

**Second Joint Meeting of the Signatories to the Hamilton Declaration  
and the Sargasso Sea Commission****The Eco-Discovery Center, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary  
21-22 March 2016****Minutes of the Meeting****DAY ONE- 21 March 2016****JOINT MEETING OF THE SIGNATORIES AND SARGASSO SEA COMMISSION****1. Welcome and Opening Remarks**

The Meeting of the Signatories opened at 1:30 pm on Monday, 21 March 2016 with welcome remarks from Dr. David Freestone, Executive Secretary, Sargasso Sea Commission. The absence of the Hon. Jeanne Atherden, JP, MP, Minister of Health, Seniors and Environment, Government of Bermuda, due to official government duties was noted with regret. Ms. Elizabeth McLanahan (US) added her welcoming remarks, followed by remarks from each of the representatives of the other Hamilton Declaration Signatory governments: Florian Botto (Monaco), Filipe Porteiro (Azores), Robert Smith Berkeley (BVI) and Lowri Griffiths (UK). The meeting welcomed Mr. Philip Weech (Bahamas) who was in attendance in an observer capacity.

The Sargasso Sea Commissioners in attendance (Tammy Trott; Mark Spalding; Stephen de Mora; and Billy Causey) also offered their introduction and opening remarks. Kristina Gjerde, President of the Sargasso Sea Project Inc. Board of Directors, was also in attendance, as well as the Secretariat: Dr. David Freestone and Ms. Faith Bulger.

**2. Election of Meeting Chair**

Dr. David Freestone proposed that Ms. Elizabeth McLanahan (US) be elected Meeting Chair, seconded by Commissioner Causey and accepted by acclamation.

Dr. Freestone noted the Vice-Chair for the First Joint Meeting of Signatories was Filipe Porteiro from the Azores. It was agreed that Filipe Porteiro continue to serve as Vice-Chair for the Meeting.

**3. Approval of Agenda**

Dr. David Freestone presented the Draft Agenda, which was approved.

#### **4. Update on work of the Sargasso Sea Commission since 2014**

Dr. David Freestone reviewed the progress to date on the 2014-2016 Work Programme, including a discussion of Commission structure and organization, its progress engaging new Signatories to the Hamilton Declaration and Commission collaborating partners, efforts to coordinate with the cruise ship industry in Bermuda, joint engagement with the International Cable Protection Committee, Joint concept paper with the Inter-American Convention for the Protection of Sea Turtles, listing the European eel under Appendix II of the Convention for Migratory Species and the collaborative workshop on the American eel. Other activities related to fishery management through NAFO and ICCAT initiatives and shipping issues with IMO were raised, as well as the international recognition of the Commission work in the annual UN Ocean Resolution. Questions were posed on Commission activities related generally to marine debris and specifically to plastics in the marine environment. Suggestions were raised regarding potential SSC involvement with the UN consultative process on marine debris and the global partnership for marine litter. Education efforts, via IMO and other organizations, about marine plastic in the Sargasso Sea with companies that operate in the Sea was suggested.

#### **5. Presentation on the BBNJ process in the UN**

Ms. Kristina Gjerde, President of SSPI Board of Directors, informed the meeting participants about the ongoing efforts at the United Nations to craft a legally binding agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction. She addressed UNGA Resolution 69/292 specifically and more generally posed questions on Sargasso Sea related issues, such as integrating science and management, cooperation on fishery management, use of marine genetic resources, and whether there is a level of significant adverse impact from activities such as deep sea bed trawling and mining. She noted the fragmented nature of ocean governance globally and pointed out that many governments thought that the new instrument should aim to provide some holistic oversight of ocean uses. She stressed how important the Sargasso Sea project was as a pilot attempt to provide such holistic oversight.

(After coffee break, reconvening at 3:15)

#### **6. NASA Pilot Project: Discussion on Priority Issues for the Sargasso Sea Commission**

After an extended discussion, the following set of general themes and potential priority uses for COVERAGE-Sargasso were highlighted by the Signatory governments and the SSC:

- 6.1 Communication to, and improved understanding by, public and policymakers (e.g., characterization of functional aspects of Sargasso Sea)
  - End goal is to have scientific information made available and be able to explain it to the public stakeholders and other interest groups

- Communicating potential emerging ecosystem threats? (e.g. *Sargassum* early warning systems)
  - Conveying the Sargasso Sea's connection to wider climate system (e.g. Sargasso Sea salinity affecting Midwest flooding)
  - Identification of knowledge and information gaps, and research needs
  - Provide visual synopses of potential economic impacts (e.g. *Sargassum* inundation on tourism)
- 6.2 Improved Understanding of the Sargasso Sea ecosystem:
- Monitoring the physical characteristics and health of the Sargasso Sea
  - Explore unknown interactions and large scale temporal data sets
  - Value of historical data
  - Ocean health indicators; vulnerability index (e.g. human uses, climate change)
  - Resolving connectivity within the Sargasso Sea and beyond
  - Information to help identify research needs and data gaps
  - Allow some functional differentiation of regions/biomes within the Sargasso Sea
  - Improved understanding of animal migration routes, habitat utilization (e.g. spawning areas)
- 6.3 Providing evidence for protective measures (management focus)
- Fishing & Food Security
    - Design protective measures and better understand the impacts of fishing
    - Provide a robust and accurate data set for fishing monitoring
    - Understanding of ocean dynamic to minimize by-catch
    - Fishery-*Sargassum* and Fishery-protected species interactions
    - Identification of essential habitat, including spawning area and migratory routes
  - Shipping
    - Uses of the Sargasso Sea for shipping by size class and vessel class.
    - Understanding the impacts of ballast and grey water, invasive species, etc.
    - Impact of shipping on *Sargassum*, protected species and essential habitat
  - Marine Pollutants & Debris
    - Potential identification of marine debris concentrations, including plastics
    - Potential impacts of future deep sea mining activity, including increased turbidity plumes near hydrothermal vent areas.

**DAY TWO- 22 March 2016****JOINT MEETING SIGNATORIES AND COMMISSION**

(10:30 am reconvening)

**7. Discussion: Development of Sargasso Sea Commission Work Programme for 2016-2018**

The Commission and Signatories reviewed the overarching goals agreed at the First Joint Meeting in October 2014 and endorsed the current overarching goals:

1. Promote international recognition of the unique ecological and biological nature and global significance of the Sargasso Sea.
2. Encourage scientific research to expand existing knowledge of the Sargasso Sea ecosystem in order to further assess its health, productivity and resilience.
3. Develop proposals for submission to existing regional, sectoral and international organizations to promote the objectives of the Hamilton Declaration.

The Commission also agreed to continue with the existing priority areas identified in 2014 and agreed to specific short and long term items as priorities for action within the next biennium (2016-2018) (see work programme MOS/SSC/2016/2/Doc. 1).

Adjournment: Chair McLanahan adjourned the Joint Meeting of the Signatories and the Sargasso Sea Commission at 1:00 pm

