



Submitted by:

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Sargasso Sea Commission on behalf of the SARGADOM Project

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## **Interactive dialogue 7: Enhancing the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law, as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea**

The SARGADOM project is a partnership between MarViva Foundation, The Sargasso Sea Commission, the University of Brest, and the French Biodiversity Agency, that aims to contribute to the protection of biodiversity and ecosystem services in two remarkable high seas areas: the Thermal Dome and the Sargasso Sea, and to facilitate the development of hybrid ocean governance approaches.

Distinguished delegates, and ocean friends, we would like to call your attention to the unique high seas ecosystem of the Sargasso Sea. It is a two-million square mile open ocean ecosystem, bounded by the circulating currents of the North Atlantic Gyre. The foundation of this incredible pelagic ecosystem is the floating, golden Sargassum seaweed for which the sea is named. As well as supporting ten fascinating endemic species, Sargassum acts as critical nursery habitat for many species of pelagic fish and several species of sea turtle. The Sargasso Sea is the only known spawning area for two species of endangered anguillid eel – which transition from marine breeding grounds to freshwater feeding grounds. It also acts as a migratory corridor for several species of sharks, rays, and cetaceans. The Sargasso Sea is threatened by various pressures – including impacts from shipping, fishing, plastic and other pollutants, and climate change.

For over a decade, the Sargasso Sea initiative - led by the government of Bermuda - has acted as the Steward of the Sargasso Sea, an iconic high seas ecosystem, and worked to keep its health, productivity, and resilience under review, as well as to develop safeguard measures for its conservation. The Sargasso Sea Commission was established in 2014 by the signing of the Hamilton Declaration on Collaboration for the Conservation of the Sargasso Sea. It is a unique institution as Commissioners are appointed primarily according to their scientific and technical expertise, and serve in their personal capacity rather than being representatives of the Signatory Governments.

The Commission is appointed by the Government of Bermuda with the support of the ten Government Signatories of the Hamilton Declaration – the Azores, the Bahamas, Bermuda,





British Virgin Islands, Canada, Cayman Islands, the Dominican Republic, the Principality of Monaco, the United Kingdom and the United States.

In addition to the SARGADOM project, funded by the French Facility for Global Environment, the Sargasso Sea Commission is also the recipient of a separate but complementary grant from the Global Environment Facility, which will enable the Commission to undertake the first ecosystem diagnostic analysis of a high seas system, and work with stakeholders to create a plan for the conservation and stewardship of the Sargasso Sea going forward.

The Sargasso Sea Commission has been described as a new paradigm for high seas governance. In this Ocean Decade, we invite more governments to become stewards of this iconic high seas area, and to become pioneers of high seas conservation in general by becoming signatories to the Hamilton Declaration. As the high seas are the concern of everyone, we encourage participation from around the world - not just from governments adjacent to the Sargasso Sea.

As you know, the ocean is a vital part of the life support system of the planet. In fact, nearly a half of the planet's surface is the high seas. It belongs to us all but we often treat it as if it belongs to no-one. Not only is it in our self-interest to protect it - we must surely have a duty to look after it for future generations.

It is my pleasure and honour to invite other governments to join with us in this important and challenging venture and to become partners by signing the Hamilton Declaration.