

About Sargasso Sea Commission appointments

Dr Murray Roberts will be entering his second three-year term as a Commissioner. He is a professor of applied marine biology and ecology at the University of Edinburgh focusing on the deep sea. He was responsible for running ATLAS, and iAtlantic, international research programmes that collect data on the Sargasso Sea. He also convenes the BBNJ Symposium with Mara Consultants. He has participated in offshore research expeditions off Norway, Scotland, Ireland, Western Africa and the Southeast USA. He is also the author of the most cited paper on cold-water coral biology and geology in 2006 (Science 312: 543-547) and the only textbook on cold-water corals (Cambridge University Press, 2009). He also has experience working at the science/policy interface at an international level, acting as a consultant for the Convention on Biological Diversity to produce an updated synthesis on the impacts of ocean acidification and to draft the 'Voluntary specific workplan on biodiversity in cold-water areas within the jurisdictional scope of the Convention'.

Elizabeth McLanahan was the Director of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Office of International Affairs and served as a Hamilton Declaration focal point for the United States until her retirement in 2025. This will be her first term as a Sargasso Sea Commissioner. She also represented the United States in marine and coastal discussions under the Convention on Biological Diversity and in negotiations of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction agreement (BBNJ agreement) and the UN plastics treaty. She served as the U.S. Head of Delegation and Vice-Chair of the Arctic Council Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) Working Group where she facilitated cross-national collaboration on marine litter, Arctic shipping, marine protected areas, and ecosystem-based management. She has a Master of Environmental Management (Resource Economics & Policy) and a Master of Forestry from Duke University, Nicholas School of the Environment, and a B.A. in Biology from Dartmouth College.

Dr Cassander Titley-O'Neal will be entering her first term as a Commissioner. She serves as the Director of the National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands (NPTVI), where she oversees the operations of the Trust and manages 21 national parks. Her role includes balancing the mandate for the conservation, protection and sustainable management of these valuable natural resources in the British Virgin Islands (BVI) with the economic needs of tourism. In addition to her role at the NPTVI, Dr Titley-O'Neal has over 16 years' experience as an environmental consultant. Her research specialty is in ecotoxicology where she investigates the nature, effects, and interactions of substances that are harmful to the environment and the organisms living in it, specifically endocrine disruption in female marine gastropods (snails). Dr Titley-O'Neal's research has been published in various peer-review journals such as the Journal of Environmental Monitoring, Science of the Total Environment, Bulletin of Marine Science and Water Quality Research Journal of Canada.

In 2019, Dr Titley-O'Neal was part of the team that completed a national physical development plan (NPDP) for the British Virgin Islands dubbed Envision 2040, which has now been ratified by The Planning Authority of the Virgin Islands. Regionally, Dr. Titley-O'Neal served as the K2 - Marine Specialist for the Caribbean Regional Oceanscape Project (CROP), where she was the lead for the development of five marine spatial plans for St. Kitts and Nevis, Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Grenada, as well as the regional marine spatial planning framework.

Dr Titley-O'Neal holds a Ph.D. in marine biology from the University of New Brunswick in Canada, a M.Sc. in applied marine science from the University of Plymouth in the United Kingdom, and a B.Sc. in marine biology with a minor in chemistry from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington in the United States.

About the Sargasso Sea

The Sargasso Sea ecosystem is based on the floating *Sargassum* seaweed that populates its surface. *Sargassum* is home to a number of endemic species, and provides a nursery for several species of pelagic fish and all species of Atlantic sea turtle. The Sargasso Sea is the only known spawning area for two endangered species of anguillid eel, the European and American eel which spawn in the ocean but migrate to live most of their lives up rivers connected to the Atlantic basin. The Sargasso Sea is also a migratory corridor for sharks, rays and cetaceans. The Sargasso Sea only takes up roughly 1% of the ocean's surface, but it is responsible for a net sink of 7% of the global carbon pump, meaning that it plays an outsized role in climate change mitigation. The Sargasso Sea is threatened by various pressures – including impacts from shipping, fishing, plastic and other pollutants, and climate change.

For more information, visit the Sargasso Sea Commission website:

<https://www.sargassoseacommission.org/index.php>

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