



## Government responds to North Sound Sargassum influx

**Grand Cayman** – The Ministry of Sustainability & Climate Resiliency and Department of Environment are leading emergency response efforts to address the large amount of Sargassum seaweed in the North Sound of Grand Cayman.

The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton, JP, MP and the Ministry has committed to complete a national response plan to mitigate the Sargassum arriving in our waters and on our shores.

“There is a significant environmental concern caused by the Sargassum on our beaches and in our waters. Although the previous administration established a task force to tackle this issue, there was no national plan or strategy produced. The equipment is inadequate to resolve the current Sargassum issues,” he said. “The Ministry of Sustainability & Climate Resiliency, Department of Environment, and Ministry of Planning will be developing a specific set of policies and plans to address the anticipated scenarios before the Sargassum settles on our shores.”

To remedy this urgent matter, Ministry Chief Officer Jennifer Ahearn said a multi-agency response has been mobilised within the Cayman Islands Government, including the Department of Environment, Hazard Management Cayman Islands, and Department of Environmental Health.

“The Cayman Islands Government is working to address the current situation and put in place long-term solutions to deal quickly with future incidents. Unfortunately, the influxes of Sargassum we are seeing in the Cayman Islands are driven by external factors such as climate change and represent an emerging, long-term issue that we will have to manage on an ongoing, annual basis,” she said. “Our immediate priority is addressing the largescale influx of Sargassum in the North Sound and the Department of Environment is leading a trial to remove seaweed with a private company.”

The trial, which began today, Friday 29 July, will involve pumping Sargassum out of the water and transporting the seaweed to one or more on-land disposal sites.

Department of Environment (DoE) Director Gina Ebanks-Petrie said the trial will determine the feasibility of the strategy given the volume of Sargassum.



**Ministry of Sustainability  
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Cayman Islands Government

## Media Release

“There are a number of environmental, public health and economic consequences of large-scale Sargassum landings and the ongoing impacts on nearby residents, businesses and the marine environment require an appropriate response. The DoE has contracted with a local service provider to trial removal of the Sargassum from the water utilising a pumping system. This will determine whether the volumes that can be removed using this methodology are sufficient to make a meaningful difference,” she said.

When Sargassum washes up on local beaches, leaving the seaweed on the beach to decompose is usually the simplest option. Over time, the seaweed is washed away or buried by wave action, nourishing the beach and stabilising the shoreline without the risk of sand removal associated with beach grooming. In the North Sound, however, the seaweed is decomposing in the water where it can reduce oxygen levels and light penetration, with the potential to negatively affect marine life.

“During seasons of particularly bad influxes, the Cayman Islands Government recognises the need for intervention, including the use of suitable equipment. During turtle nesting season – which we are in right now - our main concern is ensuring any turtle nests on beaches that need to be cleaned by equipment rather than by hand can be done safely and that we do not end up removing more beach than Sargassum,” Ebanks-Petrie said, noting the DoE has developed informational materials and a seaweed removal enquiry form to help landowners determine when action is needed to address stranded Sargassum and when it is best to let nature take its course. These materials may be accessed on the DoE website: [www.doe.ky](http://www.doe.ky)

A combination of interrelated factors, including prevailing winds and oceanic currents, contribute to whether floating Sargassum lands on local shores or passes the Cayman Islands by, making it difficult to predict stranding events before they occur.

“The Department of Environment has access to NOAA’s predictive Sargassum model which alerted us to the fact that it would be a record year for Sargassum in the Caribbean region. We are investigating the possibility of satellite tracking that will hopefully get us a bit closer to predicting the likelihood and location of large Sargassum strandings,” Ebanks-Petrie said.

**(ENDS)**

**Photo: North Sound Sargassum influx.jpg**



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**Caption:** A bird's-eye-view of the North Sound Sargassum stranding event, captured on a recent Department of Environment drone flight.

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