

Many coasts one Sea - Why the Caribbean and its Sea Should Celebrate this World Oceans Day



Every year throughout the month of June, the world celebrates the Earth's Oceans. Within this month, June 8th is specially designated as World Oceans Day. World Oceans Day is an annual celebration which is intended to help all of us better understand and appreciate the big blue "blanket" which covers over 70% of our planet. While we in the Caribbean have many reasons to celebrate this World Oceans Day, we also have many reasons to better understand our sea, as it faces the challenges of climate change and sea level rise.

Within the Greater Caribbean region, the Caribbean Sea holds a special significance as a geographic, economic, historical, cultural and importantly, environmental connector. While the Indigenous peoples, English, Spanish, Dutch and French colonists had little in common, they all recognised the importance of the sea, coastal towns and cities for transportation and commerce, the only way to traverse a region of volcanic mountains and impenetrable jungle.

The Caribbean Sea and its surrounding coasts are crucial to our trade, transportation, tourism, food and our very identity. What once started as Amerindian coastal camps, and then colonial ports for export remain today as capitals, ports, resorts, industrial and resource-processing facilities, and other critical infrastructure.

Let us understand the importance of the Caribbean Sea in numbers;

It is estimated that 53% of Caribbean Peoples live within 100 kilometres of the Caribbean Sea while 43% within 10 kilometres of the Caribbean Sea.

90% of the Caribbean Sea is enclosed by continental or island landmasses. From The Yucatan of Mexico, down Central America and across Northern South America, up the Lesser and Greater Antilles, only narrow passages connect the Caribbean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico.

The Caribbean Sea accounts for 14% - 27% of the Global Ocean Economy (valued at \$407 billion USD). This includes tourism, oil & gas, transportation, and environmental Services.[1]

Research shows that 22 of 25 ACS Member States have more ocean area than land area. This means that some countries are not, by definition small islands, but in fact 'big ocean' states.

At 2.754 M Km² in Area, the Caribbean Sea accounts for less than 1% of the global ocean area. Yet it accounts for 10% of the world's coral reefs.

These fascinating facts are but a few reasons that the Association of Caribbean States works through its Caribbean Sea Commission to preserve this unique and special area.

Why is it Necessary to have a Caribbean Sea Commission?

The Caribbean Sea is a shared resource and therefore the actions and management decisions of one state can impact and influence outcomes in neighboring states. While initially this may seem like a challenge, it can in fact be an opportunity.

Our problems are not unique, but in fact shared. The Sargassum Seaweed which is clogging the beaches of Jamaica's north coast is the same Seaweed preventing tourists from sea-bathing in Tobago. Coastal erosion and sea level rise threatens all of our coastal capitals and port cities. A lionfish that starts its life in the middle of the Caribbean Sea poses equal a threat to Haiti as it does to Panama.

With shared problems we can seek shared solutions.

Recognising this opportunity and the Caribbean Sea as our invaluable common patrimony, the ACS created the CSC in 2006. The CSC was created with the objective of promoting and contributing to the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea for present and future generations.

How does the CSC work?

Through regional consultation at the ACS, the CSC works with Member States to conduct multilateral and triangular cooperation. One of the CSC's long term initiatives has been its advocacy work for the recognition of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development at the United Nations. The CSC also implements marine-focused projects which seek to improve the coordination between and collaboration amongst the region's scientists and governments.

Its current flagship Sandy Shorelines project is being coordinated with the Cuban Ministry of Science and Technology, and the Republic of Korea. The project acknowledges that Climate Change and its associated effects, such as sea level rise and coastal erosion, are placing the Caribbean's coastlines at risk. The Sandy Shorelines project focuses on examining how coastal erosion dynamics change with the additional Climate Change effects which are currently being faced by ACS Member States and which will only worsen.

Over the next three years, the Sandy Shorelines project will equip, train and provide expert technical advice to ACS Member States in cutting-edge erosion-monitoring and beach rehabilitation techniques.

In May of this year, the Korean Institute of Ocean Science and Technology (KIOST) invited a delegation of eight ACS scientists and officials to Busan, South Korea for the 15th International Coastal Symposium. There, scientists were introduced to the latest advancements in coastal and ocean science, technology, monitoring and modeling techniques. The team also made a special study

visit to the KIOST East Sea Research Institute facility.

The Sandy Shorelines project is supported by a US\$ 4 million grant agreement with the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), with additional financial support from the Republic of Turkey and the Kingdom of the Netherlands. It is a step in the right direction toward preserving and protecting the Caribbean Sea.

On the celebration of another World Oceans Day, the ACS and its CSC echo international calls to find solutions for healthy oceans and by extension, a healthy Caribbean Sea. Indeed the Caribbean Sea has a special place amongst the many threads that connect the Caribbean's peoples and environment, all the more reason to celebrate it this month and throughout the year in collaborative and coordinated action, small and large, for the benefit of our common patrimony.

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[1] <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/278611473448567594/pdf/AUS1634...>