National Environment & Planning Agency
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Website: http://www.nepa.gov.jm

11 January 2024

Attn: Krista Campbell, TVJ

Received via email on 5 January 2024

Sent via: Email to Jodiel Ebanks and Shahri Miller

Query and Response: Follow-up Questions - National Sargassum Response Plan

1. **The strategy is listed as a draft. Has it been officially adopted by the government or the ministry?**

   The document remains in draft, however, it is continuously used by the agency to guide the annual response to the accumulation of sargassum on the island's shoreline including information exchange, surveys, public awareness and mobilization as well as provide guidance for beach clean-ups.

2. **Do we have a good general idea to what extent is the plan being followed or not followed**

   The extent of implementation of activities on a yearly basis is outlined in the internal annual reports of the agency.

3. **The draft strategy makes a list of funding recommendations, suggesting spending allocations for cleanup, etc. to the tune of JA$5m in 2015. News reports suggest that this money was allocated and spent in 2015. Was ever allocated and spent after 2015?**

   The Agency refers you to the table sent in prior response. It is included here for ease of reference and shows expenditure for 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Location	Responsible Party	Timeline (day/s)	Estimated Cost	Summary of Activity
2015				
Port Maria, St. Mary	St. Mary Parish Development Committee (coordinated through the St. Mary Municipal Corporation)	1	JMD 28,000	To provide lunches and refreshment for volunteers
Port Maria, St. Mary	St. Mary Parish Development Committee (coordinated	2	JMD 296,000.00	Machinery rental, transport of material to disposal site and labourers

Location	Responsible Party	Timeline (day/s)	Estimated Cost	Summary of Activity
	through the St. Mary Municipal Corporation)			
2016				
Long Bay, Portland	Residents	N/A	N/A	Daily cleanup by users of beach.
Fort Clarence Beach Park	UDC			Routine clean-up activities undertaken by staff at site.
2017				
Long Bay, Portland	The clean-up exercise was carried out by the Long Bay Community Youth Group	one day	Not provided	
Orchard, Hanover			Not provided	
Port Henderson Beach, St. Catherine	N/A	N/A	N/A	Persons who work on the beach revealed that they clean the beach to remove debris and accumulated Sargassum twice per day
Fort Clarence Beach Park, St. Catherine	UDC	N/A	N/A	Routine clean-up activities undertaken by staff at site.
San San, Portland	Privately operated	N/A	N/A	A staff member onsite revealed that the beach is cleaned to remove debris and accumulated Sargassum twice per day.
Boston Beach, Portland			Not provided	Persons onsite revealed that the beach is cleaned to remove debris and accumulated Sargassum twice per day.
Manchioneal, Portland	N/A	N/A	Not provided	Persons onsite revealed that the beach is cleaned to

Location	Responsible Party	Timeline (day/s)	Estimated Cost	Summary of Activity
				remove debris and accumulated Sargassum twice per day.
2018				
Hellshire Bay, St. Catherine (not fishing beach)	NEPA in partnership with the Urban Development Corporation	5	JMD 1,000,000.00	Use of machinery to remove debris from beach.

4. **The strategy recommends that a fund be established to support removal and to develop projects. Was this fund established? If so, how much money does it have in it, how much has been spent from it and how much is made available each year?**

   A fund has not been established. In 2015, the Agency successfully engaged the Tourism Enhancement Fund for the provision of funds to support clean-up activities by local community groups. The funds were made available to groups who requested assistance primarily in St. Mary. Additionally, in 2018, NEPA in partnership with the Urban Development Corporation, carried out clean-up activities along Hellshire Bay at a cost of JMD$1,000,000.00 through the support of the TEF funds.

   Through monitoring activities conducted by the Agency, it has been discovered that persons who work on beaches impacted by Sargassum would conduct daily removal of debris and accumulated Sargassum.

5. **Despite the Sargassum Response Plan outlining collaboration with NSWMA to help remove sargassum, Executive Director, Audley Gordon, says to date, the agency has not received a call to do same. Is this because there have not been significant blooms to warrant the NSWMA's assistance with removal?**

   The agency issues notices to the public in keeping with regional guidelines for the removal of Sargassum from beaches. The guidelines recommend the following for removal and disposal[1]:

   Removal of Sargassum:

[1] https://www.nepa.gov.jm/nepa-advises-new-normal-sargassum

- Removal of Sargassum should be carried out manually through non-intrusive methods (no heavy equipment and machinery) such as hand raking or beach raking equipment with a perforated conveyor belt.
- After raking, the accumulated sand should be returned to the beach.

Disposal of Sargassum:

- **Stockpiling at a designated location**
- The material should be turned occasionally to encourage its drying and the ultimate removal of sand;
- **All organic material should be disposed of at an appropriate off-site location or buried on the beach where practical.**
- The Agency further advises beach operators that should the need arise for the use of heavy equipment such as tractors and front-end loaders to remove Sargassum and other accumulated debris, then they should seek the Agency's permission before carrying out the activity.

Based on the amount of sargassum accumulating on beaches, the Agency has found that beach clean-up activities mostly involve the stockpiling of the material in a designated area for the drying and burial of the seaweed along the backshore.

Not just in Jamaica, but across the region, it is suggested that burial of the material reduces the burden on landfill areas as many do not have the space to receive large volumes of Sargassum. It is reported that some landfills avoid receiving the seaweed due to risks associated with the odour and possible fire hazard (Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism, 2019)[2].

6. **The plan says this: "In the effort to better understand critical aspects of this phenomenon, a data collection center will be established to document reports of pelagic sargassum observed within Jamaica's waters during 2015. Data collected will be referenced to regional research institutions such as UWI and the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory (GCRL), which will help scientists throughout the region to identify the source and examine the movements and causes of this extraordinary event." Was this centre established? If so, can we view its data?**

A centre has not been established.

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2 https://portal.crfm.int/he/dataset/a2da0988-f7e8-4cff-983a-6de7afe3d38b/resource/8ba1424c-4844-446e-8ba1-ee40361411e7/download/fact-finding-sargassum-survey-final-report.pdf

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7. **Can you expound more on the "information gaps" with monitoring data on sargassum. What's causing this gap? IIs it because NEPA's monitoring is not as widescale as MGI's?**

   Currently the agency conducts site-level monitoring on public beaches across the island by visual inspections to determine the presence or absence of Sargassum on the shoreline. The height of the Sargassum on the shoreline is measured and recorded. One or more meter in width of Sargassum is recorded as a positive influx, while amounts below one meter in width is recorded as little/no influx. The data is captured by using a Sargassum inspection form located on the software survey123 ArcGIS.

   The data collected does not capture the volume of Sargassum on the beach. Also monitoring is only conducted along the shoreline and not in the nearshore area (at sea). This can however be conducted with the use of drones.

   The agency does not collect forecasting data which involves the use of costly high-precision imagery and radar. This information can be used to more accurately predict localized influx, spatial distribution and make observations in the nearshore environment.

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