

Seychelles Marine Spatial Planning

ON THE LEADING EDGE OF MARINE CONSERVATION AND CLIMATE ADAPTATION



Photo: J. Smith

The Republic of Seychelles is an archipelago of 115 islands within a rich tropical marine ecosystem in the Western Indian Ocean. The Exclusive Economic Zone is 1.37 million km², with a land area of only 455 km². The islands have high rates of species endemism and their global importance for biodiversity is highlighted by two UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Tourism and tuna fisheries are vitally important to the economy, and Seychelles is a valuable partner in global trade through shipping and port facilities. Like other island nations, Seychelles is concerned about the effects that increased storm frequency and rising sea levels may have on coastal areas. In addition, coral bleaching from warm ocean temperatures threatens the beautiful coral reefs that provide valuable ecosystem services for people and ecological function for hundreds of marine species. The Blue Economy is an important mechanism for this Small Island Developing State to support its sustainable development goals and address climate change adaptation and ocean management.

Seychelles has committed to up to 30% marine protection in its Exclusive Economic Zone (400,000 km²) and a comprehensive marine spatial plan to ensure species and habitats have long-term protection, improve resiliency of coastal ecosystems with a changing climate, and ensure economic opportunities for fisheries, tourism and other uses. The 30% marine protection will be zoned in high and medium biodiversity protection areas - each about 15% of Seychelles' waters - and compatible uses will be identified to align with biodiversity objectives.

This is the first comprehensive marine plan in the Western Indian Ocean. It is significant for improving ocean management for this global biodiversity hotspot, and for Seychelles' commitment to best practices in marine spatial planning. Once approved, the Seychelles marine spatial plan will be the second largest in the world.

SEYCHELLES MSP INITIATIVE

The Seychelles Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) Initiative began in early 2014. It is a government-led process aimed at supporting the sustainable and long-term use and health of the waters throughout Seychelles' 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone. It is an integrated, multi-sector approach to address climate change adaptation, marine protection, and support the Blue Economy and other national strategies. The Initiative receives input from all major sectors including commercial fishing, tourism and marine charters, biodiversity conservation, renewable energy, port authority, maritime safety, and non-renewable resources. Science, spatial data, economic information and local knowledge are being used to propose zones for biodiversity protection and multiple uses. The marine spatial plan will be regulatory to guide policy and economic development.

The Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change is the planning authority and The Nature Conservancy is facilitating the process and leading the development of the marine plan. The project is facilitated by a partnership with the GoS-UNDP-GEF Programme Coordinating Unit. The MSP Initiative is funded by the Government of Seychelles, private grants to The Nature Conservancy, and grants from GoS-UNDP-GEF Programme Coordinating Unit. The MSP Initiative is a part of the government-led Debt-for-Nature swap that is creating the Seychelles Conservation & Climate Adaptation Trust (SeyCCAT). Funds from the SeyCCAT will be used for climate change adaptation work and to implement the marine plan.

MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING

Marine spatial planning (MSP) is a public process of analysing and allocating the spatial and temporal distribution of human activities in marine areas to achieve ecological, economic, and social objectives that usually have been specified through a political process (UNESCO 2009).



Photo: Seychelles Fishing Authority

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY AND MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING

The Nature Conservancy has been engaged in marine spatial planning since 2006, and has deep financial expertise. Conservancy staff work around the world to support planning efforts in the Caribbean, United States, Indonesia, Micronesia, Canada, Mexico and Seychelles. The Nature Conservancy is a global leader in marine conservation, including specialised areas such as marine protected area design, restoration, mapping ocean wealth, and marine spatial planning. The Nature Conservancy and Government of Seychelles are working together to improve ocean management and establish a permanent financing mechanism for marine planning, biodiversity protection, coastal protection, new management areas, and multiple socio-economic benefits.

BENEFITS OF THE MARINE PLAN

Improved Management. Using a science-based design, stakeholder input and local knowledge, the marine spatial plan will result in up to 30% of Seychelles' waters in marine protection for species and habitats, improved management for fisheries and tourism, and better management for the entire Exclusive Economic Zone.

Transparent Decision Making. Business certainty is important for economic development and Seychelles' Blue Economy. The marine spatial plan includes input from all marine stakeholders and decision-making is clearly articulated by a governance framework.

Improved Understanding. Marine spatial planning processes are extremely valuable for gathering information and data. A data catalogue and 'MSP Atlas' will benefit on-going planning, development decisions, and protected area design.

Stakeholder Participation. Organising stakeholder participation and representation will result in short- and long-term benefits to the government and citizens of Seychelles as they engage in future issues concerning the marine environment. Stakeholder participation is important so that everyone's points of view are included, and it is also an important component for global best practices in marine spatial planning.

Marine Authority. The marine spatial plan will be regulatory. New policies and regulations will be available to manage resources and activities throughout Seychelles' waters

Permanent Funding. The MSP Initiative is tied to SeyCCAT and will also identify other funding sources for long-term implementation.

SEYCHELLES MSP OUTPUTS

Phase 1 was launched in 2014 and lays the foundation for a coarse-scale zoning design and draft management considerations - it will conclude in late 2016. Phase 2 will include refining the zoning design and management considerations, developing an implementation plan and new regulations - Phase 2 will conclude in 2020. The Seychelles MSP Initiative outputs are:

- Spatial data catalogue
- Zoning framework and planning tools
- Stakeholder preferences, advice and input
- 'MSP Atlas' and decision-support tools
- Website and communication materials
- Zoning design for 1.37 million km²
- Management considerations for all zones
- 15% of Seychelles' waters in high biodiversity protection zones and compatible uses
- 15% of Seychelles' waters in medium biodiversity protection zones and compatible uses
- 70% of Seychelles' waters in multiple use zones
- Draft implementation plan

