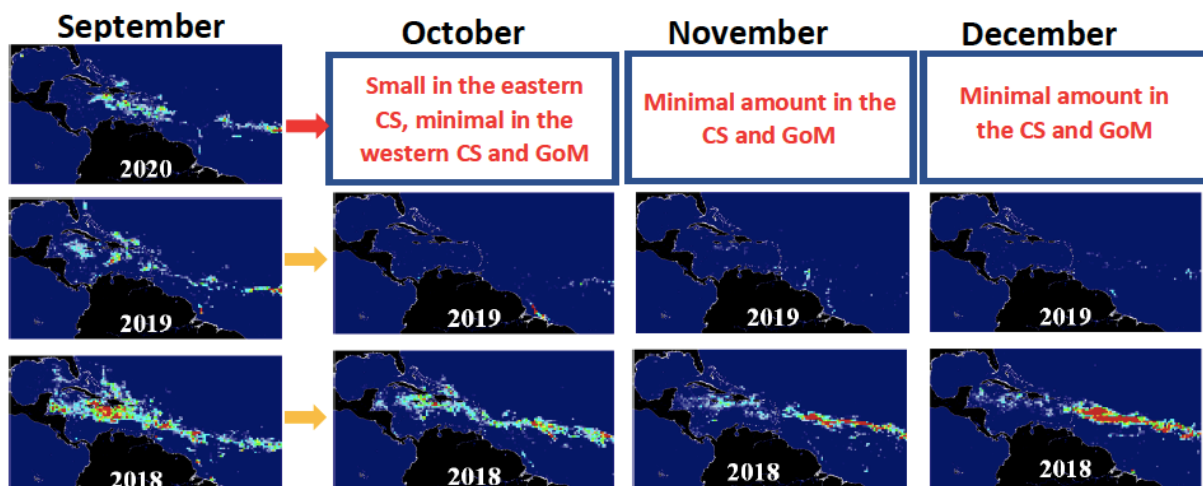


Antigua, Barbuda and Redonda: October 2020 Briefing

The Islands of the Caribbean, inclusive of Antigua, Barbuda and Redonda, have been affected by Sargassum Seaweed (*Sargassum sp.*) since 2011. Sargassum blooms appear to originate off the coast of South America and have been affecting the Caribbean island chain with varying ecological and anthropogenic/economic effects. Sargassum seaweed grow on the ocean surface and provide ecosystem services such as habitat for juvenile marine organisms (e.g. fish, turtles) and foraging areas while on the sea, but biologically degrade upon contact with the shoreline, leading to negative impacts.

Sargassum beaching events have continued to decrease across the shores of Antigua and Barbuda, with few exceptions. The University of South Florida Optical Oceanography Lab has been examining satellite images to track the sargassum blooms over the years, and states: “In July 2020, the overall *Sargassum* amount decreased across most of the central Atlantic. Moderate amounts were still observed in the Central West Atlantic (i.e. region east of the Lesser Antilles) and most of the Caribbean Sea. In all regions combined, total *Sargassum* amount decreased from 4.2M metric tons in August to 3.5M metric tons in September, lower than September 2018, 2017 and 2015. However, large amounts of *Sargassum* appeared in the Central East Atlantic along the West Africa Coast (not shown in maps)”. The maps below, with warm colours representing high abundance, displays the years 2018 to 2020.



Map 1: Comparison of Sargassum blooms between 2018 and 2020. University of South Florida.



Map 2: September 2020

This is truly a mixed news forecast. Locally, we have seen reduced beaching events, and as indicated, the amount of Sargassum in our region is decreasing. In Map 2, you can see the area around Antigua and Barbuda has some Sargassum, so expect residual beaching events over the month of October. However, the appearance of large amounts of Sargassum off the coast of Africa may be an indication of a large “Sargassum season” for us in 2021.

While we hope this will not be the case, we will continue to monitor the satellite reports and track *Sargassum* quantities.



Picture 1: Doigg September 2020 showing small amounts of Sargassum along the beach.



Picture 2: St. James September 2020 showing small amounts of Sargassum, but water which is still discoloured.

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