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**Sustainable development: follow-up to and implementation of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway and the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States**

## **Sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea for present and future generations**

### **Report of the Secretary-General**

#### *Summary*

The present report was prepared in response to General Assembly resolution [75/214](#), entitled “Towards the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea for present and future generations”, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report at its seventy-seventh session on the status of implementation of the resolution. A range of activities undertaken at the national and regional levels by Member States, international development partners and other stakeholders to advance the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea are highlighted in the report. In addition, the annex contains a report of the Association of Caribbean States on progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

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\* [A/77/150](#).



## I. Introduction

1. In its resolution [75/214](#), entitled “Towards the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea for present and future generations”, the General Assembly recognized that the Caribbean Sea is an area with unique biodiversity and highly fragile ecosystems and that, when compared with all other large marine ecosystems, is surrounded by the largest number of countries in the world, many of which have a high degree of vulnerability occasioned by climate change, climate variability and associated phenomena and rely heavily on the marine environment for economic growth and sustainable development. For these countries, the Caribbean Sea is a critical asset, providing countless benefits in the form of food security and nutrition, employment, foreign exchange, culture and recreation. Through evidence-based policy interventions, these assets can also make significantly enhanced and sustained contributions to countries’ economic growth, welfare and prosperity.

2. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic was sudden and unexpected, and, like most countries, those in the wider Caribbean region were ill-prepared for the multidimensional impact of the global pandemic. Although primarily a health challenge, the pandemic impacted every aspect of life beyond the health sector, exacerbating existing challenges and vulnerabilities, and resulting in a new array of challenges that inhibit the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway and other sustainable development priorities. The public health protocols imposed by all countries, including lockdowns and physical distancing measures, had a severe impact on business activities, increasing unemployment across all sectors. Nevertheless, the pandemic has provided an opportunity for these countries to not only ensure that recovery is resilient, but also take advantage of opportunities for economic diversification through the development of their ocean resources.

3. Innovation will be key to the development of effective post-COVID-19 recovery strategies that include increased dependence on coastal and ocean-based resources, while promoting the sustainable management of those resources. In this regard, the General Assembly also welcomed the continued efforts of Caribbean States to develop and implement regional initiatives to promote the sustainable management of the Caribbean Sea, including through the work of the Caribbean Sea Commission of the Association of Caribbean States, other international development partners and the United Nations system. The Assembly also invited the Association to submit a report to the Secretary-General on progress made in the implementation of resolution [75/214](#) for consideration by the Assembly at its seventy-seventh session (see annex).

4. In preparing the present report, information was obtained through desk research, inputs from Member States, United Nations system organizations and regional organizations operating in the Caribbean. All inputs are posted on the website of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.<sup>1</sup>

## II. Towards the creation of sustainable ocean-based economies

5. Under the public health protocols established during the COVID-19 pandemic, many ocean-based economic activities in the wider Caribbean region were managed as essential services to support continued operations in these sectors. The fisheries sectors in many countries were allowed to continue their operations during the pandemic, and ongoing maritime transportation also ensured the provision of vital food supplies, medical goods, energy and raw materials. Continued maritime services

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://sdgs.un.org/topics/small-island-developing-states>.

were also crucial for the essential movement of domestic, regional and international cargo.

6. Border closures and stay-at-home requirements imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic had a deleterious effect, particularly on the region's tourism sector, especially in Caribbean small island developing States. The countries most impacted by the pandemic were those whose economies were the most dependent on tourism. This presents a strong case for emphasizing recovery strategies and initiatives that diversify economies and include a focus on coastal and ocean potential.

7. To achieve this, a collective and concerted effort, and a commitment to integrated and interdisciplinary management structures at the national and regional levels, are required. Economic valuation of marine and coastal resources, legislation, investments in human capital, technological readiness and institutional structures are also necessary tools to harness the employment and sustainable development benefits of investing in innovative ocean and coastal economy sectors. While many countries in the region have been investing in the appropriate human capital and legal and institutional frameworks, the real potential of the Caribbean Sea as a key economic driver remains to be recognized and exploited. Countries have experienced challenges in developing and implementing effective policies and legal and institutional ocean governance structures at the national and regional levels; ensuring that the required human resources capacity is in place; and ensuring cohesive, synergistic approaches to operationalizing these agendas and mobilizing adequate financing.

8. Such cohesive and synergistic implementation requires balancing multiple economic sectors with diverse stakeholder interests and coordinated governance approaches. In this regard, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea provides the legal framework within which all oceanic activities must be carried out. It provides legal certainty regarding the extent of sovereignty or sovereign rights and jurisdictions of States, which is essential to the development of sustainable ocean-based economies. The Convention provides a comprehensive enabling framework for ocean governance, including a dispute settlement mechanism, which supports economic and social development, while also protecting ecosystem health. Full and effective implementation of the Convention on the Law of the Sea, its two implementing agreements, and other relevant conventions and instruments, together with effective national legal and institutional frameworks and the requisite national capacity for implementation, are essential prerequisites for success. However, for many countries in the region, in particular small island developing States, national legal and institutional frameworks are generally fragmented and there is often inadequate capacity for effective implementation.

9. Education and related capacity-building programmes are also key and will need to consider present and future needs in marine sciences, research, governance, innovation and technology development related to oceans. Relevant capacity-building initiatives and the transfer of appropriate marine technology to small island developing States in particular will be important for developing local knowledge and technical capacities. Technical and vocational skills training will also be necessary to create a large-enough pool of professional, scientific and skilled persons to support efforts to sustainably use, conserve and manage ocean resources. Related to this is the importance of adaptive and evidence-based decision-making, enabled by access to quality data, information and knowledge, including local and traditional knowledge.

10. Economic benefits from oceans cannot be realized without also recognizing the pivotal role of coastal and marine resources and how they are influenced by climate change, global warming, rising sea levels and other anthropogenic impacts, such as land-based pollution and loss of biodiversity. Any strategy that includes a focus on ocean potential must therefore also consider the protection of oceans from further

degradation and prioritize strategies that are sustainable, regenerative and aimed at building resilience. Unfortunately, ocean rehabilitation, conservation and sustainable use are underfunded: only 1.6 per cent of total official development assistance (\$2.9 billion annually) was targeted at the ocean economy from 2013 to 2018. The distribution of the assistance is also geographically uneven, with little provided to the poorest nations, including Caribbean countries.

11. Nevertheless, some countries have recognized the incalculable value of coral reefs in marine ecosystems and are making use of a variety of conservation tools to manage this asset. A notable example is Guatemala, which has declared a regime of spatial closure in its territorial sea and updated its national contingency plan with regard to spills of hydrocarbons and potentially dangerous substances at sea.<sup>2</sup>

12. Within the current context of low growth and high debt for several countries in the region, particularly small island developing States, significant public investments in fostering blue growth are constrained by the lack of adequate fiscal space and readily available financing. Innovative financing mechanisms will be needed, including those that leverage private capital investments and enable improved partnerships and philanthropic engagement. In this regard, national priorities need to be clearly established and the necessary enabling conditions implemented in order to reduce risk and make investment more attractive.

### **III. Trends in the policy, legal and institutional landscape for the sustainable management of the Caribbean Sea**

13. Prior to the pandemic, many of the countries in the wider Caribbean region had already begun to rethink their development trajectories, focusing on policies that build resilience. Emerging development frameworks are more focused on, inter alia, skills development, research, greater technological sophistication, the diversified production of goods and services and the sustainable management of natural resources. They also encompass the blue economy as one means of economic diversification.

14. Post-COVID-19 recovery efforts in the region have seen intensified efforts towards economic diversification. In this regard, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) has been supporting Caribbean and Central American countries to diversify their economies and embrace innovative technologies and emerging sectors, including aquaculture, biotechnology and marine-based renewable energy technologies. In 2021, Small Islands Developing States Dock (SIDS DOCK) and UNIDO launched the Global Ocean Energy Alliance to support small island developing States and coastal developing countries to access ocean energy technology, financing and expertise. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has developed the first ocean trade data set (on goods) that can be used to assess the goods export potential of Caribbean countries in selected ocean-based sectors, in the light of Sustainable Development Goal 14.7.

15. To strengthen ocean governance, Governments continue to take advantage of the framework provided by the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region (Cartagena Convention) and its associated protocols. More recently, in 2021, the Government of Nicaragua ratified the Cartagena Convention's Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife, and the Governments of Guatemala, Mexico and Suriname were provided

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<sup>2</sup> See inputs by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to the present report at [https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-07/UNCTAD\\_Inputs\\_2022\\_UN\\_SG\\_Report\\_on\\_Caribbean\\_Sea.pdf](https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-07/UNCTAD_Inputs_2022_UN_SG_Report_on_Caribbean_Sea.pdf).

with technical support to assist them with becoming parties to the protocols (and the Convention, in the case of Suriname) they had not yet ratified. Saint Kitts and Nevis has also now submitted a request to its Cabinet to ratify the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife and the Protocol concerning Pollution from Land-based Sources and Activities.

16. A range of other decision-making and policy development support tools to strengthen ocean governance have also been made available in the region. These include a regional nutrient pollution reduction strategy and action plan; a regional strategy and action plan for the valuation, protection and/or restoration of key marine habitats in the wider Caribbean (2021–2030); a manual for the ecological restoration of mangroves in the Mesoamerican Reef System and the wider Caribbean, developed by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); and a regional action plan for the sustainable use of queen conch to promote sustainable and legal harvesting, traceability and compliance with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, developed by UNCTAD. In addition, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), through the Global Environment Facility (GEF) project “Catalysing Implementation of the Strategic Action Programme for the Sustainable Management of Shared Living Marine Resources in the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems”, has provided support to address the gaps and weaknesses in transboundary and cross-sectoral governance arrangements in the region.

17. Other efforts to support the strengthening of ocean governance in the region include those by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction to support the development of disaster risk reduction plans in 10 Caribbean countries and territories, including by integrating the handling of biological hazards and lessons learned from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic; and by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to support the region in the development of effective policies, governance structures and institutions to facilitate the adoption and effective implementation of international instruments, regional coordination mechanisms, plans of action and guidelines to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

18. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is committed to the safety and security of coastal communities in the Caribbean, including the sustainable use of the Caribbean Sea, free from crime. As part of its efforts to combat crimes that affect the environment, UNODC conducted a summary analysis of the wildlife-specific laws covering nine jurisdictions across the Caribbean. This exercise sought to provide an overview of the key offences relating to international trafficking, the associated penalties and the extent to which the domestic laws afford protection to critically endangered species, as identified in the appendices to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

19. One new framework that could also support countries to foster effective ocean governance is the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, which seeks to deepen environmental governance through the strengthening of community engagement in environmental stewardship, the generation of and access to environmental information, and the prevention and remedy of environmental harm. These are essential components of any post-COVID-19 recovery strategy that includes blue or green growth. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean functions as the secretariat to this Agreement.

20. At the national level, some countries have also focused on strengthening implementation of their obligations under other relevant international maritime conventions. Honduras has been implementing the latest amendments to annex VI to the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, which aims

at promoting the implementation of environmentally reasonable technologies. Honduras has also now regulated the environmental powers of its merchant navy to better protect the marine environment in waters under Honduran jurisdiction.

21. Mexico, with support from UNDP, has focused on strengthening the management effectiveness of 10 natural protected areas in the region, covering more than 15 million hectares of coastal and marine ecosystems. Activities include strengthening local and inter-institutional governance, improving the control of invasive alien species, restoring dunes and mangroves, implementing climate change adaptation actions and conserving endangered species. The country's Ministry of Tourism and local communities have also strengthened their capacities for the conservation of biodiversity in coastal ecosystems through the design and implementation of innovative policies and models of sustainable tourism in Mexico at the national and local levels.

22. At the regional level, the 2022–2028 plan of action of the Association of Caribbean States will see the countries of the wider Caribbean region supported to develop appropriate plans and policies to address cross-cutting issues relating to the protection and conservation of ecosystems, through ecosystem-based solutions, community participation and engagement with youth, women, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, such as indigenous peoples.

23. Land-based activities continue to represent the leading source of marine pollution, highlighting the need to integrate source-to-sea approaches in the protection of ocean health. Plastics continue to be the most prevalent debris item recorded, contributing approximately 60 to 80 per cent of all marine litter, a 10-fold increase since 1980.<sup>3</sup> While the plastics agenda is covered by a range of international and regional processes, more work is needed, including the development of indicators to measure progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 14.1. Under the aegis of the United Nations Environment Assembly, a new process to negotiate a treaty on global plastic pollution was launched in March 2022.

#### **IV. Capacity-building efforts in the wider Caribbean region**

24. Building knowledge and technical capacities with respect to the marine environment facilitates effective participation in research, knowledge creation and development, and allows for optimized use and management of ocean resources. Notable examples of such efforts include the work of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which is contributing to building human and institutional capacities for monitoring coastal erosion, ocean acidification, harmful algal blooms and microplastics in the Caribbean Sea. Nuclear, nuclear-related and isotopic techniques are being used to measure and monitor the impacts of ocean acidification, analyse harmful algal bloom events and assist in identifying the sources of pollution in the sea.

25. In a similar vein, the Government of Japan has been delivering support through a project strengthening sargassum management capacities in the Caribbean (\$12.3 million). The project supports capacity-building in Barbados, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago for the removal and disposal of sargassum seaweed. Support has also been provided for the further development of the fisheries sectors in Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis and Saint Lucia; the improvement of fisheries facilities and

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<sup>3</sup> See inputs by UNCTAD to the present report at [https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-07/UNCTAD\\_Inputs\\_2022\\_UN\\_SG\\_Report\\_on\\_Caribbean\\_Sea.pdf](https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-07/UNCTAD_Inputs_2022_UN_SG_Report_on_Caribbean_Sea.pdf).

equipment damaged by Hurricane Maria in Dominica; and the provision of related equipment to enhance maritime security and disaster response in Jamaica.

26. Through the Integrating Water, Land and Ecosystems Management in Caribbean Small Island Developing States project, the GEF Small Grants Programme has supported 55 small-scale community-based projects in the region. Key outcomes include innovative solutions for improved water, land and biodiversity resource management; rehabilitated riparian zones; enhanced capacity to measure change in environmental and socioeconomic status indicators; and land, habitat, forest, coastal area and coral reef restoration.

27. Managing the region's sargassum seaweed challenge has also been the focus of Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) support in the Caribbean. Efforts have focused on reducing the potential health impacts of sargassum seaweed through, inter alia, increasing air quality monitoring and remote sensing capacities; implementing health surveillance systems to identify health outcomes related to sargassum decomposition; and fostering research on the sustainable removal and use of sargassum.

28. PAHO and the World Health Organization have also been facilitating the integration of health into strategic planning and programming through the development of health chapters in the national adaptation plans of six countries (Barbados, Belize, Grenada, Haiti, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines). These national adaptation plans incorporate strategic approaches to ensure ecosystem integrity and build resilience by strengthening mechanisms to mitigate the effects of climate-related hazards and environmental change on the region's ocean and marine systems, in connection with water and sanitation resilience planning, food safety and security, and strengthened surveillance systems.

29. Through the Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems initiative, in cooperation with the World Bank and the World Meteorological Organization, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction has been working to increase the availability of and access to multi-hazard early warning systems and support a transition to impact-based forecasting based on historical disaster risk data in the Caribbean. In this regard, the Office has worked with Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago to establish loss and damage databases containing historical information and develop studies on the future impacts of hazards based on these findings.

30. UNIDO has recently established the BLOOM Clean Tech Cluster Barbados, which provides shared resources and incubation support to businesses and start-ups working on the commercialization of integrated green and blue economy products and services. Barbadian participants in the programme are working on using green and blue biomaterials, including sargassum seaweed, cassava and sweet potatoes, to develop biodegradable plastic materials for use in packaging.

31. UNODC provides legislative technical assistance to Member States in implementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime to strengthen their response to transnational organized crime. The Convention is an effective tool and an important part of the legal framework for preventing and combating transnational organized crime that affects the environment, including trafficking in hazardous wastes and other wastes.

32. Strengthening technical and vocational skills training to foster sustainable ocean-based economies is crucial. Notable examples of such efforts include a PAHO training course on climate-resilient water and sanitation safety planning, which has been included as a self-learning course on the PAHO virtual campus; IAEA support focused on harmonization of monitoring methodologies, sampling and sample preparation, sample analysis protocols, and human resources development to monitor

marine stressors through the transfer of nuclear technologies; and FAO contributions to knowledge management regarding the current science behind sargassum blooms, building knowledge networks to drive further research on sargassum, and working with countries and local and regional partners to develop related mitigation plans.

33. IAEA has established regional observatories in Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba and Mexico to provide monthly data on ocean acidification in the Caribbean Sea. Furthermore, IAEA has supported two regional reference centres in Colombia (Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas y Costeras) and Cuba (Centro de Estudios Ambientales de Cienfuegos) to detect marine biotoxins during harmful algal blooms and to develop a national alert system to control and manage the blooms.

34. FAO, in collaboration with the Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies and the Global Institute for Climate Smart and Resilient Development at the University of the West Indies, developed an e-learning initiative for leaders and change-makers working in fields related to climate change, social development and poverty reduction, and small-scale fisheries in the Caribbean. The course focused on building capacity to support national and local initiatives for reducing exposure and vulnerability and enhancing the resilience of the poor and vulnerable in coastal communities and the fisheries sector.

35. Current approaches to valuing the ocean economy could underestimate its contribution, particularly in terms of the value of non-market goods and services, such as those related to the ecosystem, for example, the protection offered by coral reefs or carbon sequestration. Improvements have been made in accounting methods and techniques, but there remain gaps in the data and information required to cost ecosystem benefits accurately and at the level where the information can be used to better inform policy and investment decisions. For the Caribbean region, information and data on ocean-related research, science, technology and innovation are limited. The countries of the Caribbean region will need to strengthen their institutions, technological capacities, data management systems and research capacities.

36. To address this challenge in the area of fisheries, FAO facilitates regular monitoring and reporting, development of innovative data and information systems and implementation of fisheries management plans, strategies and measures through the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission. Activities have been undertaken with the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism and the Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization to generate scientific advice for sound policy and management plans for the sustainable development of marine resources.

## V. Opportunity for resilience recovery strategies

37. The disruptive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the wider Caribbean region have demonstrated the need for integrated recovery strategies that can enable countries to not only build a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient future, but also respond effectively to future shocks, including pandemics. The present section discusses some key interventions by the United Nations system in this regard.

### **Fisheries and aquaculture**

38. The fisheries and aquaculture sectors provide significant opportunities for growth and expansion in small island developing States and least developed countries. Developing the aquaculture subsector and other upstream and downstream activities along the fisheries value chain can create employment and economic benefits. To this end, FAO focuses on effective fisheries management systems that address ecological, social and economic objectives, and consider trade-offs, including by promoting the



implementation of fisheries management measures that support biodiversity, facilitate ecosystem restoration, strengthen climate change adaptation and build resilience to stressors.

39. In a 2021 study of the fisheries and aquaculture sector in Haiti, UNCTAD demonstrated that it is possible to harness the potential of aquatic resources, making them a factor in the country's transformational progress and efforts towards poverty reduction. The study underlined the need for substantial infrastructural, institutional and human resources development efforts if the country is to meet the large national and international demand for fish and seafood.

### **Tourism**

40. Tourism is a major growth engine and foreign exchange earner in most Caribbean small island developing States and other coastal economies. However, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this sector has made it critical for countries to revamp the tourism sector to improve its productivity and efficiency, and enhance the technological intensity of the sector's products and services, as a means of moving up the global value chain. Opportunities exist to transform the tourist sector to make greater use of digital technologies and innovative business models, based on the unique selling points of coastal and marine assets.

41. Sustainable and nature-based tourism is a cross-cutting sector that also has the ability to address broad issues affecting sustainable development in the region, in particular for small island developing States. The move towards a sustainable tourism sector must, however, be cross-cutting by design. While some countries have made significant efforts to reform specific sustainable tourism industry sectors, broader policies and programmes still need to adopt a more holistic approach to their development. In addition, the private sector has a key role to play in driving corporate sustainability frameworks that, inter alia, support the preservation of natural capital and help build human capital.

### **Marine biodiversity**

42. Living marine resources have great potential for the development of new food, biochemicals, biomaterials, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, fertilizers and pest control products. In addition, new omics (e.g. genomics, proteomics, metabolomics) tools based on marine genetic resources show promise for fisheries management, aquaculture development, food and water safety, species and habitat conservation, seafood consumer protection, and natural products discovery. For example, two chemicals isolated from the Caribbean sea sponge *Tectitethya crypta* are used in the development of drugs to treat, inter alia, cancer, HIV, hepatitis, herpes, and, more recently, Ebola virus disease and coronaviruses.<sup>4</sup> This is significant for countries in the region, whose exclusive economic zones are extensive.

43. Stony coral tissue loss disease has been a prominent threat to coral reef ecosystems in the region. UNEP, through the Regional Activity Centre for the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife for the Wider Caribbean Region, developed a white paper with recommended actions for local, national and regional stakeholders and an interactive dashboard to record and track sightings of the disease in the region. Honduras has also been actively addressing this issue through inter-institutional and multisectoral action platforms, monitoring the disease, applying treatment to the affected colonies and raising the awareness of the general population about this problem.

<sup>4</sup> G. A. Schwartzmann and others, "Marine organisms as a source of new anticancer agents", *Lancet Oncology*, vol. 2, No. 4 (2001).

**Finance**

44. COVID-19 and its economic fallout have had a negative effect on the public balance sheets of many countries in the region. The need to explore innovative financing and new, cost-effective instruments to transfer risk cannot be overstated. Catalysing private sector investment for infrastructure is also critical, although such efforts remain in a relatively nascent stage. Unless national strategies are crafted to build a favourable climate for private sector investment, this potential will continue to go untapped. While some countries have had moderate success in leveraging domestic resources and public investment, significant barriers still remain.

45. In this regard, the UNEP Finance Initiative is collaborating with UNDP, FAO and the United Nations Population Fund on various catalytic projects, funded by the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund, to elaborate inclusive sustainable development financing strategies for the blue economy sectors of prioritized small island developing States. These projects support upstream policy reform to attract, inter alia, sustainable finance and investment and capacity-strengthening.

**Partnerships**

46. A constantly changing and volatile global environment demands the development and maintenance of genuine and durable partnerships. Intensified efforts at resource mobilization should involve exploring new sources, such as South-South cooperation and private and philanthropic funding, which are increasingly important in development cooperation, as well as new modalities, such as triangular delivery and the utilization of blended finance to lower costs.

47. Partnerships make considerable contributions to the sustainable development of countries, as they typically position themselves at the nexus of economic development, social inclusion and environmental protection, and often seek to advance innovation, new technologies and capacities. Such partnerships provide employment opportunities in sectors such as sustainable tourism, fisheries, aquaculture, renewable energy, transportation and blue carbon. Some examples include the partnership between UNEP, Agence Française de Développement and the German Development Cooperation Agency to improve the capacities for circular economy, waste management and resource efficiency in Caribbean small island developing States. The joint effort will support the strengthening of national legislative frameworks and the establishment of a regional policy structure to support subregional and Caribbean small island developing State actions. In addition, UNODC has been investing in marine domain awareness capabilities in the Dominican Republic and Jamaica through the provision of technology, and fostering cooperation between air and maritime forces to promote joint search and rescue efforts and tackle maritime crime, including crimes in the fisheries sector, which is a destabilizing factor in the region.

48. The challenge, however, has been to assess the impact of these partnerships. Many partnerships do not report on their impacts at the global level, and thus there is no consistent and comparable source of information about the impacts on beneficiaries. Some information in this regard is available from individual partnerships and from donor-conducted evaluations.

49. One mechanism that could address this gap is the United Nations Small Island Developing States Partnership Framework, which aims at promoting partnerships that assist small island developing States in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals. Under the leadership of Antigua and Barbuda and Malta as co-chairs in 2020–2021, the Steering Committee addressed a number of pressing themes relevant to Caribbean small island developing States, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

and its effects on building resilience in tourism, the blue economy, climate change, renewable energy sources and water management.

50. The Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee – Regional Coordination Mechanism for Sustainable Development serves as a principal subregional mechanism for monitoring and supporting sustainable development implementation in Caribbean small island developing States. This Regional Coordination Mechanism could be further explored to determine what role it could play in monitoring the effectiveness of partnerships in the region.

## **VI. Possible legal and financial implications of the concept of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development**

51. The call for the designation of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development was first made at a Caribbean ministerial meeting held in 1997 on the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. The Caribbean Sea Commission was created under the auspices of the Association of Caribbean States in 2006 and identified as the mechanism for pursuing the goal of designating the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development.

52. Any assessment of financial implications would first depend on, *inter alia*, the exact definition of the concept, the extent of its application, its legal status in international law and an assessment of intended impacts against a previously defined baseline. As detailed in previous reports of the Secretary-General, it is necessary to examine the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out, as well as other international instruments that implement or further develop its general principles. The Association of Caribbean States was not able to advance this work during the reporting period. The work is an ongoing effort for the Association (see annex).

## **VII. Conclusion**

53. Member States in the wider Caribbean region have continued in the current biennium to work collaboratively on behalf of their shared resource, the Caribbean Sea. They have been supported in their efforts by the international community, including partner Governments, intergovernmental organizations and the private sector. Their efforts address economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development and often include capacity-building components. In addition, an ecosystem-based approach has been adopted in many cases, which has allowed for the consideration of the cumulative impacts of environmental issues and challenges on the Caribbean marine environment and for policymakers to work across sectors to manage species and habitats, economic activities, conflicting uses and the sustainability of resources.

## Annex

### **Report of the Caribbean Sea Commission of the Association of Caribbean States on progress made in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 75/214**

#### **I. Introduction**

1. The Caribbean Sea is a suboceanic basin of the Atlantic Ocean, the largest and most geopolitically complex marine ecosystem in the world because it is home to the largest number of countries and the most maritime boundaries of any large marine ecosystem in the world. The region is a complex marine area shared by countries of different sizes and with different levels of sustainable development. The Caribbean Sea is considered the common heritage of the peoples of the region, who share a cultural identity. The inhabitants of the region depend on this ecosystem in economic, social, cultural, environmental, climatic and other terms. Therefore, it is necessary to promote spatial planning and governance to create structures that connect the region through tools such as international cooperation and policies that favour the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea.

2. Approximately 44 million people depend directly on the resources of the Caribbean Sea<sup>1</sup> and it is one of the most biologically diverse marine ecosystems in the world. Unfortunately, it is affected by a lack of protection and recurrent threats associated with pollution, habitat loss, overexploitation of resources, climate change, invasion of alien species, massive arrivals of sargassum and, in general, a lack of sustainable development and planning.

3. In the light of the increasing adverse impacts of climate change, the different public health crises such as the current pandemic caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the loss of biodiversity and the continuous degradation of ecosystems and pollution, it is essential to achieve sustainable management of the ecosystems of the Caribbean Sea and the ecosystem services it provides. To achieve the management and preservation of this large geographic area, coherent ocean governance is required through actions aimed at the promotion of conservation and sustainable usage of marine resources for present and future generations.

4. In the light of this, the Caribbean Sea Commission was conceived to provide and oversee the sustainable use of the Caribbean Sea. The Commission has held 21 meetings with the purpose of fostering greater public awareness of the importance of the Caribbean Sea, established a forum to discuss issues relating to its uses and related activities and facilitated a policy for the integration of ocean management to improve the link between governance and the social and economic development of the Greater Caribbean region.

5. In 2014, in response to mandates from the fifth summit of Heads of State and Government of the Association of Caribbean States and the United Nations General Assembly to examine the implications of the designation, a consultancy was engaged to analyse the various ways in which the concept of a “special area” is addressed in legal instruments such as the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the International Maritime Organization’s resolution on Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas. The review concluded that the Caribbean Sea qualifies as a special area because of

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<sup>1</sup> The Nature Conservancy. “Caribbean 2021 Impact Report” (May 2022). Available at <https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/caribbean/stories-in-caribbean/caribbean-annual-impact-report/>.

its ecological, socioeconomic and scientific value to the peoples of the Caribbean. However, the report needs to be updated to include broader issues such as sustainable tourism, trade and the impact of the pandemic. Similarly, it was determined that member States should work towards a consensus in the definition, including the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, environmental and social.

6. While the Caribbean Sea Commission was revitalized in 2015, seeking special area status was envisioned two decades ago with the Caribbean Sea Initiative. The creation of the Commission reflected the commitment of the member States of the Association of Caribbean States to preserve and protect the Caribbean Sea. Since then, it has sought to coordinate efforts to achieve its aims to achieve recognition of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development.

7. The present report describes progress made from 2020 to 2022 in follow-up to General Assembly resolution [75/214](#).

## **II. Declaration of Managua**

8. In the framework of the Declaration of Managua, adopted in March 2019 by the Heads of State and Government of the member States and associate members of the Association of Caribbean States, with the main theme “Joining Efforts in the Caribbean to Confront Climate Change”, the importance of confronting climate change and its effects on the countries and territories of the region was recognized; the work programme of the Caribbean Sea Commission was established, which included seeking recognition of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development and the project “Assessment of the Impact of Climate Change on Sandy Shorelines”.

## **III. Plan of action 2022–2028**

9. On 29 April 2022, during the twenty-seventh ordinary meeting of the Association of Caribbean States Ministerial Council, the plan of action 2022–2028 was approved. Its strategic objectives are interlinked and have as a priority the sustainable development of the Greater Caribbean. The strategies consider cross-cutting issues related to the protection and conservation of ecosystems through ecosystem-based solutions, community participation and engagement with youth, women, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, such as indigenous peoples.

10. Strategic Objective C of the Association of Caribbean States concerning Caribbean Sea Commission activities is aimed at reducing environmental risks, biodiversity loss and promoting the restoration, preservation, conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and other natural resources through improved governance of the Caribbean Sea, through the implementation of four general strategies: (a) promote the designation of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development; (b) promote the sustainable management of the Caribbean Sea and its resources; (c) strengthen measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change; (d) promote the sustainable management of waste and residues.

## **IV. Strengthening collaboration with regional and international partners**

11. The Declaration of Managua acknowledges the technical and financial resources offered by member States, associate members, founding observers, observer States,

observer organizations and social actors and thanks them for their support for the implementation of the plan of action for the triennium 2019–2021.

12. The recently approved plan of action 2022–2028 aims at promoting multidimensional cooperation as a fundamental tool for the development of the Greater Caribbean region, the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals and other international development agendas through Association of Caribbean States projects and programmes. In fulfilment of the mandate conferred by the member States of the Association of Caribbean States in its mandate of “regional consultation, cooperation, and concerted action”<sup>2</sup> the Association has intensified its collaboration with regional and international partners on matters relating to climate change and disaster risk reduction, with the aim of bringing about effective and sustainable solutions to mitigate against global warming and the other adverse effects of climate change, as well as its impacts on the member States of the Association of Caribbean States.

13. In fulfilment of the mandate given by the member States of the Association of Caribbean States as a body for “regional consultation, cooperation, and concerted action”, the secretariat has intensified its collaboration with regional and international partners on issues related to climate change, disaster risk reduction, trade, transport and sustainable tourism, with the aim of achieving effective and sustainable solutions to promote adaptation and resilience of the member States of the Association.

14. With 25 member States, 10 associate members and 28 observer countries, the Association of Caribbean States has a unique position within the region. In addition to existing partnerships with donor countries such as the Republic of Korea, Türkiye and the Netherlands for the implementation of Caribbean Sea Commission projects, it requires the technical and financial support of the United Nations to implement such a large-scale task.

15. Some examples include the role of the Association of Caribbean States in addressing the widespread threat of sargasso algae. On 29 October 2021, the third Steering Committee Meeting of the SARG’COOP project was held by the Regional Council of Guadeloupe in conjunction with Interreg Caraïbes. The meeting sought to discuss the SARG’COOP project, which was born in partnership with the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States and the Association of Caribbean States after the international conference on sargassum in 2019.

16. The Association of Caribbean States engages with the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems (CLME+) Project Coordination Unit to seek the final drafting and adoption of the coordinating mechanism memorandum of understanding, as well as to open the memorandum of understanding for signature and review the road map towards the implementation of the coordinating mechanism memorandum of understanding.

17. Subsequently, the Association of Caribbean States participated in the virtual dialogue on marine spatial planning and blue economy for the CLME+ region. The objective of the meeting was to establish the current status and opportunities for advancing marine spatial planning through the global PROCARIBE+ project and marine spatial planning projects, as well as the future Global Environment Facility’s International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network.

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<sup>2</sup> Association of Caribbean States, Secretariat (1994) Convention establishing the Association of Caribbean States, Article III.

## V. Ongoing projects of the Caribbean Sea Commission

18. The various crises facing our region have caused a slowdown in the implementation of Caribbean Sea Commission projects. However, under new online collaboration schemes and modalities, it has been possible to continue working.

19. The Caribbean Sea Commission and Association of Caribbean States flagship project, entitled “Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Caribbean Sandy Shorelines; Alternatives for Control and Resilience” referred to in the general secretariat’s 2020 report, seeks to improve the coastal resilience of member States of the Association of Caribbean States by bringing together coastal erosion experts in the region through the establishment of a coastal erosion monitoring network in nine member countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Haiti, Jamaica, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago, all of which currently have a national focal point.

20. This project was launched in 2017 with funding from the Korea International Cooperation Agency, which provided \$4 million. It will enable the member States of the Association of Caribbean States to understand some of the impacts of climate change on the region’s coastal zones such as sea-level rise and coastal erosion. An amendment to the agreement was made in April 2022, approving an extension of the project until September 2023. This will allow the integration of proposals from regional specialists to restore beaches that have suffered the impact of climate change in the region, taking into account the characteristics that differentiate them from the rest of the world.

21. The secretariat continues to work in constant collaboration with the focal points of the network (component 1) and on the equipment procurement strategy (component 3). The countries of Trinidad and Tobago, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Costa Rica and Panama have met with the Association of Caribbean States individually during the last quarter of 2021 to update the equipment list, which consists of 250 items. In parallel, the Association of Caribbean States is preparing a custody transfer agreement and the supply of equipment to member States, including donation processes, tax exemptions and securing data to integrate the monitoring network.

22. In January 2021, the project signed a contract with GAMMA Investment Management to carry out executive studies for beach rehabilitation in three countries: Panama, Trinidad and Tobago and Antigua and Barbuda (component 4.1). The beach rehabilitation projects by the GAMMA consultancy began in September 2021 in Viento Frío, Panama, and were successfully completed in October 2021. Subsequently, the team moved on and commenced project activities in the countries of Trinidad and Tobago and Antigua and Barbuda in April 2022. The projects consist of fieldwork exercises and a postgraduate course entitled “Coastal Processes and Methodological Criteria for Beach Restoration and Sedimentology Seminar”.

23. On 2 June 2021, the National Environment and Planning Agency of Jamaica submitted the status report on the video monitoring tower in Hellshire (component 4.2), in which they reported the completion of the construction of the tower in May 2021. Subsequently, the Agency received the monitoring equipment for future installation and training by experts from the Korean Institute of Ocean Science and Technology.

24. The general secretariat is developing a website for the Sandy Shorelines project (component 5) that will serve as a platform for knowledge transfer and will show case the results of the different components of the project.

25. In addition to the Sandy Shorelines project mentioned above, the Netherlands financed the participation of Dutch members Curaçao and Sint Maarten. Approximately

\$70,000 worth of coastal monitoring equipment was procured in September 2020 and successfully delivered to Curaçao and Sint Maarten in November 2020.

26. In addition, the Caribbean Sea Commission included in the plan of action 2022–2028 the “Caribbean Climate Mobility Initiative”, which was presented to member States on 2 September 2021 during the first meeting of the Bureau of the Caribbean Sea Commission Special Committee and its inclusion in the Caribbean Sea Commission project agenda was discussed. The Caribbean Climate Mobility Initiative will be launched in July 2022. The climate crisis is the key driver of forced displacement and migration. In this regard, the Greater Caribbean would benefit from developing “people-centred climate action” in line with its objectives of advancing common prosperity and greater economic integration.

27. Our region faces continuing and new development needs, particularly in the context of COVID-19, climate change and related threats. It is therefore necessary to reposition it in order to identify and develop regional comparative advantages to promote sustainable development, production complementarity and resilience in the productive sectors of the Greater Caribbean.

28. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize sustainable tourism as an essential activity for the economic and environmental development of the region. In this regard, the designation of the Caribbean as a sustainable tourism zone will be promoted in recognition of the contributions of the tourism industry to improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the Greater Caribbean.

29. The high vulnerability of the Caribbean to the climate crisis demands greater regional action. For this reason, the Association of Caribbean States will begin the process of accreditation to the Green Climate Fund.

## VI. Special area designation – defining the Caribbean Sea as a special area

30. The twentieth meeting of the Caribbean Sea Commission was held online on 14 August 2020. During the discussion, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the progress of the project portfolio, the modality of work and the efforts deployed by Association of Caribbean States countries to contain it were highlighted. The Caribbean Sea Commission approved the composition of the subcommissions as seen in the table below.

<i>Country</i>	<i>Members nominated for the Scientific and Technical Subcommission</i>	<i>Members nominated for the Legal Subcommission</i>
Colombia	Erick Castro	Andrés Villegas Jaramillo
Dominica	Minchinton Burton Florian Mitchel	Minchinton Burton Florian Mitchel
Guadeloupe	Jessica Julan-Aubourg Nicolas Diaz Pierre Bourgeois	Jessica Julan-Aubourg Nicolas Diaz Pierre Bourgeois
Guyana		Donnette Streete
Jamaica	Anthony McKenzie Mona Webber	



<i>Country</i>	<i>Members nominated for the Scientific and Technical Subcommission</i>	<i>Members nominated for the Legal Subcommission</i>
Mexico	Daniel Robledo Ramírez Francisco Arreguín Sánchez	
Nicaragua		Julio César Saborío Arguello Claudia Loza Obregón
Panama	José Julio Casas Ligia Castro	
Saint Lucia	Bethia Thomas (principal) Lavina Alexander (alternate)	
Trinidad and Tobago	Anjani Ganase	Rahanna Juman Mary Tang-Yew

31. Since the formation of the subcommissions, four meetings have been held between 2020 and 2021. The subcommissions have focused on advancing the work of determining the legal, financial and technical implications of defining the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development, as described in United Nations General Assembly resolution [75/214](#).

32. The subcommissions have developed a joint meeting mechanism to maximize time and share expertise among experts. In this regard, they approved the terms of reference to carry out an update of the 2014 consultants' report, in the light of new international and regional legislation, using a multidimensional, ocean governance approach, taking into account the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the multidimensional and sectoral implications of the designation of special areas and incorporating current issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. These terms of reference were approved during the second extraordinary meeting of the Caribbean Sea Commission held on 16 April 2021.

33. In 2021, the membership was consulted on possible consultancy firms that could develop the project to analyse the implications of designating the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development and to update the consultancy carried out in 2014. Colombia and Mexico sent their proposals to the Association of Caribbean States.

34. The Caribbean Sea Commission will establish the path that the Legal and Scientific and Technical Subcommissions should implement to initiate the work detailed in General Assembly resolution [75/214](#) and build consensus to define the special area by underlining the three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental aspects – and recognizing their interrelationships. The work programme of the subcommissions is expected to include research on global and regional agreements to which member States of the Association of Caribbean States are party, existing definitions of “special area”, the shortcomings of such existing agreements, as well as their level of ratification among member States.

35. The Legal Subcommission will lead: (a) the investigation of existing legal concepts of “special area”, in particular as they apply to the Caribbean Sea; and (b) the examination of the conceptual elements of a “special area” within relevant international instruments, and how these can be extended and/or applied to the concept of “special area in the context of sustainable development”.

36. The Scientific and Technical Subcommission will provide scientific research that details and highlights the environmental characteristics of the Caribbean Sea as unique and the desires of member States with respect to the management of the Sea. These desires should reflect a concerted effort towards the integration of the management of the Caribbean Sea and include a mechanism based on participation and consensus-building rather than punitive actions.

37. A draft definition of the special area will be presented which incorporates all the above-mentioned considerations, including the contributions of the different United Nations agencies working on the matter.

38. During this process, the Caribbean Sea Commission will consult with agencies and/or mechanisms that have similar activities to the initiative, such as the Caribbean Development Bank and the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre.

## **VII. Conclusion**

39. The Association of Caribbean States, through the Caribbean Sea Commission, remains committed to the goal of achieving special area status for the Caribbean Sea. The Commission is actively working on the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea through activities such as joint research, management projects, meetings and cooperative information-exchange mechanisms in order to improve coordination and cooperation on issues relating to the management of the marine environment and related decision-making.

40. The secretariat of the Association of Caribbean States considers it essential to move from narrative to results. In this sense, it will convene the United Nations agencies that report inputs to the present report, through the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

41. While this issue has been high on the agenda of the Association of Caribbean States during the reporting period, the members of the Association and the general secretariat must join forces to continue to strengthen and mobilize resources for approved projects, as well as new initiatives that promote the development of the Caribbean Sea, its preservation and sustainability. The Association has every confidence that the joint efforts and active participation of the members will help to ensure the strategic objectives of the Commission.

42. Finally, the general secretariat expresses its appreciation to the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Secretary-General for the consideration of this matter.

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