Questions from AIR Centre Networking Friday Governing the tide: regional policy, coordination, and international frameworks webinar on 30/10/2026 from 13:00-14:30 UTC.

1, Building on the OECS's push for a coordinated regional response, what opportunities do you see for linking Caribbean efforts with initiatives across the Atlantic, especially on monitoring and forecasting, waste management and the shift to a circular economy?

Building on the OECS Integrated Approach for sargassum management, there are substantial opportunities to connect Caribbean regional efforts with initiatives across the Atlantic, particularly with West Africa, as both regions face similar transboundary sargassum influxes driven by shared climate and oceanographic factors.

Key areas for practical cooperation and exchange include:

- **Monitoring, Forecasting, and Early Warning Systems:** Interconnecting regional observation platforms—such as the Caribbean basin-wide remote sensing and monitoring tools developed under SARGCOOP I and expanded in SARGCOOP II—with Atlantic-wide data networks enables real-time tracking of sargassum belts. Sharing daily grounding forecasts and observation bulletins enhances early warning capabilities and preparedness in both basins.
- **Waste Management and Operational Protocols:** Moving beyond siloed, reactive clean-up efforts requires harmonizing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for collecting, handling, storing, and disposing of sargassum in an eco-friendly way. Shared technical hubs and best-practice exchanges reduce redundant equipment costs while safeguarding coastal ecosystems and public health.
- **Transitioning to a Circular and Blue Economy:** Reframing sargassum from a detrimental waste hazard into a valuable resource opens avenues for joint research and innovation. Collaborative initiatives can focus on valorization technologies—transforming sargassum into agricultural fertilizers, bio-based building materials, and energy products—thereby turning an environmental challenge into a sustainable economic opportunity for coastal communities.

By leveraging established cooperative frameworks like the SARGCOOP partnership model and international platforms, both regions can pool technical expertise, secure long-term climate adaptation financing, and scale up resilient, integrated solutions across the Atlantic basin.

2, How is sargassum defined in national law: as a natural hazard, a pollutant, waste, a marine resource, or not at all?

No single legal classification applies across all countries. The applicable treatment depends on reviewing each country's legislation, regulations, and administrative arrangements.

It is useful to distinguish between floating sargassum as a living marine resource and habitat, an influx that creates environmental or public health risks, and collected biomass requiring transport, processing or disposal. These situations may engage different legal frameworks. A regional legal review could help clarify responsibilities and identify gaps without assuming that one classification is suitable for every stage of management.

3, How can harmonization and standardisation be achieved or accelerated when Sargassum may not be an immediate priority of some nations and as such may not be funded by those countries of less impact?

The Cartagena and Abidjan Conventions can support the environmental and intergovernmental dimensions of this work, in cooperation with organizations such as CARICOM, OECS, ACS, ECOWAS and relevant regional fisheries bodies, within their respective mandates. These partnerships can help align existing initiatives, share expertise and promote the uptake of regional guidance through national institutions.

Progress does not require every country to make the same financial investment at the same time. Joint training, shared technical services, regional pilot projects and coordinated resource mobilization can

reduce national costs and allow less affected countries to participate. Countries experiencing greater impacts can contribute practical experience to inform standards that benefit the wider region.
A phased approach—starting with voluntary technical guidance and progressing towards nationally adopted standards where appropriate—can accelerate harmonization while allowing implementation to reflect local conditions and capacities.

4, Does the national disaster management framework allow sargassum influxes to be declared an emergency or disaster?
This depends on national legislation, the applicable thresholds and the authority responsible for making a declaration. Whether an influx qualifies must be assessed against the relevant national criteria. Cooperation with disaster management and public health institutions would be essential.
Regional Organizations could help countries establish clearer responsibilities and response arrangements before severe influxes occur. Formal declarations and access to emergency resources would remain matters for the competent national authorities.

5, Which regional body should lead in each region, and how should their roles divide (e.g. CARICOM, OECS, CRFM and the Cartagena Convention Secretariat, ECOWAS, the Abidjan Convention Secretariat and regional fisheries bodies)?
Answer 1: Leadership should be based on a government-agreed division of responsibilities that reflects institutional mandates and geographical coverage.
The Regional Seas conventions can provide an intergovernmental environmental framework for cooperation, helping connect pollution prevention, biodiversity conservation and coastal management. In the Wider Caribbean, the Cartagena Convention can support this environmental dimension in cooperation with CARICOM, OECS, CRFM and other relevant organizations. In West Africa, the Abidjan Convention could play a corresponding role alongside ECOWAS, fisheries bodies and national institutions.
Political coordination, fisheries management, forecasting, public health and financing would require contributions from the institutions with the relevant expertise and authority. A shared work programme, designated focal points and clear reporting arrangements could help translate these complementary roles into coordinated action.

Answer 2: Effective management of sargassum across the Atlantic requires a complementary division of responsibilities between legal-policy frameworks, regional economic communities, and technical/ sectoral bodies in both the Wider Caribbean and West Africa.

- **Cartagena Convention Secretariat (UNEP):** Serves as the overarching legal and policy anchor. As the only legally binding regional agreement dedicated to protecting the marine environment in the Wider Caribbean Region, it provides the formal mandate for regional cooperation, policy harmonization, and updating regional action plans.
- **OECS Commission:** Acts as an operational "strategic brain" and sub-regional coordinator. The OECS leads on practical implementation, technical capacity building, standardising Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for collection and disposal, resource mobilization, and driving circular economy innovation (such as through the SARGCOOP framework).
- **CARICOM:** Provides broader geopolitical alignment and high-level political integration across Caribbean nations.
- **CRFM (Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism):** Focuses specifically on sector-specific assessments, mitigating economic and livelihood losses in the fisheries industry, and coordinating fisheries-level responses.

6, Which forums keep sargassum on the political agenda (e.g. SIDS, UN Ocean Conference, regional ministerial meetings)?
A: Relevant forums include the Conferences of the Parties to the Cartagena and Abidjan Conventions, regional ministerial meetings, CARICOM and OECS policy processes, SIDS processes, the United Nations Ocean Conference and the United Nations Environment Assembly.

The Regional Seas Conferences of the Parties are particularly valuable because they provide recurring intergovernmental opportunities to consider regional priorities, review progress and guide future work. Their technical processes can also help bring national experience and scientific findings into policy discussions.
The Regional Seas network could connect these regional priorities with global ocean and environmental discussions. Regular reporting between major meetings would help sustain attention and demonstrate where additional partnerships, technical support and financing are needed.

7, Is dumping sargassum back at sea permitted, and under what conditions?
There should be no assumption that returning collected sargassum to the sea is permitted simply because it originated there. Applicable requirements depend on national law, the circumstances of the operation and relevant international obligations, including the London Convention or London Protocol where applicable.
Any proposed disposal operation would still require a determination by the relevant national authority. Regional guidance would support that assessment but would not constitute authorization. Environmental considerations include decomposition, oxygen depletion, associated contaminants, impacts on habitats and the transfer of problems to other coastal areas.

8, Who owns sargassum at sea, in the territorial sea, in the EEZ and once beached on public or private land?
Ownership must be distinguished from sovereign rights, regulatory jurisdiction, access rights and responsibility for management.
UNCLOS recognizes coastal-state sovereign rights over natural resources in the exclusive economic zone, but this does not by itself establish private ownership of floating or collected sargassum. In the territorial sea and after stranding, the applicable national legal frameworks must be examined. Beyond national jurisdiction, relevant international rules must also be considered.

9, Can sargassum qualify for climate adaptation finance, loss and damage funding, or disaster risk financing?
These financing avenues may be worth exploring, but eligibility is not automatic. Adaptation proposals would need to demonstrate a credible climate rationale and resilience benefits. Loss and damage funding and disaster risk financing would depend on the requirements of the particular fund or instrument.
A practical contribution would be to support consistent assessments of impacts, vulnerabilities, management costs and expected benefits. This evidence could strengthen funding proposals, while eligibility and approval would remain with the relevant financing institutions.

10, Should a tourism levy or user fee fund removal, and who decides how it is spent?
A tourism levy or user fee could be considered as one component of a broader financing strategy, depending on national law, consultation with stakeholders and an assessment of costs and benefits.
The competent national or local authorities would decide whether to establish a levy and how it would be administered. Clear allocation criteria, stakeholder participation and public reporting would help ensure accountability.