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Proposal for a Cartagena Convention Established Working Group on Sargassum

For reasons of economy and the environment, Delegates are kindly requested to bring their copies of the Working and Information documents to the Meeting, and not to request additional copies.

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Proposal for a Cartagena Convention Established Working Group on Sargassum

1. Background and Rationale

Sargassum inundations continue to pose significant ecological, social, and economic challenges for the Wider Caribbean Region. Contracting Parties to the Cartagena Convention have repeatedly recognized the importance of enhancing regional cooperation to address this complex transboundary issue.

During discussions under the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols, including SPAW Sargassum Working Group (WGs) meetings, the joint session of the Sargassum WG and the Open-Ended Working Group on Monitoring and Evaluation, and SPAW STAC11 and LBS STAC7 Parties highlighted the potential value of establishing a Convention-level mechanism to facilitate coordination, avoid duplication, and ensure alignment of sargassum-related efforts across relevant regional and global initiatives. This would also provide an important cross-Protocol opportunity, linking nutrient pollution concerns under the LBS Protocol with impacts on coastal and marine biodiversity addressed under the SPAW Protocol.

In particular, Parties noted the relevance of ongoing and planned projects, and emphasized the value of embedding sargassum management within the institutional architecture of the Cartagena Convention to guarantee sustained support, visibility, and oversight.

2. Process for Establishment

In line with Recommendation V.4 of SPAW STAC11. *The Secretariat provides additional information regarding how a Convention-level working group on Sargassum could operate, including how it could be tasked and how any products it may develop could be considered by the governing bodies of the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols*, it is proposed that modalities for a Convention-level Working Group on Sargassum be considered at the COPs of both the SPAW (COP13) and LBS (COP7) Protocols, with the understanding that final approval of the proposal — including its mandate and tasks — will rest with the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Cartagena Convention (COP18).

If endorsed by Contracting Parties, it is recommended that the WG agree on the Chair and Vice Chair during its first meeting and define its Terms of Reference (ToRs), outlining its scope, mandate and modus operandi, within the first six months of the WG's operation. This approach ensures transparency, inclusiveness, and alignment with established Convention procedures. In defining the TORs, Working Group members should consider the following outlined in the sections below.

3. Mandate and Functions

The Working Group could:

1. Provide technical guidance for the implementation of the Cartagena Convention Sargassum Action Plan (subject to endorsement by the Contracting Parties).
2. Facilitate the exchange of best practices and knowledge, including innovative monitoring, management, and valorization approaches.
3. Promote alignment and synergies with related initiatives and institutions, including CAF Sargassum Initiative, GEO Blue Planet, IOCARIBE/UNESCO, the EU Sargassum Information Hub, and national programmes.
4. Develop technical products — assessments, guidelines, and recommendations — for consideration by the governing bodies of the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols.
5. Consider the link between Sargassum inundation, eutrophication and the management of nutrients.
6. Support resource mobilization efforts by identifying collaborative opportunities and partnerships.

The outputs of the Working Group would first be presented to the relevant STAC(s), then forwarded for consideration and potential adoption by the respective COPs and, as appropriate, by the Cartagena Convention COP.

4. Proposed Structure and Membership

- **Chair and Vice Chair:** Contracting Parties to the Cartagena Convention, not limited to a specific Protocol, ensuring equitable representation.
- **Secretariat Support:** The SPAW Regional Activity Centre (SPAW-RAC), in close collaboration with the Secretariat of the Cartagena Convention, drawing on its prior experience in coordinating the SPAW Sargassum Working Group. Alternatively, this role could be shared with, or led by, other Regional Activity Centres (RACs) depending on the scope of tasks and expertise required.
- **Membership:** Open to all Contracting Parties to the Cartagena Convention, with the possibility for Parties to nominate national experts in relevant fields (monitoring, management, socio-economic impacts).

- **Observers:** Regional organizations, scientific institutions, NGOs, and other stakeholders may be invited to contribute, subject to agreement by the Contracting Parties.

5. Mode of Work

The Working Group would operate primarily through virtual meetings and electronic correspondence, minimizing costs while ensuring continuity. In-person meetings may be convened subject to available resources.

Key features:

- Virtual meetings at least once every two months, with ad hoc sessions as needed.
- The working language of the group will be English, with multilingual support (subject to the availability of funds) for interpretation during meetings and for translation of key technical documents into Spanish and French.
- Collaborative drafting of outputs, circulated to all Parties for review.
- Recommendations adopted by consensus, with divergent views recorded if consensus cannot be reached.

6. Conclusion

The establishment of a Convention-level Working Group on Sargassum offers a unique opportunity to consolidate regional efforts, leverage existing expertise, and ensure coordinated and effective responses to one of the most pressing environmental challenges in the Wider Caribbean Region.

By embedding this Working Group within the governance framework of the Cartagena Convention, Parties will ensure ownership, sustainability, and coherence with broader regional and global processes, while providing targeted support to the individual countries or subregions most affected by sargassum inundations.