

## Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan Initiative – an update on milestones and implementation planning

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### Introduction

The Seychelles is an archipelagic nation in the Western Indian Ocean encompassing 1.35 million square kilometers and 155 islands (Government of Seychelles, 2011). Marine biodiversity is one of Seychelles' most important natural assets, supporting a luxury tourism industry and over eight different fisheries. Concerns about economic sustainability, marine biodiversity, and climate change resulted in a government commitment to expand protection of its waters to 30% in new or expanded marine protections by 2020, developing a marine plan that will also support the Blue Economy Roadmap for the entire Exclusive Economic Zone (Figure 1).

The Seychelles Marine Spatial Planning Initiative is focused on planning for, and management of, the sustainable and long-term use and health of the Seychelles' ocean. The Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan (SMSP) process began in 2014 as a condition of the world's first debt conversion for marine conservation and climate change adaptation. In 2016, the Government of Seychelles passed a new Act to create the Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust (SeyCCAT), providing a mechanism for long-term financing of ocean conservation and sustainable economic development activities.

The purpose of this Research Note is to provide a brief update on the SMSP. This information was presented recently at the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA) conference in Mauritius, 1-6 July 2019. The research note is for information purposes only; information is subject to change upon discussion and review during the Marine Spatial Planning process.



Figure 1. Seychelles' Exclusive Economic Zone. Map by Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan Initiative

## Process Design for the MSP

The SMSP is a government-led process, facilitated by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and in partnership with the Government of Seychelles UNDP-GEF. The process began in early 2014 and will be completed by 2020, with implementation in 2021.

It is a public, participatory process involving more than 11 sectors including fishing, tourism, conservation, petroleum, recreation, maritime safety, ports, and renewable energy. The SMSP takes an integrated, science-based, multi-sector approach with robust stakeholder engagement and consultation as per international best practices (Ehler and Douvere, 2009). More than 100 meetings and workshops have been held since 2014 so that stakeholders and the public are able to contribute information and data, review and discuss proposals for zoning, review planning tools and maps, and provide recommendations to government. A decision-making framework has been developed, a 3-category zoning framework, an adaptive GIS spatial database with more than 90 layers, and numerous decision-support tools are being used to assist with the development of the plan and zones.

## Milestones

The first milestone of the SMSP was completed in 2017 and the boundary's coordinates of 210,000 square kilometers in new marine protections were legally gazetted in February 2018. This totalled 15% of the EEZ, reaching half of the 30% overall goal for new marine protections by December 2020, and included zones for high biodiversity protection and medium biodiversity and sustainable uses.

The second milestone was completed in April 2019 and areas legally gazetted totalled more than 350,000 square kilometers, or 26% of the EEZ.

The third and final milestone is under way now. Both milestones one and two have an associated nomination file to describe the new marine protection zones including background information, draft allowable activities tables, and summary of stakeholder input. Information about the zoning designs and accompanying information can be found on the website: [www.seymsp.com](http://www.seymsp.com).

## Preparing for Implementation in 2021

The implementation of the Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan has been a key consideration since the start of the initiative. Guiding principles for decisions – developed by the stakeholders in 2014 – reflect the practical aspects of implementation in the design of the marine plan: including feasible, implementable, affordable.

The SMSP zoning designs are developed in consultation with the Seychelles Maritime Safety Administration (SMSA), Seychelles Fishing Authority (SFA), Coast Guard, Seychelles Ports Authority (SPA), National Information Sharing Coordination Centre (NISCC) and Regional Coordination Operations Centre (RCOC). These discussions will ensure that the marine zones can be fully implemented once the marine spatial plan is completed and effective monitoring can be done to evaluate the effectiveness of the zones to meet the objectives for biodiversity protection, Blue Economy, and address climate change adaptation.

Implementation preparations include discussions for governance arrangements, financing, policy and enforcement. The entities responsible for monitoring, compliance and surveillance have provided significant input to ensure high levels of compliance, for example, with recommendations for straight lines and simple shaped polygons (i.e., squares, rectangles).

### ***Governance arrangements***

Research for the concept of an independent ocean authority is underway, including financial requirements and capacity needs. A framework and costing were developed and are being evaluated by government.

### ***Costing and financing***

Three financing options for implementation of protection areas are being developed. Stakeholder workshops discuss and prioritise the financing options for the marine protection areas and decisions will be taken once all information is finalised.

### ***MSP policy***

A draft national MSP policy, which was developed in 2016-2017 and has been reviewed by stakeholders, will undergo international peer-review, be revised and discussed again by stakeholders, and then presented to the Cabinet of Ministers.

### ***Monitoring and enforcement***

Costs, capacity and infrastructure for monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) are being discussed. Regulations and mandates for enforcement of marine activities are being examined as well as frameworks, capacity and infrastructure for information sharing in Seychelles and regional coordination for the Western Indian Ocean. Management plans and frameworks will be developed for the marine zones and a pilot Electronic-Monitoring (EM) project is underway with the Seychelles Fishing Authority, The Nature Conservancy's Indo-Pacific Tuna team, industrial longline and purse seine tuna fleet. Indicators will be identified for monitoring changes in the environment and the effectiveness of the SMSP.

## **Conclusion**

The ocean has always been important to Seychelles. Seychelles was inspired to create a comprehensive Marine Spatial Plan in order to safeguard the oceans for generations to come and to ensure the sustainable and long-term effective management of the economic activities that sustain the country's economy. The SMSP is also contributing to the advancement of MSPs for tropical and Small Island Developing States and is a new model for MSP innovative financing to support long-term conservation, sustainable economies, and effective management of the oceans.

## References

Ehler, C. and Douvère, F. (2009). Marine Spatial Planning: a step-by-step approach toward ecosystem-based management. Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and Man and the Biosphere Programme. *IOC Manual and Guides*, No. 53. ICAM Dossier, 6. Paris.

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