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American Eel: A Symposium. Welcome Session

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**AMERICAN EEL: A SYMPOSIUM
WELCOME SESSION**

Dr. David Freestone¹
Sen. Wilfred Moore²
Dr. David VanderZwaag³

David Freestone:

My name is David Freestone and I am the Executive Secretary of the Sargasso Sea Commission and I will explain [later] why the group that is based in Bermuda and Washington D.C. should be interested in eels in Maine. It is my [very pleasant] job to open the symposium and to thank you all for coming, both the speakers and the participants, particularly the speakers who agreed to come here and discuss this very interesting topic. It is great that we have such a nice location for it. I am just coming from Monaco where the weather was a little [warmer], but not as beautiful as it is here, so I am delighted to be in Maine.

Let me say something about the Sargasso Sea Commission because the Sargasso Sea Commission and the Dalhousie University Ocean Tracking Network, are the main sponsors of this eel symposium and we are delighted to be hosted by colleagues here at the University of Maine School of Law as well. As we are an “eel-oriented” group, I hope I do not have to explain why the Sargasso Sea is of such importance to the spawning cycle of both the American eel and the European eel, but I usually have to do this for other audiences.

We have been working since 2010, with the leadership of the Government of Bermuda on measures to conserve the Sargasso Sea, which I will be talking about in a little more detail later today. [Initially,] we formed the Sargasso Sea Alliance, an alliance of governments and international organizations as well as science bodies, and NGOs. [The aim of the] Alliance was to use the existing international organizations, existing organizations with [responsibilities for] fisheries, maritime transport, *et cetera*, put measures in place to protect this unique high seas area. As we will be seeing, it is an area about 350 miles south of Bermuda in the high seas, where these remarkable creatures, for reasons that . . . we really still do not know travel . . . to spawn. [But] eels are only part of the story and I will give you a little bit of it this afternoon. [However,] it is obviously a very central part of the Sargasso Sea story [in that this] is the only place in the world where the eels, both from the Americas and Europe, spawn. So that is why we are interested in [this issue].

We have actually been able to achieve quite a lot with the European eel by having it listed under the Appendix II of the Convention on Migratory Species. We are delighted to have Dr. Bradnee Chambers, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Migratory Species, here to [be] our

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keynote speaker tomorrow. We are interested in whether the host States of the American Eel can make similar progress in ensuring its conservation, so this is a tremendous opportunity for us to exchange ideas. It is great to have you all here and thank you so much for coming.

[Professor David VanderZwaag] is going to speak in a minute but I wanted first to introduce Senator Wilfred Moore who has been a longstanding supporter of the Sargasso Sea Alliance and now the Commission. [The Sargasso Sea Commission was appointed by the Government of Bermuda in 2014] as a result of the signing of the *Hamilton Declaration on Collaboration for the Conservation of the Sargasso Sea* – only lawyers would think of a title like that. We had five governments sign it: the U.K., the U.S., Monaco, Bermuda, and the Azores. We [are still] trying to get the Canadian government to sign, and one of our big proponents in Canada to get its signature is Senator Moore, so I invite him to say a few words.

Senator Wilfred Moore:

Good morning, everybody. Thank you, Dr. Freestone, and thank you for inviting me here today. I am a Senator, a Liberal Senator from Nova Scotia. I have my regional office in the Town of Lunenburg, and, as David mentioned, I have been a participant in the advancement of the Sargasso Sea Alliance since 2013 and now the Commission; I have spoken about it and the value of it in the Senate of Canada on a number of occasions. I was honored to be part of the team that went to Tarrytown, New York, in November 2013 and assisted David in the drafting of the Hamilton Declaration. I can assure you I was pressing every button I could push to get Canada to be a signatory to the Declaration in Hamilton in March 2014. I could not get it done. However, as you may know, on Monday of this week we have a new Liberal government elected in Canada with a solid majority, and I know that its leadership is sensitive to our environment, the health of our oceans, and the species that dwell therein. So this gives me hope and I can assure you, David, that I will renew my efforts with added vigor. . . .

In closing, I want to mention that earlier this week, a story was published in the Halifax press that there is a study soon to be published in the international Journal of Marine Policy. A team of scientists crunched the data on Canada's efforts with regard to our oceans and species that live in the oceans, and the report calls on the new government to reform the system described as "divorcing policy from science." Nineteen scientists looked at this closely and they looked at the Oceans Act, the Fisheries Act, the Species at Risk Act, and I am looking forward to see what comes of that and have an opportunity to work with these people to try to advance their important work with the new government. So with that, I am hopeful that Canada will return to her role as a meaningful participant in the stewardship of our oceans and the species that live therein. And I wish you all a very successful and beneficial session here over today and tomorrow. Thank you.

David VanderZwaag:

Thank you, Senator Moore. If you look at your program you [will see various] logos and, of course, we have a couple of other co-organizers. One is the Marine & Environmental Law Institute at Dalhousie University where I teach, so we are very pleased to be here as a co-organizer with the University of Maine Law School and Sargasso Sea Commission. The other co-organizer

is the Ocean Tracking Network (OTN) and many of you in the audience will know quite a bit about it as some of you have been trackers under the OTN. But for those who do not [know, here are] a few slides [about OTN] to start out the day. . . .

OTN is a seven-year research project, based at Dalhousie University, but involves a number of other universities and [their] researchers, [along with] government departments. [The network is] mainly about science and technology. It tracks the local-to-global movements . . . of ocean animals using the acoustic and satellite telemetry [A substantial amount of effort has been devoted to] developing the technology, the actual tags that go on animals and [the acoustic receivers that record information on passing animals. Acoustic “curtains” have been placed in various marine areas around the globe including a line of receivers extending into Canada’s 200 nautical mile zone off Halifax.]

[OTN] tracks over 80 [marine] species [including] seals, whales, lobsters, [salmon,] sturgeon, as well as the American eel. [OTN] is a Canadian led partnership with over 400 researchers from 19 countries, including the United States, but also Australia. [The network has built] an open-data system.

[OTN] does have a social science component. Very quickly, [the network] is funded not just from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada but also from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). So you can thank SSHRC for supporting this workshop. One of the themes [of OTN] is ocean governance, so [besides] lots of science, including biology and the whole question of trophic interactions, [OTN] does have an ocean governance [component] which I have led for the last 5 years. [Various research projects have been exploring how] the science translates into management.

As Senator Moore said, we have a real problem often bridging the gap between science and policy. So that is really why we are here today, to try to move the [management] agenda forward [in light of increasing scientific information].

Tracking the American eel has been one of the most exciting OTN initiatives. [Researchers] have been tracking eels for quite a few years now with the use of pop-up tags which [send information] up to satellites. In the fall of 2014, OTN scientists trucked tagged eels from the St. Lawrence Estuary (Quebec) to Nova Scotia and released them just south of Halifax. . . . [Researchers] actually figured that the [tagged] eels were [likely] getting eaten up by porbeagle sharks [in the Gulf of St. Lawrence region, and thus] they were not making it down towards the Sargasso Sea. [The more southerly release of tagged American eels actually allowed the successful tracking of a number of eels over the continental shelf and one into the Sargasso Sea. We will likely hear more about this later in the morning from David Cairns.]

[To finish] up, I want to [remind participants of the symposium’s four objectives. The first objective is] *learning*. [Participants are drawn] from different disciplines [and varying] backgrounds – NGOs, academics, First Nations, industry, and government. [Thus, the symposium offers the opportunity] to learn from different perspectives. Second is the goal of *visioning*. [In the] final session we will be looking forward to how [the scientific and management agendas for American eel might be advanced]. Third is *networking*. This started last night at the reception for those who were there, but [this symposium provides a forum for considering new research collaborations and] initiatives. Finally [is the objective of] *understanding*. We really want to see the public and the political realm much more aware of the American eel issues both scientifically

but also [from] the management side. That is why we are proposing to have a symposium proceedings [published] by the *Ocean & Coastal Law Journal*.