

# Policy Perspectives

Perspectives on resource management and environmental policy from the Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES), Faculty of Science and Technology, The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados.

The Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES) initiated this occasional outreach publication, *Policy Perspectives*, to share lessons learnt from applied interdisciplinary research. CERMES research is through learning-by-doing collaboration. *Policy Perspectives* may be used by policymakers and advisers to strengthen linkages between applied research and policymaking in the Wider Caribbean Region.

## Sargassum sub-regional outlook bulletin — informing decision-making

### Pioneering the Sargassum Sub-regional Outlook Bulletin

Sargassum scientists, managers and other stakeholders need a periodic communication on sargassum influx forecasting. This is especially so for persons with livelihoods in coastal and marine industries and activities such as fisheries, mariculture, tourism, renewable energy, marine protected areas and transportation.

Under the UWI-CERMES project on *Adapting to a new reality: Managing responses to influxes of sargassum seaweed in the Eastern Caribbean as ecosystem hazards and opportunities (SargAdapt)* a critical communication product — the Sargassum Sub-regional Outlook Bulletin — was continued and improved. In this issue we adopt a user’s perspective to consider some lessons learned from the bulletin experience.

### Forecasting sargassum influxes

First, just a few words about forecasting sargassum influxes. A large number of scientists and research entities are constantly working on improving the accuracy of sargassum forecasts. The products and publications are often too complex for the average reader to fully digest and make use of, but they are important to acknowledge and remind us of the foundational data sources used in issues of the Sargassum Sub-regional Outlook Bulletin.

### Design Criteria

- ✓ Target audiences: Tourism businesses and policy makers, fisheries managers, fisherfolk
- ✓ Simplifying scientific jargon so that stakeholders can understand
- ✓ Sargassum abundance intensity-level
- ✓ 3-month outlook
- ✓ Implications to sectors
- ✓ Links to useful resources

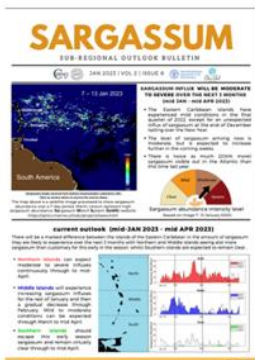
Good graphics such as maps, charts and photographs are the hallmark of the bulletin along with a simple summary dashboard and easily understandable explanatory text. You can download issues of the bulletin on the [CERMES sargassum website](#) and peruse articles on the science and technology behind them.

### Delightfully definite description and dashboard

Bulletin prototypes were tested during design and the feedback was for a clear message to be conveyed while not disregarding the uncertainties and variability associated with sargassum. At the top of each bulletin there is a clear statement of what is to be expected during the upcoming three month forecast period.

**SARGASSUM INFLUX WILL LIKELY BE SEVERE OVER THE NEXT 3 MONTHS (mid MARCH - mid JUNE 2023)**

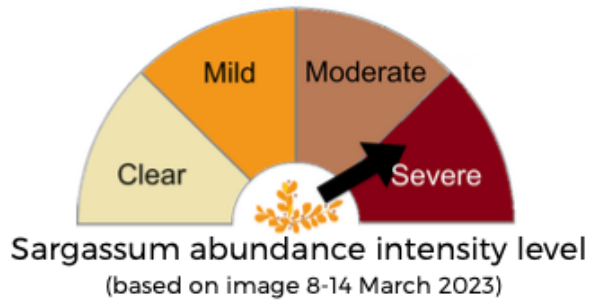
In addition, a simple dashboard graphic reinforces the message visually. Readers can compare graphics across issues against the map that displays the distribution of sargassum abundance.



Front page



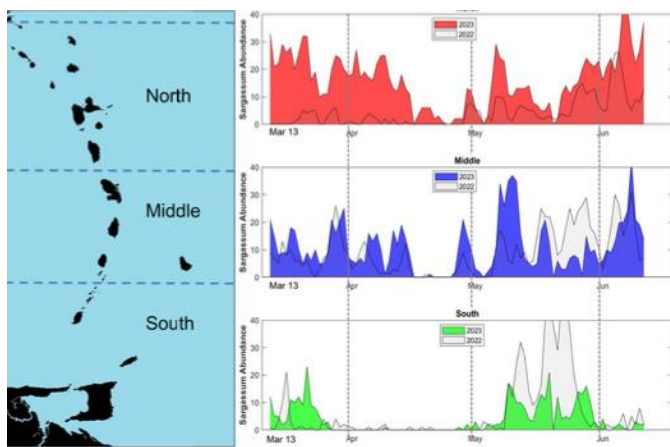
Back page



The obvious lesson is that clear communication is valued. It is supplemented by other details further into the body of the issue. There are now over 1,000 subscribers who receive the bulletin directly by email, but others also get it from CERMES website.

### Unpacking the outlook

By also providing a more detailed outlook by northern, middle and southern islands the bulletin caters to users in these areas that often experience different levels of influx intensity over time.



Based on the bulletin, tourism readers may then better decide where to send their clients or go themselves for a vacation. Scientists will know where and when to find active impacts and management responses. Fishers and other coastal workers may decide on preferred livelihood strategies based on the bulletin's information, such as when a second job could be advisable or when to prepare for a drop or change in catches and income.

In locations where rural coastal poverty is already at high levels, having access to the bulletin's forecast could become a critical asset. However, not everyone has access to good internet or the instruments and skills to receive the bulletin. Social networks of sargassum stakeholders who share information and assist each other are thus still critically important, especially at a local level where shared interests are likely to be high. Multi-level ties within networks help information to flow between local level and national level bi-directionally. It is more than the bulletin alone.

### Sector summaries and so on

Each issue also features summary implications for key sectors and interests such as fisheries, tourism and the environment. An implication summary will address practical points such as:

- The extent of disruption expected or if there should be none
- What response is recommended for the sector to consider
- Advice, e.g. for tourism, on alternative coasts to visit or use
- Specific alerts about dangerous and damaging conditions
- Consequences for biodiversity conservation e.g. of turtles
- Persistent impacts such as brown tides that are harmful

While most of the points may be well known by sargassum stakeholders who keep up to date with their information there are a surprisingly large number of people affected by influxes who seem to make little effort to actively seek out information.

### What's on the event horizon?

To address the preceding point on information inertia, bulletins also announce upcoming events that offer resources such as sargassum symposia, webinars, conferences and workshops.



Many of these events are linked to projects that share additional information on sargassum such as its commercial uses. A good example concerns its potential as a transportation biofuel.



**Rum and Sargassum Inc.**



### Publication with a purpose

Although the Sargassum Sub-regional Outlook Bulletin is mainly a communication about influx forecasts a lesson learned was the need to incorporate as much linked information as feasible in a brief read — only two pages. Concise messaging is critical.

There have been articles and initiatives on communication about sargassum to the general public and to specific target audiences that emphasize the need to make science understandable. This is essential for increasing confidence and trust in marine science at Caribbean science-policy interfaces. The bulletin contributes to the quest for engaging and assisting readers as they demand.

**SargAdapt**

Adapting to a new reality: Managing responses to influxes of sargassum seaweed in the Eastern Caribbean as ecosystem hazards and opportunities



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