

# Supporting a Sargasso Sea Sanctuary

The UK must regain its ocean leadership by ratifying the Global Ocean Treaty and championing the designation of the Sargasso Sea as a highly protected international marine sanctuary, with a comprehensive plan ready by the first Ocean COP in January 2027.

## Why the Sargasso Sea?

### The Sargasso is teeming with globally significant marine life

“The golden rainforest of the high seas” gets its name from Sargassum seaweed. These floating habitats support a rich ecosystem, with over 145 invertebrate species and 127 fish species recorded. They also attract migratory species, including dolphins, marlins and sharks. It has been identified by UNESCO as a priority area for potential World Heritage status on the high seas.



The green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*)



### UK Overseas Territory Bermuda is its only landmass

This gives the UK a particularly important role in championing its protection as a high seas sanctuary.

### Its lack of coastal borders makes protection an easier win

The Sargasso is the only sea in the world not defined by coastlines but by ocean currents – the North Atlantic Gyre. This contributes to relatively low geopolitical contestation.

# What threats does the Sargasso Sea face?

## Sea life residing and migrating through the Sargasso Sea face tremendous strain from giant fishing vessels that use drifting longlines up to 100km long.

Whilst tuna and billfish are the primary targets of these vessels, their longlines result in significant bycatch such as marine mammals, turtles, seabirds and sharks. This threatens the Bermudan way of life and economy, undermining both local fishing and tourism.

**Just 33 longline vessels accounted for 97% of total fishing activities in the Sargasso Sea, amounting to a total 22,881 hours of fishing activity in 2023.** By far the largest portion of these ships came from Taiwan, with further vessels coming from the US, China, and Spain. These numbers show no sign of abating over recent years according to data collected by the [Global Fishing Watch](#).

**Existing governance is fragmented.** Key elements are carried out through Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs), which primarily manage fishing activity and specific target species, rather than ecosystem-level recovery. Their reliance on consensus-based decision-making among member states can also limit the adoption of more ambitious conservation measures.



**As work accelerates under the new BBNJ Agreement, Bermuda remains committed to supporting measures that enhance the conservation of the Sargasso Sea's unique biodiversity and promote its long-term ecological resilience.**

Jaché Adams, Bermuda's Minister of Public Works & Environment



## Bermuda is one of the strongest proponents for stronger protection of the Sargasso Sea

Bermuda was one of the founders of the Sargasso Sea Commission, set up to oversee monitoring and management of the species rich waters surrounding the island.

Bermuda remains a prominent advocate for a sanctuary, with its Minister of Public Works and Environment, Jaché Adams, saying that: "Over the past decade, Bermuda has championed science-based stewardship and helped to strengthen co-operation among governments, researchers and ocean stakeholders to safeguard this globally important high-seas ecosystem."

## What steps does the UK need to take to effectively create and implement a sanctuary in the Sargasso Sea?



The UK should champion the designation of the Sargasso Sea as a highly protected marine sanctuary a priority, with a comprehensive plan ready by the first Ocean COP in January 2027. In doing so, the UK demonstrates its global marine leadership and commitment to the 30x30 target.



The plan to make the Sargasso Sea a sanctuary should include provisions for robust monitoring, control and surveillance systems. These need to be established to monitor and effectively implement a marine protected area, including satellite tracking of fishing activity and transparent public reporting.



Bermuda should hold seats on any oversight body to ensure representation of their interests as a strong advocate for protecting the Sargasso Sea's precious marine ecosystem and as the sole island in the area.



The UK should work with Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) to integrate ecosystem-based management approaches. Without this alignment, fisheries governance risks continuing to prioritise individual stock management over wider ecosystem protection, potentially undermining the effectiveness of any Sargasso Sea marine protected area.

