



GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA

The Cabinet Office

Department of Communication and Information

PRESS RELEASE

March 11th, 2014

CONTACT

Helen Jardine

Ph: 294-2795

hajardine@gov.bm

Governments Come Together to Conserve the Sargasso Sea

In Bermuda today (March 11th 2014) representatives from the governments of 11 countries and territories from around the Sargasso Sea and Europe met to reaffirm their support for an initiative, led by the Government of Bermuda, to collaborate for the conservation of the Sargasso Sea ecosystem.

The governments of Bermuda, the Azores, Monaco, United Kingdom and the United States signed the “Hamilton Declaration on Collaboration for the Conservation of the Sargasso Sea” which is a non-binding political statement that indicates signatories’ interest in voluntarily collaborating on efforts to conserve the Sargasso Sea - a vast patch of ocean named for a type of free-floating seaweed called Sargassum.*

Additionally, representatives of the governments of Sweden, Turks and Caicos Islands, British Virgin Islands, the Netherlands, Bahamas, and South Africa attended to speak in support of the initiative, as did representatives from the Secretariats of five international organizations: the Oslo and Paris Commission (OSPAR) from the neighboring North-East Atlantic region, the International Seabed Authority, the Inter-American Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Sea Turtles, the Convention on Migratory Species and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The Sargasso Sea Alliance (SSA), founded in 2010 and led by the Government of Bermuda, aims to seek protection measures for this unique high seas, open ocean ecosystem through the bodies which already have regulatory authority for areas beyond national jurisdiction – such as the International Seabed Authority, International Maritime Organization, the regional fisheries bodies and the Convention on Migratory Species.

Bermuda’s Premier the Hon. Craig Cannonier JP MP said at the Conference today: “As you may know, Bermuda is the only landmass in the middle of the Sargasso Sea. We see it as our responsibility to lead the stewardship of this unique marine ecosystem and to request the support and assistance of the international community in this task.

“Additionally, I want to publicly state that the signing of this historic document will allow the stewardship of the Bermuda Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) to remain solely under the control and management authority of the Government of Bermuda. We are committed to a high level of sustainable management of the resources of the EEZ and we have an impressive history to prove it.”

The Signatories – which may later be joined by other signing governments – will set up a regular Meeting of Signatories and establish a Sargasso Sea Commission to exercise a stewardship role for the Sargasso Sea and keep its health, productivity and resilience under continual review.

The Commission will be composed of distinguished scientists and other persons of international repute committed to the conservation of high seas ecosystems. The Government of Bermuda, in consultation with the Signatories and Collaborating Partners, will select qualified individuals to serve on the Commission. Commissioners will be unpaid and will serve in a largely virtual setting.

The Sargassum mats are home to many endemic species and provide a protective ‘nursery’ for juvenile fish and turtles. Over 150 invertebrate species live on, or in association with, the Sargassum.

The Hamilton Declaration defines the Sargasso Sea ecosystem to include international waters or areas beyond national jurisdiction, but the Bermuda Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) will remain under the sovereignty and management authority of the Government of Bermuda.

Bermuda’s Minister of Environment and Health the Hon. Trevor Moniz JP MP said: “As the lead government of the Sargasso Sea Alliance since 2010, Bermuda is proud to be part of this collaboration of individuals and countries who all share a vision of protecting the unique and vulnerable ocean ecosystem of the Sargasso Sea.

“The Sargasso Sea supports a range of endemic species and plays a critical role in supporting the life cycle of a number of threatened and endangered species.

“The opportunity to recognize the importance of the Sargasso Sea and to develop and implement procedures to protect this iconic region and the wider High Seas should be taken before it is too late. The initiative we are embarking upon today may be capable of replication in other high seas areas, and Bermuda is proud to be in a leadership role to that end. It is my hope that through our experience we can share lessons learned with others who may be exploring similar work globally.”

“This is a truly historic occasion,” remarked Dr. David Freestone, Executive Director of the SSA. “This is the first time an international alliance has been formed to develop protection measures for an iconic high seas ecosystem, using existing international law frameworks.”

It should be noted that the meeting was entirely financed by the Sargasso Sea Alliance.

* The Sargasso Sea is a region in the gyre in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean. It is bounded on the west by the Gulf Stream; on the north, by the North Atlantic Current; on the east, by the Canary Current; and on the south, by the North Atlantic Equatorial Current. This system of ocean currents forms the North Atlantic Gyre. The Sargasso Sea is 1,100 km wide and 3,200 km long (700 statute miles wide and 2,000 statute miles long). It stretches from roughly 70 degrees west to 40 degrees west, and from 20 degrees north to 35 degrees north. Bermuda is near the western fringes of the sea.