

Concept Note

Joint Monitoring and Assessment Open Ended Working Group and Sargassum Working Group Meeting/Workshop

Trinidad and Tobago

Background:

The increasing inundations of sargassum along Caribbean coastlines poses critical environmental and socioeconomic challenges, with significant impacts on marine biodiversity, fisheries, tourism, and coastal livelihoods. While more research is needed, emerging evidence suggests a potential link between these mass inundations and rising nutrient pollution in the marine environment. Excessive inputs of nitrogen and phosphorus, largely from agricultural runoff, untreated wastewater discharge, and other human activities, drive eutrophication processes that promote harmful algal blooms (HABs) and may contribute to sargassum proliferation.

Addressing these interconnected challenges is essential within the framework of the Cartagena Convention and its SPAW and LBS Protocols. The SPAW Protocol emphasizes the conservation of species and ecosystems affected by sargassum influxes, while the LBS Protocol focuses on reducing land-based sources of nutrient pollution. In 2021, at the 5th LBS COP and the 16 Cartagena Convention COP, Contracting Parties adopted the Regional Nutrients Pollution Reduction Strategy and Action Plan (RNPSAP).

Further in 2023, to promote integration between the AMEP and SPAW sub-programmes, the following decisions were adopted:

Decision 1 of the 6 LBS COP: “**Encourage** continued integration of the AMEP and SPAW sub-programmes in the implementation of the 2023-2024 work plan and budget including on strengthening linkages on issues such as Nutrient pollution and its impacts on Sargassum and Marine Biodiversity, as well as between the LBS Protocol and the work of all the Regional Activity Centres (RACs) of the Cartagena Convention. “

Decision V of the 12 SPAW COP: “**Request** the Secretariat and the RACs to strengthen the integration between the AMEP and SPAW sub-programmes in the 2023-2024 biennium, including integration of thematic linkages on issues such as eutrophication, Sargassum inundation, and the impacts of nutrient pollution on marine biodiversity, as well as coordination between RACs and RANs and cross-representation of experts between Working Groups, as appropriate, and in accordance with the relevant Terms of Reference.”

Strengthening coordinated actions under these frameworks provides the tools and mechanisms needed to mitigate nutrient enrichment, manage sargassum influxes, and enhance the resilience of marine and coastal ecosystems across the region.

To ensure an integrated approach, a joint, in-person meeting between the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) of the LBS Protocol and the SPAW Sargassum Working Group is proposed. Such a meeting would facilitate the exchange of knowledge, foster collaboration, and align strategies between the two groups to address nutrient pollution and sargassum events more effectively. This proposal supports decisions made by the Cartagena Convention COPs, urging Contracting Parties to strengthen collaboration on sargassum inundation issues and enhance synergies between the SPAW and LBS Protocols.

Meeting Objectives:

- Provide an overview of the issue surrounding the Sargassum inundations in the Wider Caribbean Region and the potential link between these mass inundations and rising nutrient pollution in the marine environment.
- Identify data gaps and needs, as well as opportunities for improved data collection and analysis
- Respond to the decisions of the LBS and SPAW COPs for greater integration between the AMEP and SPAW Sub programmes, including the regional activity centers (RACs).
- Identify potential joint activities for the Monitoring and Assessment OEWG and the SPAW Sargassum Working Groups for inclusion in the Sargassum Working Group's Action Plan and the Monitoring and Assessment OEWG work plan.
- Outline potential recommendations to be considered at the LBS and SPAW Scientific Technical Advisory Committees.

Proposed dates:

18 – 20 March, 2025

Participants:

The Workshop/Meeting participants will include the following:

- Members of the Sargassum Working Group
- Members of the Open-Ended Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment, specifically members of the Nutrients and Wastewater Sub-group and members of the Emerging issue Sargassum Thematic Subgroup.

- Partners such as the OECS Commission, CRFM, EU
- Observers (REMARCO, PROCARIBE+ PCU)

#	Time	Item	Presenter
1	9:00 –9:10	Welcome and Meeting/Workshop Objectives	CCS
2	9:10 – 9:30	Introduction of participants	Participants
3	9:30 – 9:50	Overview of the biology, life cycle and distribution of Sargassum	
4	9:50 –10:30	Overview of the Sargassum bloom in the Wider Caribbean Region <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Timeline - Potential causes – <i>increase nutrient flows, warmer ocean surface waters, changing ocean currents</i> - Impacts – <i>social, economic and environmental</i> 	
	10:30-10:45	BREAK	
5	10:45 –11:10	Opportunities for controlling the Sargassum blooms in the wider Caribbean Region	
6	11:10 –11:35	National Perspective – Threats, Impacts, Opportunities of Sargassum	
7	11:35–12:30	Overview of activities by the Sargassum working group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation of the survey results conducted by the SPAW Sargassum Working Group among Contracting Parties, focusing on the effects of sargassum and its impact on the fulfillment of obligations under the Cartagena Convention and its protocols - Presentation on the draft Sargassum Working Group Action Plan 	SPAW-RAC
	12:30– 13:30	LUNCH	
8	13:30-14:20	Overview of activities related to Sargassum by the LBS OEWG <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nutrients reduction strategy and action plan - Regional Criteria and Standards for N and P Loads in Domestic Wastewater Discharges 	LBS RACs
9	14:20 –14:40	Questions from Working Group presentations	

10	14:40-15:50	Presentations from countries, partners and observers on existing programmes and initiatives addressing Sargassum or nutrient reduction	
		END OF DAY 1	
		DAY 2	
11	9:00-9:15	Review of Day 1	
12	9:15-9:45	Experiences from other Regional Seas Programmes	
13	9:45 -10:30	Break out group on specific topics related to the draft Sargassum Working Group Action Plan	
	10:30- 10:45	BREAK	
14	10:45-11:45	Discussion on potential collaborative actions and its inclusion in the updated SPAW Sargassum Working Group Action Plan (break out groups)	
15	11:45-12:30	Report back to plenary	
	12:30 -13:30	LUNCH	
16	13:30 -14:30	Opportunities for improved data collection and analysis to contribute to CCS data platform and the State of Convention reports (break out groups)	
17	14:30-15-10	Report back to plenary	
	15:10 -15:25	BREAK	
18	15:25 -15:50	Review of outputs and recommendations from Working Group Consultancy	
		END OF DAY 2	
		DAY 3	
19	9:00 -9:15	Review of Day 2	
20	9:15 -10:30	Towards the development of a joint LBS OWEG and Sargassum WG chapter for the next integrated State of Convention Area Report	
	10:30-10:45	BREAK	
21	10:45 -12:30	Proposal of recommendations to be considered and/or endorsed at the LBS and SPAW Scientific Technical Advisory Committees	
22	12:30 -12:50	Way Forward and Next Steps	
23	12:50-13:00	Meeting/workshop closure	
		END OF DAY 3	