ECOPS AT THE 2026 ALL ATLANTIC FORUM

All-Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance (AAORIA)

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High-level officials, ocean researchers, policymakers and civil society actors gathered in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, on 15–16 April 2026 for the All-Atlantic Forum, organized by the All-Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance (AAORIA). Hosted in the heart of the South Atlantic, this landmark edition marked the first time the Forum convened in the Global South, reflecting AAORIA's commitment to inclusive governance and equitable partnership across all Atlantic nations. Building on the momentum of previous gatherings in Galway, Belém, Washington and Brussels, the Salvador Forum deepened the transatlantic community's resolve to confront shared ocean challenges — warming, sea level rise, biodiversity loss, pollution and overexploitation — through science, innovation and multilateral diplomacy.

Opening of the All-Atlantic Forum, 15th April 2026, Salvador da Bahia, Brazil

In 2026, AAORIA reaffirmed its two strategic pillars: coastal resilience, and ocean observation and modelling. Under the coastal resilience pillar, the Forum advanced co-designed frameworks with governments, coastal communities and scientific institutions, with particular emphasis on mangrove restoration, seagrass ecosystem recovery, and the expansion of early warning systems adapted to the vulnerabilities of tropical Atlantic coastlines. Brazil's extensive experience in community-based marine stewardship and biodiversity conservation provided a rich backdrop for these discussions. Under the ocean observation and modelling pillar, partners reinforced commitments to interoperable data platforms and shared standards, including the Copernicus Marine Service, the European Digital Twin Ocean and GOOS (Global Ocean Observing System) best practices, integrating new contributions from Latin American monitoring networks to strengthen regional coverage across the South Atlantic.

The Forum also delivered significant institutional milestones. Several new member states and partner organisations formalised their engagement with the Alliance, broadening AAORIA's reach across West Africa, the Caribbean and South America. Key initiatives were launched or advanced: the Network of Coastal Resilience Beacon Sites welcomed additional sites from the South Atlantic, the Ocean Observation and Modelling Work Plan saw the adoption of new implementation recommendations, and the Blue Intergenerational Programme expanded its cohort of Early-Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs) engaging with senior experts across the Atlantic community. The sustainable aquaculture work stream, introduced in Brussels, gained further traction with the adoption of a joint framework aligning scientific evidence, social licence and best practices across member countries.

Practical mechanisms took centre stage in Salvador. Technical assistance programmes to national governments were broadened, regional hubs in Latin America and the Caribbean and West Africa strengthened their coordination roles, and new capacity-building pathways were announced through academic and civil society partnerships. The Salvador Forum also placed renewed emphasis on ocean-climate linkages, recognising the South Atlantic's critical role in global climate regulation and the urgency of integrating this science into national adaptation strategies.

At the close of the Forum, participants adopted the Salvador Declaration, reaffirming AAORIA's results-oriented approach and its commitment to serving coastal communities on both sides of the Atlantic. The host nation for the 2027 All-Atlantic Forum will be the United Kingdom.

2026 All-Atlantic Forum

The two-day programme in Salvador combined high-level plenary sessions, thematic panels and co-design spaces with the Atlantic community.

Day 1 (15th of April 2026) opened with welcoming remarks from the Brazilian Government and the European Commission, followed by the session "The South Atlantic Moment", which framed AAORIA's expanding engagement with the Global South and its implications for equitable ocean governance, with contributions from Brazil, South Africa, Senegal, the United States, Portugal and the EU. The first thematic block focused on coastal resilience, with presentations from Brazil, Cape Verde, Colombia, Nigeria and Namibia. This was followed by the ocean observation and modelling session, with NOAA, the Interamerican Development Bank, SAEON, GOOS and regional Latin American monitoring networks highlighting data gaps in the South Atlantic, progress on interoperability and new co-design activities targeting under-observed tropical and subtropical Atlantic regions. The day also featured the first part of the Intergenerational Dialogue and afternoon sessions on ocean literacy, community-based marine stewardship and the Blue Intergenerational Programme's second cohort.

ECOPs who participated in the Intergenerational Hackathon during the Award Ceremony in Plenary, 16th of April 2026

Day 2 (16th of April 2026) began with a scene-setting panel including leaders from Brazil, the African Union and the European Commission, followed by cross-cutting Atlantic science interactions anchored in the host region's biodiversity and climate significance. AAORIA Supporters such as IOC-UNESCO, the AIR Centre, ICES, The Ocean Race, GEOMAR, the Oceano Azul Foundation and the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation shared their perspectives and ongoing initiatives. A dedicated block on sustainable aquaculture and food from the ocean brought together ICES, EATiP, Embrapa, UNTDF and the European Commission to advance the joint framework launched in Brussels. A session addressed the South Atlantic's role in polar and climate systems, with contributions from the Brazilian Antarctic Programme, AWI, Europe Jacques Delors and the European Polar Coordination Office. The afternoon featured project pitches from Mission Atlantic, BlueMissionAA, ACTNOW and several Brazilian and Latin American ocean science initiatives, followed by the adoption of the Salvador Declaration and the announcement of the 2027 Forum host. The event concluded with a reaffirmation of AAORIA's agenda centred on coastal resilience, ocean observation and sustainable aquaculture, all under an intergenerational lens.

Side events held on 13–14 April contributed to shaping the Forum's outcomes. At the Palácio da Aclamação, stakeholders co-designed coastal resilience pathways and reviewed indicators under the updated Work Programme on Good Practices. At the Federal University of Bahia, two workshops addressed South Atlantic observation gaps and sustainable blue economy priorities, with a focus on operationalising the Work Plan recommendations across Latin American and West African regional hubs. On 13 April, the Intergenerational Hackathon gathered early-career ocean professionals and senior experts to design prototypes for some of the most pressing ocean challenges.

AAORIA Outcomes and replays can be found here.

Early Careers at the 2026 All-Atlantic Forum

Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs) were a key group participating in the intergenerational hackathon that took place before and during the All-Atlantic Forum. During a 24-hours Intergenerational Ocean Hackathon, ECOPs together with Late Career Ocean Professionals (LCOP) advisors worked out a prototype to solve critical ocean science challenges on ocean literacy (blue schools), fisheries, low-cost sensors, coastal resilience, digital mapping and *Sargassum* monitoring. Each group had between 10-20 members from various countries and backgrounds but with a shared goal of working on a solution for the problem at hand.

Like 2025, GEO Blue Planet through the support of the project EU4OceanObs was committed to support ECOP participation in the 2026 All-Atlantic Forum. Furthermore, GEO Blue Planet co-lead with IOCaribe one of the hackathon challenges, the *Sargassum* monitoring challenge which focused on GEO Blue Planet´s Sargassum Information Hub website, and the opportunity to integrate Copernicus Marine Service data into the Regional Pages of this hub. Through GEO Blue Planet's engagement, various ECOPs were able to learn about *Sargassum* inundations and apply their skills to create a solution with real life application. The 59 ECOPs were from 26 different countries including Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, France, Germany, Ghana, Great Britain, Greece, Honduras, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Norway, Portugal, Senegal, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, and USA.

From left to right: Paola Diaz, Winnie Sowah, Franziska Elmer, at Senai/CIMATEC, AAORIA 2026, Salvador da Bahia, Brazil

GEO Blue Planet was proud to support the authors of this report in attending the 2026 All-Atlantic Forum and contributing as *Sargassum* experts members of GEO Blue Planet's *Sargassum* Working Group to the *Sargassum* monitoring hackathon challenge groups. Dr. Franziska Elmer is the head of science at Seafields Solutions Limited, a startup working on *Sargassum* management solutions that provide high-quality *Sargassum* biomass for valorisation companies. Paola Diaz is a Honduran biologist based in Costa Rica as a researcher at the Center for Research in Marine Sciences and Limnology (CIMAR) at the University of Costa Rica. She is part of the coordinating team of the PreMiSa Project, focused on strengthening governance, research, and sustainable strategies for the prevention and mitigation of massive *Sargassum* influxes in Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic. Dr Winnie Sowah is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Ghana. Her work focuses on marine biology and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, with research spanning fish genetics, aquaculture practices, fisheries management, and the impacts of invasive species such as *Sargassum*.

Each hackathon group also had a challenge coordinator. For this challenge, it was Camille Cherques, Communications, Dissemination and User Engagement Officer at GEO Blue Planet (Mercator Ocean International). Late Career Ocean Professionals (LCOPS) also acted as facilitators. The Sargassum monitoring group was advised by Craig McLean, retired from NOAA, and Dr Deanesh Ramsewak from the University of Trinidad and Tobago.

This challenge was designed by GEO Blue Planet given the new opportunity that Copernicus Marine Service now also offers satellite based *Sargassum* detection as one of the layers that can be integrated into its visualization tools such as dynamic dashboards. GEO Blue Planet has experienced that users

of the Sargassum Information Hub are very interested in location specific data and challenged the ECOPs of the hackathon to come up with a demo site that can serve multiple stakeholders in diverse regions.

Even before the hackathon officially started, the *Sargassum* monitoring team met several times online and designed a user feedback survey to distribute to stakeholders. More than 100 responses were received and analysed during the hackathon. This made it apparent that not only a website but rather a communication strategy is needed as many stakeholders prefer WhatsApp or email as ways to receive their information. The prototype designed by the group embedded all of this while also using the up-to-date AI knowledge of ECOP members from the hosting institution Senai/CIMATEC to make the site more personalized for different user groups and subregions.

Paola Diaz said *"The Sargassum Monitoring Hackathon challenge group focused on designing a communication tool that enables diverse stakeholders to access timely and localized information on sargassum arrivals. What made this experience especially valuable was the multidisciplinary composition of the ECOPs involved, bringing together perspectives from different fields to collaboratively develop a prototype solution for our challenge. This strongly reflects the real-world nature of the sargassum issue itself, which requires interdisciplinary collaboration to effectively design and implement solutions — something we clearly saw represented in our outcomes."*

Franziska Elmer highlighted the value of networking that happened during the forum: *"Our hackathon team was more than just a group of people you work with for two days. Everyone was so dedicated to our challenge and the group and applied their unique strengths to it. We got to know each other really well in this short time frame and I made some very useful connections for my professional life."*

The intergenerational ocean hackathon was a true exchange of generations. While the ECOPs were shining with knowledge on new technological advances and integration of AI; LCOPs were able to give background info on remote sensing, data analysis, *Sargassum* blooms and help the group focus on what to include and not include in a good pitch to be funded for instance. The facilitators let the ECOPs autonomous in their creativity and problem-solving pathways but accompanied them with relevant questions and brought their experience on ocean policymaking to make sure the group was heading in a realistic direction as well as remaining impactful. The challenge coordinator helped to keep the group on track while also sparking creativity and connectivity with various exercises, icebreakers at the beginning but also brainstorming mappings that helped the group get to know each other better, to think outside of the box and find innovative solutions.

At the end of the hackathon, each group had a prototype and gave a 7-minute pitch to a jury and the other groups. Christopher Enriquez Urban and Franziska Elmer were giving the pitch. During the AAORIA forum, all groups presented again through a 2-minute pitch, followed by a ceremony where the jury gave out awards to the hackathon groups. The team called itself the SAR'GO Team, and they won the Communication & Storytelling Award. Probably because of their theatrical entrance on a Caribbean paradisiac beach then suddenly covered in smelly, hazardous algae releasing toxic gases. Maybe because of their impactful story about health, economical and social impacts on different populations and sectors. Also, because of their innovation user-friendly solution: they showcased the logo and prototype video of the platform SAR'COMM, standing for *Sargassum* Communication & Communities, along with Sargy, an AI-agent to help users, to be integrated into the Sargassum Information Hub. They thought about fisher people in Ghana, tourism operators in Mexico or coastal managers in Costa Rica which helped them reach criteria such as replicability, scalability but also creativity & innovation.

The Sar'GO Team won the Communication & Storytelling Award

From left to right: Coralie Elmaleh, Winnie Sowah, Adil Bakir, Alexsander Iwanec, Camille Cherques, Gustavo Oliveira Ramos Cruz, Naiara Bomfim, Christopher Enriquez Urban, Paola Diaz, Xolani Thokozani Zondo, Craig McLean and Deanesh Ramsewak

Read the full story here: Turning Sargassum data into action at AAORIA's Hackathon - SARGASSUM INFORMATION HUB
Read AAORIA's report on the Sargassum monitoring challenge here: Intergenerational Hackathon at the 2026 AAORIA Forum: Challenge Reports - All Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance