



SCOPING ACTIVITIES AND TASK TEAMS

Report of the Task Team on causes and impacts of massive accumulations of the brown macro-algae *Sargassum* in the nearshore environment of the Caribbean and West Africa

1 Massive accumulations of *Sargassum* seaweed first occurred on the shores of West Africa and many Caribbean islands in 2011, and have re-appeared every year since (apart from 2013), with 2018 being the worst year to date. Floating mid-ocean *Sargassum* provides a biodiversity 'hot-spot' and has been described as '*the golden floating rainforest of the ocean*'. Conversely, near-shore and shoreline inundations create considerable social, economic and environmental impacts, but the cause or combination of causes responsible remain uncertain.

2 GESAMP, at its 46th session, decided to create a Task Team (TT) on *Sargassum* to provide a mechanism to help coordinate GESAMP interests, acknowledging that several sponsoring agencies have an interest in the phenomenon (IOC, FAO, UNEP, UNDP, IAEA). One of the main intentions was to cooperate with SCOR-IOC GlobalHAB to organise an Open Science Meeting (OSM) on the topic. It quickly became apparent that interest and activity on both sides of the Atlantic has expanded significantly compared with the situation described in the GESAMP Scoping Paper, last revised in 2017. Several initiatives and on-line platforms have been created and joint research projects funded. Rather than setting up a new TT, it seemed more effective to liaise with those existing groups. To this end the Chair of the Task Team took part (as presenter or moderator) in the first two of the four webinars being organised by UNEP and IOC-UNESCO (SCOR GlobalHAB), looking especially at the science of *Sargassum* inundations, bringing together experts from the region. This generated significant interest. The third and fourth webinars are planned for September and November. The Chair of the Task Team is also in contact with the leads of a major new Atlantic-wide research project, as well as individual researchers. The OSM had been planned to take place in November 2020, hosted by Mexico, but has been postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Action requested of GESAMP

3 GESAMP is invited to note the information provided, and comment as it deems appropriate.