

Seychelles MSP Sustainable Use Area draft management plans

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the consultation process about?

Draft Management Plans have been developed for three marine areas in the Seychelles' exclusive economic zone (EEZ) that have been designated under the Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan (SMSP) Initiative and Nature Reserves and Conservancy Act. The areas represent the three largest Sustainable Use Areas (Zone 2) for medium biodiversity protection and sustainable use (see explanation below). This consultation process is an opportunity for all Seychellois and relevant stakeholders to provide feedback and input about the content of these draft Management Plans.

2. What is the Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan (SMSP) initiative?

The Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan (SMSP) Initiative is a government-led public process to secure the health and sustainable long-term use of Seychelles' ocean. A multi-sector and participatory approach is being used to develop a marine spatial plan that integrates goals for expanding marine protection, addressing climate change adaptation, and supporting the Blue Economy Roadmap and other national strategies. The planning process relies on input and participation from all the major sectors using or valuing the marine environment, including fisheries, tourism, biodiversity conservation, research, renewable energy, port authority, maritime safety, and non-renewable resources. This is the first comprehensive marine plan for Seychelles' ocean and is an important step for improving marine management for the benefit of current and future generations. It is also the first comprehensive large-scale marine spatial plan in the Western Indian Ocean.

The Seychelles MSP began in February 2014 and is ongoing. The process uses integrated, multi-sector engagement within an ecosystem-based framework to improve ocean management in Seychelles and address three objectives: 1. expand marine protected areas to 30% of the EEZ and Territorial Sea; 2. to develop the Blue Economy; and 3. to address climate change adaptation.

3. What agencies are leading the Seychelles MSP initiative?

The Government of Seychelles is the authority for the SMSP and their role is to lead the marine spatial planning process, including the implementation plan. The Ministry of Agriculture, Climate Change and Environment (MACCE) is the lead Ministry responsible for the SMSP and they are supported by the MSP Executive Committee, which has representation from all the Ministries and Parastatal Agencies related to the marine sectors in Seychelles. These include tourism, ports, fisheries, Blue Economy, and national parks. The Ministry of Fisheries and Blue Economy is the co-Chair for the MSP Executive Committee. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is facilitating the process including process design, data compilation, scientific analysis, stakeholder engagement, planning outputs, communications, implementation and integration with other related projects.

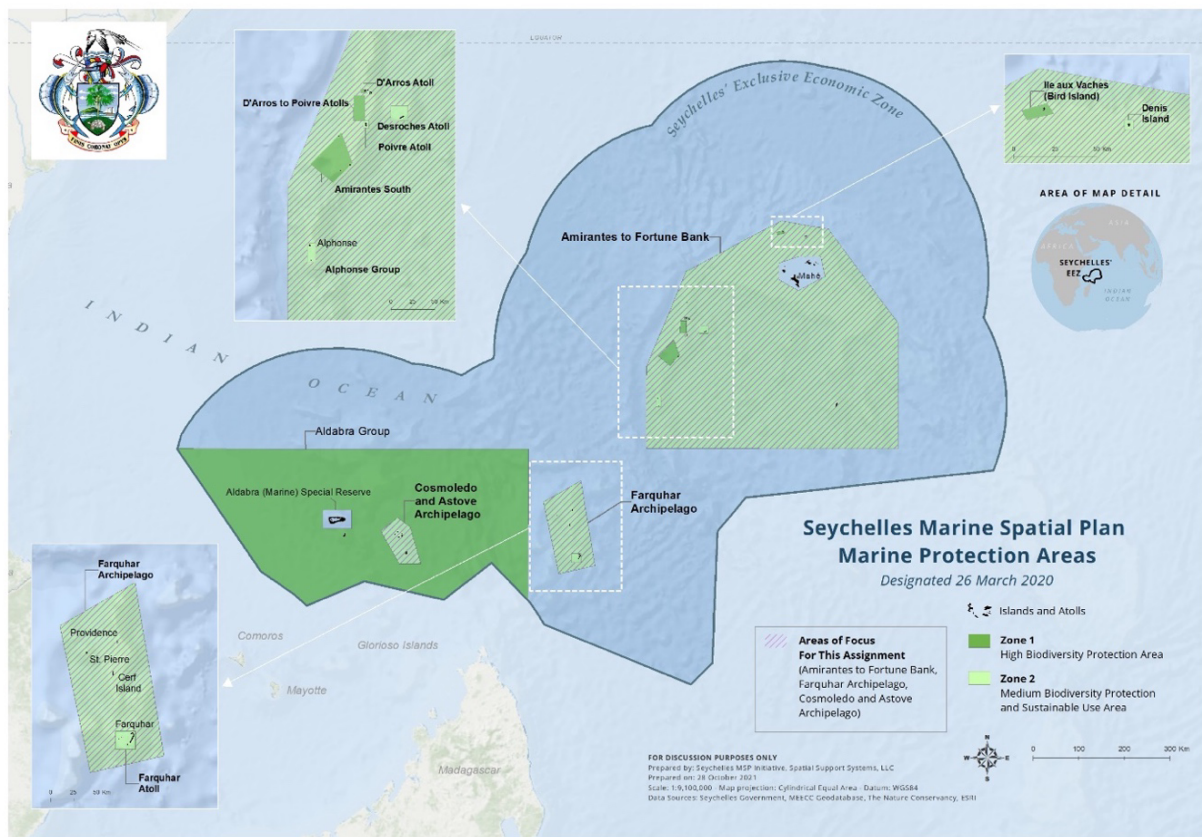
4. What are Medium Biodiversity Protection and Sustainable Use areas (zones)?

The SMSP Zoning Framework contains three zone categories: Zone 1: high protection of marine biodiversity; Zone 2: medium protection of biodiversity and sustainable uses; and Zone 3 multiple uses. The Sustainable Use Areas (Zone 2) provide for medium biodiversity protection while allowing sustainable allowable activities. Allowable activities in Sustainable Use Areas must be compatible with the objective of medium biodiversity protection. While allowable activities include

resource extraction, commercial fishing harvest, recreational and subsistence fishing, tourism, shipping and transport, seabed disturbance, and economic development, they must be conducted in ways that are sustainable and do not threaten biodiversity.

5. What are the three areas covered by these draft Sustainable Use Area Management Plans?

The three Sustainable Use Areas included in this public consultation are the Farquhar Archipelago Sustainable Use Area, the Amirantes to Fortune Bank Sustainable Use Area (with some exclusion areas), and the Cosmoledo and Astove Archipelago Sustainable Use Area. These three areas are shown on the map below.



Map showing all zones across the Seychelles EEZ and locations of the three sustainable-use areas that are the subject of this public consultation. Note that inserts depict nested areas that have existing management plans or zone 1 areas within zone 2 areas subject to a separate management planning process (e.g. Ile aux Vaches). Source: SMSP Initiative.

6. Why do these Sustainable Use Areas need a management plan?

All of the marine areas gazetted under the SMSP Initiative will need a management plan. The Sustainable Use Area management plans will serve as a blueprint for the administration and operation of all Sustainable Use Areas designated under the Seychelles Marine Spatial Planning initiative. The Draft Management Plans for Sustainable Use Areas will define specific objectives to protect marine habitats and species while allowing opportunities for sustainable economic and recreational activities and sustainable long-term use of resources to ensure that current and future activities do not cause environmental harm. The benefits of having management plans to guide the sustainable use of the areas include:

- Providing clarity about the objectives for the area, how it will be managed, the actions to be taken over the plan's duration, and the rules, expectations, and responsibilities of everyone using the area.
- Gaining international recognition for the initiative of Seychelles to protect and conserve marine ecosystems can improve visitor numbers, experiences, and enjoyment.
- Sustainable Use Areas are intended to support long-term access for fisheries, marine tourism and aquaculture.
- Updated maritime zone boundaries for territorial sea waters.
- Increase business certainty and subsequent domestic economic development.
- Improved management of pelagic ecosystems to support increased catch rates and/or value of fisheries.
- Strategies for climate change adaptation and long-term protection of key ecosystems.

7. How will these management plans affect users of the Sustainable Use Areas?

As part of the SMSP process a list of allowable activities are being developed together with key stakeholders that will help guide the sectors that will operate in these areas. The allowable activities constitute the baseline set of management measures which will eventually be transposed into legally enforceable regulations. Other than the activity table, each area in the zoning design has its management considerations. The management plans provide conditions (strategies and actions) for how these activities are to be conducted. Allowable activities within the Sustainable Use areas need to comply with the relevant conditions, such as commercial activities obtaining a permit to operate and following all relevant Codes of Conduct. All activities and uses must also be conducted in accordance with applicable national laws, regulations, and policies, as well as applicable international laws, treaties, and agreements. Importantly, users will need to consult the Allowable Activities Tables and management considerations, which are being finalised by the SMSP Initiative in 2023.

8. Can fishers still access and fish in Sustainable Use areas?

Fishing activities are conditionally allowed within the Sustainable Use Areas providing they comply with the Allowable Activity Tables, General and Area-based Management Considerations from the MSP and the management plan conditions developed during the management plan consultations.

Considerations include, but are not limited to, following the Seychelles Fisheries Regulations, license agreements, and fisheries agreements, where applicable.

The draft management plans recognise that sustainable fishing is essential to meet the goals and objectives of all Sustainable Use Areas (Zone 2) and acknowledge that fisheries management is the responsibility of the Seychelles Fishing Authority (SFA) and Ministry of Fisheries and Blue Economy (MFBE). The SFA sets conditions such as licenses, quotas, protected species, and technical rules about how fishing is conducted. These arrangements are implemented through Fisheries Regulations, license conditions, and Fisheries Management Plans. However, at this time there are no fisheries management plans that apply to the Outer Islands, or management plans to address sport fishing and fly-fishing (a sub-category of sport fishing). In order to address the issues raised and solutions proposed by stakeholders during the consultative process, interim strategies and actions are proposed in all three draft Sustainable Use Management Plans. These interim strategies and actions are intended to be temporary until such time as fisheries management arrangements such as Fisheries Management Plans and Regulations are finalised.

9. How were these draft management plans developed?

The development of these three Sustainable Use Areas draft management plans uses a consultative process that follows similar stakeholder engagement as the SMSP processes since 2014.

A stakeholder consultation process involving multiple and diverse stakeholders was conducted from September 2022 to May 2023. The process is consistent with the global best practice principles of participatory spatial planning and development of management plans for Protected Areas (e.g., IUCN 2003, MSPglobal 2022).

The management plan development process followed a systematic and structured four-step approach. It included a **scoping step** to collect information through a desk-top review and consultation with stakeholders via email and direct discussions in Seychelles during September 2022. Participatory discussions about the goals and objectives, main issues and management strategies for each Area were held during workshops and virtual meetings from November 2022 to January 2023 (**plan development step**). This information was then used to draft the management plans, which involved further input from workshops in April 2023 (**plan review step**). The revised draft plans are now open for comment during this public consultation phase in July/August 2023. Feedback from this public consultation will inform any further revisions and finalisation of the three draft Sustainable Use area management plans (**finalise plan step**).

10. Who has been involved and consulted in developing the draft sustainable use area management plans?

Stakeholder participation is important so that everyone's points of view is heard and considered in developing these draft management plans for the three Sustainable Use Areas. From September 2022 to June 2023, a total of 48 meetings, 10 participatory workshops, 3 public information sessions, and over 26 stakeholder groups or representatives were consulted and provided input. The planning process relied on input and participation from all the major sectors using or valuing the marine environment, including fisheries, tourism, biodiversity conservation, research, renewable energy, port authority, maritime safety, and non-renewable resources. Government Ministries and Parastatal Agencies related to the marine sectors in Seychelles were also represented throughout the draft management plans development process.

11. Why are some sites excluded from the Amirantes to Fortune Bank Sustainable Use Area, and how will they be managed?

The Amirantes to Fortune Bank Sustainable Use Area boundary is in the centre of the Seychelles EEZ. Several areas are not part of the official designation for this Sustainable Use Area. The following areas are excluded from the Amirantes to Fortune Bank Sustainable Use Area, and the official gazette can be consulted:

- Port of Victoria limit area
- Denis Island (Marine) Sustainable Use Area
- Desroches Atoll (Marine) Sustainable Use Area
- Poivre Atoll (Marine) Sustainable Use Area
- Alphonse Group (Marine) Sustainable Use Area
- Bird Island (Ile aux Vaches) (Marine) National Park
- D'Arros Atoll (Marine) National Park
- D'Arros to Poivre Atolls (Marine) National Park
- Amirantes South (Marine) National Park

The current management arrangements for the aforementioned list will remain the same, where they exist. Note that the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty category from NPNCA is now the Sustainable Use Area category under the new NRC Act.

The Amirantes to Fortune Bank Sustainable Use Area boundary includes industrial fishing exclusion areas, and these areas are delineated and gazetted under the Seychelles Fisheries Act.

12. Who is funding the development of these three Sustainable Use Area management plans?

Funding for these three management plans comes from the World Bank's Third South West Indian Ocean Fisheries Governance and Shared Growth (SWIOFish3) Program. A team of local and international consultants (C₂O Fisheries) is leading the development of the draft management plans, including stakeholder consultations.

13. How do stakeholders and the public get involved in this process? What is the consultation process for the draft management plans?

The three draft Sustainable Use area management plans will be open for public consultation for a period of 24 days, from midnight 14 July to midnight 7 August 2023 (Seychelles local time). The three draft management plans are available online at the SMSP website (see link below). An online form is available for all stakeholders and the public to fill in and return so they can have their say on the draft management plans. This public consultation phase is open to anyone with an interest in the Seychelles ocean. After the public consultation phase, the feedback will be compiled and used to finalise the three Sustainable Use management plans. All feedback that is within the scope of the three draft Sustainable Use management plans will be considered.

14. How will the Sustainable Use Area management plans be implemented and by which agencies?

Regulations are being drafted under Section 9 of the Environment Protection Act 2016 to operationalise the interim governance framework through the establishment of the Seychelles Ocean Agency Environment Protection (Seychelles Ocean Agency) Regulations, 2023 pending its full transition to the Seychelles Ocean Authority (SOA). The SOA will oversee the spatial planning of marine areas and provide guidance to coordinate the Marine Spatial Plan activities and promote compliance from Marine Spatial Plan implementation bodies.

The SMSP Initiative will integrate with existing management wherever possible, with implementation of the Sustainable Use Area management plans under a single coordinating agency. The Seychelles Oceans Authority Bill (yet to be enacted) clearly sets out the mandate of the Seychelles Ocean Authority (SOA) as an independent, coordinating and strategic management body that is responsible for managing the Areas designated through the SMSP process and to deliver on the overarching SMSP objectives. The key functions of the SOA are review and adaptive management functions, coordination, engagement, and developing relevant policy. In general, the SOA will have the mandate for overall marine spatial planning and is empowered to require implementing 'line agencies' to report on the implementation of the SMSP on a regular schedule and in a standardised format.

The SOA is not intended as an implementing entity and direct 'on ground' implementation of management plans and policy will be undertaken by line agencies that manage sectors or areas within the SMSP. For example, the Seychelles Coast Guard, Seychelles National Parks Authority, Seychelles Fishing Authority, Islands Development Company, Seychelles Island Foundation, Island Conservation Society, Nature Seychelles, Seychelles Maritime Safety, and others, including the private sector, which may assume specific co-management roles.

15. How will the performance of management actions be tracked and assessed?

For the Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan and the Sustainable Use Area management plans to be successfully implemented, monitoring and enforcement is very important throughout Seychelles' marine waters. A Performance Measurement Framework, or PMF, has been designed to measure performance against the Sustainable Use area objectives. The PMF will assess the Management plan's effectiveness by collecting, analysing and evaluating how "on track" implementation is to achieve the Plan's goal and objectives. Importantly, the PMF provides transparency by measuring and publicly reporting on the performance of the management plans in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Sustainable Use Areas, which are community owned resources. The PMF includes indicators to measure progress of both management actions and key results, and trigger levels and decision rules that provide guidance about limits of acceptable change, and the actions to be taken when changes exceeding these limits are detected.

16. How is the proposed national permit system expected to work?

Through consultation and engagement with stakeholders, it has been proposed that all commercial activities could be managed under a national permit system, that will aim to align with existing line agencies issuing permits or licences for allowable activities (e.g., PetroSeychelles for seismic surveys, Seychelles Fishing Authority for fisheries). This is just one of the actions proposed under the draft management plans and for which feedback can be provided during this online public consultation phase.

While this is not yet approved by government, the proposal is that current licence and permit systems would remain in place while a permit system is established, which will ultimately be a 'one-stop-shop' for all permits issued for Sustainable Use Areas. The design will provide a framework for existing licence/permit systems and/or new permits that explicitly consider the Sustainable Use Areas (Zone 2) goals and objectives and the allowable activities conditions through a spatial lens. It aims to avoid duplication and deliver a single process for applicants. Individual agencies would remain responsible for managing permits for their jurisdiction; however, the initial permit application screening would be administered by a multi-sectoral representative committee assembled by the Seychelles Oceans Authority (SOA). This would ensure that all permit applications are assessed against Sustainable Use Area goals and objectives, any permits issued incorporate allowable activity conditions, and permits have a spatial endorsement for activities.

Many elements of this proposed system remain to be identified and discussed with government and stakeholders including the schedule of permit application fees, limits to permit numbers at some sites and for some activities, permit allocation criteria, and the legalities of joint permits. Assessment of permit applications would remain the responsibility of relevant line agencies, while administration, reporting, and standardised issuing of joint agency permits would be the responsibility of the SOA.

Where can I obtain more information?

Please contact us for more information.

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The online consultation process can be accessed via the SMSP website: www.seymsp.com