

Towards the Sustainability of the Caribbean Sea through Dialogue and Cooperation



Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, November 24th 2015- The Greater Caribbean Region's reliance on the Caribbean Sea to derive social, economic, cultural, climatic, aesthetic and other benefits has also been the catalyst for the development of a number of debilitating phenomena on the sustainability of the marine environment. Compounded by natural phenomena such as climate change, threats to the viability of the Caribbean Sea have increased.

In an effort to address the pertinent issues impacting the Caribbean Sea, share experiences and consider possible strategies for concerted action in the preservation of this shared patrimony, the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) through the Caribbean Sea Commission (CSC) convened a two day Symposium titled "Challenges, Dialogue and Cooperation towards the Sustainability of the Caribbean Sea" from 23rd-24th November 2015 in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago.

This Meeting welcomed high level participation from His Excellency Lener Renauld, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Worship of Haiti; His Excellency Andrés Navarro, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Dominican Republic; Mr Cesar Dargam Espaillat, Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Economic Affairs and Business of the Dominican Republic; Mr Radhamés Martínez Aponte, Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Tourism; Mr Valdrack L. Jaentschke, Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nicaragua, and Ms Frances Seignoret, Acting Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago.

The CSC Symposium provided an environment whereby key issues impacting the Caribbean Sea can be discussed and specific strategies to address these concerns can be developed. Experts presented on the following themes: the threat of Sargassum Seaweed; the erosion of coastal zones, and invasive species such as the lionfish. Expert presentations were followed by detailed discussion with

policymakers and country nominated experts on how best to address these issues.

As it relates to the issue of Sargassum Seaweed and its impacts on human life, endangered species, coastal eco systems and on the economies of the Greater Caribbean Region, Dr Hazel Oxenford and Dr Norma Patricia Muñoz Sevilla, experts in the field, provided recommendations on how to manage the seaweed which has increased to epidemic proportions in the Caribbean Sea.

Explaining that the threat of Sargassum Seaweed is a regional issue that needs a regional response, Dr Oxenford underscored the following; the need for regional collaboration for research and the importance of regional communication for response and learning. Dr Oxenford also suggested the development of a regional research fund, collaboration mechanisms among research institutions and facilitation of regionally relevant research in a more efficient and rapid way.

Reiterating the urgency to find concrete and practical solutions to the risks that Sargassum Seaweed poses, Dr Muñoz also called for further studies and increased collaborations.

With regards to the examination of the erosion of coastal zones and mitigation alternatives, Dr José Luis Juanes Marti proposed a national programme for beach recovery, developing models and inventory to analyse and forecast beach profiles as well as establishing a consultant group for quick action. Contributing further recommendations to treat with coastal erosion, Dr Constanza Ricaurte Villota prioritised capacity development and research in monitoring coastal management.

Presenting on the issue of the invasion of the Lionfish, Engineer Jacklyn Rivera Wong and Dr Dayne Buddo, experts in the field, provided recommendations on how reduce the levels of lionfish in the Caribbean waters. Engineer Jacklyn Rivera Wong emphasised that the invasion of the lion fish has a very tangible impact on local ecosystems and also affects the fishing industry worldwide as well as food security and quality of life. To control the proliferation of the lion fish, Engineer Wong stressed that countries commit to work together to identify the problems at hand and prioritise actions to be taken. She further encouraged the exchange of information and the importance of recruiting the help of other departments and associations which may contribute positively to the issue at hand. Dr Buddo suggested that the private sector should get involved in order to increase visibility on this issue. He further added that prevention, early detection and rapid response, management and control of this species are crucial as the environmental impact is significant and more costly.

The Symposium received participation from international bodies, experts, academics, investigators and institutional donors such as the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem, Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism, Institute of Marine Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago, International Maritime Organization, Oceans Governance Unit OECS Commission, Organization of American States, SPAW Regional Activity Center Guadeloupe, United Nations Development Programme, Regional Activity Centre for SPAW, United Nations Environmental Programme.

A clear outcome of the symposium was the need for coordinated action to address these threats which are regional in origin and impact, a role the CSC aims to fulfil. The CSC endeavours to present the results and recommendations of this symposium to the ACS Ministerial Council. By acting as the science policy interface, promoting cooperation, and as a coordinating entity, the CSC hopes to promote ecosystem based management of the Caribbean Sea for improved environmental outcomes.