [special attention].” Four (4) such *ad hoc* working groups have been created dedicated respectively to Protected Areas, to Species, to Exemptions and the most recent one, to Sargassum. Working Groups were established by the STAC and recently reendorsed with terms of reference and specific tasks specially designed following the last STAC, in Panama, 2018. They are composed of experts designated for their acknowledged scientific and technical competence, their availability and readiness to be responsive in the group, and to cover as much as possible the geographical and thematic scope of the working group. Experts may be nominated by one or more Parties, the Secretariat including the SPAW-RAC, observers or a RAN. Once designated, they participate *intuitu personae*. The working groups are currently all chaired by the SPAW-RAC. In case consensus cannot be reached on a specific task, the chair guarantees that the diversity of opinions are dutifully reflected in the feedback and reports to the contracting parties and observers and ultimately to the STAC.

MANDATE AND COMPOSITION

2. Formally established in January 2020, the SPAW STAC *ad hoc* Working Group on Sargassum has the following tasks assigned by the Terms of Reference of the SPAW STAC *ad hoc* Working Groups (UNEP(DEPI)/CAR WG.42/INF.12):

Mandatory tasks agreed by STAC 8:

- *Task 1- Develop clear objectives and responsibilities for the Working Group*
- *Task 2 - Establish coordination and collaboration with relevant regional and global initiatives in order to promote maximum impact of synergies and solutions to the Sargassum outbreaks.*

In addition to these tasks, STAC 8 suggested to:

- *« cooperate with relevant partners to assess and merge information and best practices on managing the Sargassum influx impacting Caribbean countries” (i.e. MoC concluded with the Sargasso Sea Commission) »;*

and COP10 recommended:

- *«that the SPAW Sargassum WG also include members/experts of the LBS protocol; look into potential health risks from heavy metals and liaise with the Atomic Energy Commission and Caricom building synergies with other national and regional groups or initiatives working on this issue that working in this area.»*

3. Regarding the Sargassum issue, the biennium workplan 2019-2020 also expresses the necessity to:
 - *support protected areas and invasive species management, also considering the context of the Sargassum influx as appropriate;*
 - *and sharing general data across the region and research on Sargassum.*
4. The current Sargassum working group is composed of 18 experts, 9 nominated from 7 countries, 7 nominated from observers and IGOs, 2 from the Secretariat (LBS protocol and SPAW-RAC) (see Annex 1).

WORKS CONDUCTED DURING THE BIENNIUM 2019-2020

5. Being closely related, the work around these two tasks was carried out in parallel.

TASK 1 - Develop clear objectives and responsibilities for the Working Group

TASK 2 - Establish coordination and collaboration with relevant regional and global initiatives in order to promote maximum impact of synergies and solutions to the Sargassum outbreaks

Methodology

6. In October 2019, during the Sargassum International Conference in Guadeloupe, the creation of this Working Group has been communicated and a call for participation has been done.
7. The Working Group met remotely on 20th April 2020, and then has worked by using a dedicated collaborating online platform and by sharing documents and useful information such as meetings and webinars of interest.
8. On 26th May 2020, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Global Partnership on Nutrient Management (GPNM) in collaboration with its partners, has launched a series of webinars dedicated to Sargassum. The first one aimed to highlight key challenges, responses and collaboration of Sargassum in the context of the Caribbean and West-Africa, as well as highlight efforts of the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection (GESAMP).
9. On 4th June 2020, SPAW-RAC shared a contribution from the Secretariat of the SPAW Protocol which has drafted a work plan to improve regional coordination to effectively manage the Sargassum proliferation in the wider Caribbean. This document is supplemented by elements on sustainable financing that can be mobilized for sargassum compiled by Sabine Engel and Samantha Dowdell. Unfortunately, few contributions and additions were made.
10. Based on the observation that the Working Group was not very active and that many organizations are working on this issue throughout the Wider Caribbean Region, and to find synergies and linkages for further collaboration, several new members have joined the Working Group in November and December 2020.

Outcomes and highlights

11. The Working Group has produced and reviewed a draft work plan to improve regional coordination and gather some elements on sustainable financing that can be mobilized for managing this issue. It will continue to review relevant documents such as the UNEP CEP White Paper on Sargassum once updated.
12. The Working group has difficulties in identifying and defining its field of action and possibilities, in particular due to the large number of parallel initiatives dealing with the same subject in the region. Its strengthening with new members of other relevant organizations, will guarantee its usefulness and effectiveness, as well as a widening of its political basis.

SPAW-RAC OVERALL CONCLUSION

13. First SPAW-RAC wishes to thank the group for their dedication, commitment and work all other the period and welcome its recently nominated members.
14. Considering the experts thoughtful contributions, SPAW-RAC recommends the STAC to:
 - Request the COP to encourage further collaboration between SPAW and LBS Protocols towards a co-lead of the STAC working group
 - Request the COP to request the STAC working group to pursue the review and comment of relevant documents, such as the UNEP CEP White Paper on Sargassum, programmes and projects
 - Request the COP to request that the Secretariat and SPAW-RAC develop partnership with relevant organizations / initiatives such as GEO-BluePlanet in order to participate to the Sargassum Information Hub by compiling existing best management practices and guidelines, providing information and support to policy makers to implement regulations consistent with SPAW Protocol, SARG-Net, consolidate a common platform for sargassum, and seek West-African stakeholders and organizations to collaborate with (e.g., the Abidjan Convention), and promote their work around the Caribbean.
 - Kindly request Parties and in particular Signatory Parties to the SPAW protocol to nominate experts in order to diversify skills and expertise, and ensure the most exhaustive geographical and political representation but also as an efficient way to be involved in the SPAW implementation and better voice their needs and wishes in the SPAW protocol. This also allow the Working Group to bring real added value to regional organizations for the management of Sargassum.
 - If deemed necessary, revise the ToR and it in particular the Annex (update the current tasks of the working group).

ANNEX 1

COMPOSITION OF THE SARGASSUM WORKING GROUP

Expert name	Affiliation
Felicia Cruz	Belize
Martha Natalia Rincón Díaz	Colombia
Nacor Bolaños-Cubillos	Colombia
Lisa Sandy	Dominica
Fabien Vedie	France
Sabine Engel	Netherlands
Eric F. Salamanca	Turks and Caicos
Gonzalo Cid	USA
Samantha Dodwell	USA
Cherise Trotman	ACS
Newton Eristhee	CARPHA
Monnereau Iris	FAO/ CC4FISH
James Franks	GCFI
Peter Swarzenski	IAEA
Emily Smail	IOCARIBE
Ana-Maria Nunez	UNDP
Christopher Corbin	UNEP-CEP
Sandrine Pivard	SPAW-RAC / chair

ANNEX 2

STAC SARGASSUM WORKING GROUP WORKPLAN PROPOSAL AND SUSTAINABLE FINANCING RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

1. Based on recommendations from the Eighth Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC8) to the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA) in the wider Caribbean Region, the SPAW Regional Activity Center (SPAW-RAC) developed a draft sargassum workplan and a list of potential opportunities to foster sustainable financing.
2. Specific tasks of the sargassum working group recommended by STAC8, as expressed in the Terms of Reference of the SPAW *ad hoc* Working Groups Annex paragraph 4, are to:
 - Develop clear objectives and responsibilities for the Working Group
 - Establish coordination and collaboration with relevant regional and global initiatives in order to promote maximum impact of synergies and solutions to the sargassum outbreaks.

WORKPLAN PROPOSAL

3. Goal: Improve regional coordination to effectively manage sargassum proliferation and coastal accumulation in the wider Caribbean.

<u>Component</u>	<u>Objectives</u>	<u>Lines of Action</u>	<u>Outputs</u>
Governance	<u>Objective 1</u> Strengthen cooperation between the SPAW Protocol Sub-Programme and regional agencies coordinating implementation of relevant regional plans and initiatives addressing sargassum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinated management and efforts to control sargassum across the region • MOUs/Statements of Cooperation between CAR/RCU SPAW Sub-programme and key agencies • Coordinated strategies, plans, policies addressing Sargassum at regional level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sargassum regional coordination mechanisms supported or created. • Increase in number of countries benefiting from threat-reduction initiatives • Recognition of the proliferation and coastal accumulation of sargassum by UNEA-5
<u>Research</u>	<u>Objective 2.</u> Enhance region-wide coordinated research and identification of good practice models to address sargassum accumulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinated research among regional institutions and identification of good practice models to address sargassum • Monitoring and evaluation of regional and national sargassum proliferation. • Identified and prioritized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of research papers addressing sargassum in the wider Caribbean finding answers to gaps • Updated Sargassum White Paper, “Sargassum Outbreak in the Caribbean: Challenges,

<u>Component</u>	<u>Objectives</u>	<u>Lines of Action</u>	<u>Outputs</u>
		areas of research to find main causes of proliferation of sargassum	Opportunities and Regional Situation,” peer reviewed
<u>Management</u>	Objective 3. Promote best management practices and capacity building based on scientific evidence and traditional knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve science-based decision-making and use of local/traditional knowledge in management of sargassum • Field testing of best management practices • Capacity building activities at regional and national levels to mitigate and use sargassum • National sargassum responses integrate good-practice models across the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sargassum response guidelines completed by 2024 • One guideline with best management practices and lessons learned • 3 pilot projects at national level • 2 webinars with best practices • One online regional workshop with experts
<u>Communication and awareness</u>	Objective 4. Increase awareness, knowledge and understanding about the sargassum challenge in the wider Caribbean.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support development of website including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>sargassum early warning system in collaboration with partners</i> 2. <i>Online Discussion List in coordination with other existing fora</i> 3. <i>Best Management Practices repository</i> 4. <i>Regional Calendar of Relevant Activities</i> 5. <i>Research Papers and documents virtual Library</i> 6. <i>Distribution Map</i> 7. <i>Fact Sheets</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly Newsletter • Webinar, panels • Civil society engagement and online reporting • Database 	Identify key stakeholders and partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One website at regional level • Partnership with Universities (SFU, Texas A & M, UWI) • Active Online Discussion and Coordination among experts at regional level • At least 2 Webinars before STAC 9 • 1 fact sheet finalized • At least 1 Newsletter before STAC 9
<u>Sustainable financing resources</u>	Objective 5. Enhance access to understanding of sustainable financing resources for sargassum research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compilation of funding resources for use by Contracting Parties, other stakeholders, and CEP • Identification of regional funding gaps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One resource guide on sustainable financing options for Contracting Parties and other stakeholders • One workshop to promote

<u>Component</u>	<u>Objectives</u>	<u>Lines of Action</u>	<u>Outputs</u>
	and response by Contracting Parties, other stakeholders, and the CEP Secretariat.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination between potential donors, project implementers, and resource managers • Development of a financial sustainability plan/strategy for CEP's engagement on sargassum 	<p>coordination/exchanges between potential donors, project implementers (including researchers), and resource managers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One concept note including at least 3 of the components of a financial sustainability plan. • At least two donors identified • One budget prepared • General strategy created to achieve the goals outlined in CEP's financial sustainability plan

4. Several Points to further develop (*Highlighted by Samantha Dowdell*):

- Broaden the regional focus in the “Governance” and/or “Communication and Awareness” sections to leave room for cooperation/coordination with agencies and partners in West Africa
- How would SPAW lead the coordination effort?
- As a starting point for coordinated and prioritized research, it may be beneficial to first update/summarize what has been already done and to identify potential research gaps and needs. This could be done in partnership with GEO Blue Planet, who is working to describe research efforts for the Sargassum Information Hub.
- Develop the database and its outputs and determine why would it be separate from the website?

Additions to the sustainable financing component

5. Goals:

- Identify sustainable financing resources for managing sargassum
- Explore funding opportunities for Contracting Parties to improve research and responses on the ground. (Ex: Ireland's new SIDS Partnership strategy, including a section on sargassum management in the Caribbean)

6. Potential funding opportunities and resources could include:

- Sustainable financing session at the Guadeloupe international sargassum conference presentations by banks (BNP) for lending
- SargCoop - for the OECS (INTERREG)
- Greenclimatefund
- INTERREG - European Union program to maximize return on European Regional Development Fund investments; co-finances up to 85% of interregional cooperation project activities; supports research and innovation, SME competitiveness, low-carbon economy, and environment and resource efficiency

- *see INTERREG website for new calls for proposals (total FEDER funding available = 180 001 104,23 €) at <http://www.interreg-caraibes.fr/> or https://www.linkedin.com/posts/interreg-caraibes-a2b1b7164_fiche-pre-projet-activity-6675956292936359936-VA5r)*
- BPI-France – French agency for innovation; supports microbusinesses and SMEs
- Agence Française de Développement (AFD)
- Horizon Europe
- Global Environment Facility Small Grants Program
- Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture
- Global Programme of Action for the protection of the marine environment from land-based activities Strategy 2017-2021
- Bilateral funding agreements

Given the different status of Contracting Parties (SIDS, European, independent, territories, etc.), each option does not cover all Contracting Parties