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Scientists call for global conservation of wild seaweed at UN ocean summit

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By Responsible Seafood Advocate

Wild seaweed must be protected like coral reefs, scientists argue, citing its role in climate, food security and ocean ecosystem health

A research program led by the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) is urging global recognition of seaweed as vital to ocean health, food security and climate goals, calling for it to receive conservation status and investment on par with coral reefs, mangroves and seagrasses.

The GlobalSeaweed-SUPERSTAR program, funded by the United Kingdom's Global Centre on Biodiversity for Climate, will bring the proposal to the United Nations Ocean Conference in Nice. The initiative cites the growing threat to wild seaweed stocks from climate change and aims to elevate the issue within international policy discussions.

"Seaweeds are remarkable: they can grow over 30 times faster than many terrestrial plants and their long-term carbon burial outranks mangroves and tidal marshes," said Elizabeth Cottier-Cook of SAMS. "They absorb excess nutrients to reduce eutrophication, absorb carbon dioxide, increase biodiversity by up to 40 percent and as well as providing food and other commercially important products."

The group has already published the *State of the World's Seaweed* report, which outlines risks



Wild seaweed must be protected like coral reefs, scientists argue, citing its role in climate, food security and ocean ecosystem health. Photo by [Kindel Media \(https://www.pexels.com/photo/brown-and-black-turtle-in-water-8849618/\)](https://www.pexels.com/photo/brown-and-black-turtle-in-water-8849618/).

associated with inaction, and is preparing a follow-up, the *Seaweed Breakthrough* report, for release at COP31 next year. It also supports the creation of a UN Global Seaweed Initiative and endorses the Nice Ocean Action Plan, which includes a focus on sustainable seaweed cultivation.

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“More than six million farmers in 54 countries worldwide culture seaweeds with an annual global production valued at over (U.S.) \$17 billion in 2024,” said Cottier-Cook. “We therefore recognize the importance of wild seaweeds in the growth and contribution of the seaweed sector to food security, trade and economic diversification, environmental sustainability and local livelihoods of local communities, small-scale producers, traders and other stakeholders, particularly in developing countries, Least Developed Countries (LDCs), and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).”

“This can only be realized, however, if seaweeds are given as high a conservation status as coral reefs, mangroves and seagrasses to ensure that their long-term protection is secured and that the livelihoods of the millions of farmers who are dependent on seaweeds are safeguarded.”



Playing favorites: How selective breeding can grow the seaweed sector

Seaweed farming experts are urging producers to employ selective breeding to capitalize on desired traits amid a changing climate.



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In its upcoming *Seaweed Breakthrough* report, GlobalSeaweed-SUPERSTAR will call for global, regional and national financing to support the protection, restoration and sustainable management of seaweed ecosystems. The initiative proposes conserving at least 30 percent of wild seaweed habitats and halting further loss.

The effort seeks to align with existing international frameworks, including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the Paris Agreement and the UN Decades on Ecosystem Restoration and Ocean Science. By embedding its targets within these commitments, the initiative aims to advance coordinated action on seaweed conservation across local, national and global levels.

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