

Draft Joint Declaration by States and International organizations supporting
the French International Initiative
to combat sargassum

« Combating together the toxic effects of massive sargassum landings in the Caribbean and beyond »

Courtesy translation

Since 2011, massive landings of sargassum from the Atlantic have been affecting the exposed coasts of the Caribbean, with worrying effects on people's health, tourism and economic activities, as well as coastal biodiversity. As the seaweed decomposes, it produces around thirty gases, including ammonia and hydrogen sulphide, and carries hazardous substances such as arsenic. In addition, large-scale 'reservoirs' of sargassum are forming at the mouths of the Mississippi, Amazon and Congo rivers.

The proliferation of sargassum is being exacerbated by global warming, which is causing temperatures in the oceans to rise, and by the accumulation of nutrients in rivers. This phenomenon, which is constantly expanding, could reach all neighbouring coasts and affect us all.

Several initiatives have already been taken in response to this challenge. Following on from the international conference organised in Guadeloupe in 2019, France is proposing, in close coordination with the Guadeloupe Region, to launch an International Initiative to Combat Mass Sargassum Landing. The aim is to mobilise regional and international efforts to deal effectively with this phenomenon.

The problem of sargassum is clearly and increasingly affecting the populations of the Greater Caribbean, but it is also an Atlantic and African issue on which we must mobilise as part of the wider international fight against toxic algae resulting from the changes affecting our environment.

This is why Costa Rica, the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic have decided to lend their support to this initiative launched by France.

1° We, the Ministers of the States and representatives of the international organisations supporting the International Sargassum Initiative, recognise the disastrous effects of this phenomenon on our coastal ecosystems, our rivers, our economies and human health. In particular, we recognise the damaging impact on agriculture, tourism and fisheries in the region, as well as on freshwater sources, groundwater and coastlines.

2° We undertake to do our utmost to ensure that the sargassum issue is fully integrated into the negotiations on global warming, the preservation of biodiversity and the oceans. We will bring together Ministers and representatives of the Initiative on a regular basis, during high-level environmental meetings, to make the issue more visible and to raise the awareness of the international community.

Our aim will be, in particular, to include this issue on one of the high-level panels of the United Nations Conference on the Oceans to be held in Nice in June 2025.

3° We call on all States concerned by the massive sargassum landing on their coasts to take effective, ambitious and science-based measures to prevent and remedy this phenomenon. This initiative should make it possible to develop an action plan incorporating a legal definition of sargassum in international law, increased coordination of basic and applied research into the phenomenon, exchanges of best practice in the detection, collection, processing and storage of sargassum, as well as economic and ecological recovery, and finally a dialogue on the issue of reservoirs.

Given the growing scale of the phenomenon, the International Initiative will aim to strengthen cooperation at the highest level on environmental issues and the protection of natural environments, the response capacity of the territories concerned and scientific research, and to improve public awareness and information. The protection of populations will be central to the initiative, through the implementation of detection systems and the pooling of health information.

4° We call for the strengthening of regional cooperation in the relevant organisations, in particular within the Cartagena Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region, which could adopt an action plan on this subject in 2025, and also within the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission's Sub-Commission for the Caribbean and Adjacent Region (IOCARIBE), while taking into account already existing initiatives. Enhanced cooperation at regional level could include capacity building and the mobilisation and the pooling of resources for the prevention, treatment and recovery of sargassum seaweed.

5° We recognise the role played by the SARG'COOP project, financed by European territorial cooperation (Interreg) and led by the Guadeloupe Region, which is a crucial instrument for fostering the necessary cooperation between all stakeholders in the region, including civil society and businesses, in the fight against the phenomenon of Sargassum seaweed proliferation./.

Dubai, 2 December 2023