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**CARIBBEAN REGIONAL MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING
STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE**

**CRFM Secretariat
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Caribbean Regional Marine Spatial Planning Step-by-Step Guide

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Caribbean Regional Marine Spatial Planning (CRMSP) Step-by-Step Guide was developed to assist Caribbean nations in using marine spatial planning (MSP) as a tool and process to achieve sustainable marine management and blue economy objectives. Grounded in international best practice but tailored for the Caribbean Region, the Guide was produced through substantial national and stakeholder consultation as part of the Blue Economy – Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem Plus (BE-CLME+) Project, reflecting both the growing demands on Caribbean marine resources and the urgent need for more integrated governance and equitable decision-making.

MSP allows Caribbean states to coordinate and balance the many uses of marine space - tourism, fisheries, conservation, and emerging blue economy sectors - while mitigating conflicts, promoting ecosystem resilience, and responding to global and regional commitments. The Guide's central purpose is to provide a practical stepwise resource for authorities, practitioners, and stakeholders involved in MSP. It is designed to cover the entire MSP cycle, making it relevant for countries at all stages, and it is adaptable for both national and subnational scales and across diverse political, economic, and environmental contexts.

The focus on process, participation and adaptability addresses persistent challenges, such as fragmented governance, limited high-resolution data, constrained financing, and the need to meaningfully engage marginalised and Indigenous groups. The CRMSP Guide highlights the Caribbean context, where many Small Island Developing States have vast marine areas relative to land, rich biodiversity, and livelihoods deeply interlinked with healthy oceans, yet face high climate vulnerability and evolving marine pressures.

The Guide supports the following core objectives:

- To build and strengthen the governance, legal, and institutional frameworks underpinning MSP in the Caribbean.
- To ensure meaningful participation of all stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples, women, marginalised groups, and the private sector, throughout the MSP lifecycle.
- To support robust baseline data collection and sharing, using both scientific and local and Indigenous knowledge.
- To facilitate transparent, evidence-based allocation of marine space, balancing economic, ecological and social priorities.
- To develop actionable, enforceable marine plans that serve national, regional and international policy goals.
- To enable adaptive implementation, regular review, and iterative improvement of marine plans as new evidence and challenges arise.

The Guide divides the MSP process into five main phases with nine sequential steps:

1. Build the Foundations

Step 1. Preparation and pre-planning: The preparatory and pre-planning phase sets the foundations for a successful, effective, and adaptive plan. It includes defining or clarifying the high-level objectives and drivers for undertaking an MSP process and assesses the existing legal and institutional frameworks in which the MSP will be developed and implemented. It sets the spatial and temporal scope and jurisdiction of the MSP and establishes the lead authority and governance needed to develop and implement the plan.

It also considers the resources needed and sources of funding, secures Parliamentary commitment and sets out a clear workplan.

Step 2. Plan and initiate stakeholder participation: This step identifies all relevant stakeholders and their role and interest in the MSP process. It sets out who will be engaged, when and how in a clear stakeholder engagement strategy. Special consideration is given to identifying vulnerable, marginalised and gender groups, and ensuring purposeful, ethical and inclusive opportunities for participation are identified and built into the process. Best practice recognises the importance of effectively engaging Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) and integrating Indigenous and Local Knowledge (ILK) into the MSP processes. The development of a well-planned engagement strategy ensures that no key voices are excluded, facilitates conflict resolution, improves the knowledge base for decision-making, and builds the necessary awareness to support implementation. This is also the stage where the MSP process and opportunities to participate can be introduced to stakeholders, although engagement will be an ongoing process that continues throughout all phases of the MSP process, including data collection, spatial zoning, implementation, monitoring and review.

2. Assess the Baselines

Step 3. Information and data collection and analysis: This step identifies the data and evidence needed to develop a credible and legitimate marine spatial plan using the best-available information. Data and evidence needs, and how the information will be collected, used, managed, stored and shared at each stage of the MSP process should be set out in a clear strategy. Data and evidence gaps should be considered, including a prioritised plan for how they will be addressed, either in the current round of MSP, or in future rounds. Given the high quantity of information likely to be gathered, and its critical role in decision-making, the establishment of a public information system should also be considered. The data and evidence collected should inform baseline assessments of the current and future conditions that will influence how the planned area might be used over the lifetime of the plan, including community and sea user priorities. Potential for spatial conflicts between sectors, including environmental sensitivity, and opportunities for co-location should be assessed to inform the development of spatial zoning options (Step 5). It is important to remember that incomplete information and data should not be seen as a barrier to starting an MSP process; make a start based on best-available information and review the plan as new information becomes available (Step 9).

3. Develop the Plan

Step 4. Vision, goals and objective setting: This step translates the current and future priorities for the plan area into a unified vision, goals and SMARTIE (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound, Inclusive, Equitable) objectives. The vision, goals and objectives should align with and reinforce international and national legal, policy and institutional frameworks, such as existing sustainability goals and targets stipulated by National Ocean Policies (NOPs), Blue Economy Strategies and Sustainable Ocean Plans. Existing policies relevant to MSP should be translated from general goals into a single vision to be realised through specific objectives that can be achieved through spatial allocation and zoning of marine activities and supporting policies that guide future decisions on how the marine space is used. They should also be informed by the baseline assessments and findings from Step 3, including stakeholder views and priorities.

Step 5. Agree zoning and management and draft the Marine Spatial Plan: This step translates the plan vision, goals and objectives into potential spatial zoning scenarios that account for current and anticipated future priorities, aligned with existing international and national legislation, policy and commitments, and stakeholder aspirations. The likely environmental, social and economic implications of each scenario should be assessed to help reach a decision on the preferred scenario, often through a dedicated strategic environmental and socio-economic impact assessment process. Once a preferred zoning arrangement is selected, the plan can be drafted. The zones should be defined along with their associated management, plus any plan-level supporting policies required to guide future decisions. An implementation plan should be developed at this stage, setting out how the plan will be operationalised, for example the formal designation or gazetting of zones, establishing new institutional arrangements, or provision of training to enable enforcement. A Monitoring Plan setting out how achievement of the plan objectives and expected outcomes will be assessed should also be developed. It should include clear indicators directly linked to expected plan outcomes and set out how management will be adapted in response to monitoring. Considering implementation and monitoring at this stage ensures that the draft plan is achievable, its impact can be measured, and it has Parliamentary commitment ahead of public consultation.

Step 6. Plan consultation and plan adoption: Public consultation on the draft plan is a critical step and should be carefully planned at the start of the process. A structured approach ensures the consultation is inclusive, transparent and meaningful, enabling changes to be made and building broad support for the final plan. Relevant transboundary and neighbouring countries and regional stakeholders should have been identified, along with vulnerable, marginalised and gender groups and how best to involve them. The draft plan and associated planning documents should be presented to stakeholders through the right channels and cultural processes as a draft and not a final decision. The purpose of the consultation is to invite final feedback from a broad range of stakeholders at this final planning stage, allowing further refinement of the final plan before endorsement and adoption.

4. Implement and Monitor

Step 7. Implementation phase: The implementation phase moves the marine spatial plan from ambition into action based on the implementation plan developed in Step 5 and begins once the marine spatial plan has been formally adopted. Although some management requirements may already be in place under existing frameworks, the adopted plan provides the overarching framework to draw all existing and new management measures and actions together into an integrated and coordinated approach to manage the plan area. Implementation involves designated agencies or coordinating bodies initiating the management actions specified in the implementation plan, such as issuing permits, enforcement of spatial regulations, habitat restoration, and stakeholder engagement activities. Implementation also involves setting up any necessary resources, training, awareness creation, equipment etc, to enable regulators and enforcement agencies to deliver their actions. This includes raising awareness and supporting sea users and the public through effective and proactive communication (including clear demarcation of zones and areas), helping them to understand the plan and how it interacts with their activities.

Step 8. Monitoring phase: This stage initiates and delivers the Monitoring Plan developed in Step 5. It involves collecting data on marine environmental conditions, human activities, and socio-economic trends within the plan area using well-defined methods and baselines. Regular, accurate and unbiased reporting, and technically sound analysis are critical to assess plan performance, detect unintended consequences,

and identify areas needing adjustment. Stakeholder involvement remains important throughout monitoring to provide insights and maintain transparency.

5. Review and Revise

Step 9. Review and revision: The MSP process does not end when a plan is adopted. It should be a cycle of continuous refinement and improvement as contexts change and as new evidence becomes available. This step formalises a periodic review (typically every 3-5 years) to assess whether the context has changed in such a way to warrant a revision of the plan in full, or in part. If the context remains stable, the review may determine that no revisions are needed at the current time and may simply set a date for the next review. The findings and lessons from implementation and monitoring phases will provide crucial evidence to inform the review and any required revisions, both of the plan and the MSP process more broadly to ensure it is fit for purpose.

By following this Guide, Caribbean countries can leverage MSP to:

- Enhance biodiversity protection and recovery, support sustainable fisheries and sustainable blue economies.
- Reduce space-use conflicts and enable transparent investment in new blue economy sectors, including tourism, aquaculture, and renewable energy.
- Empower local communities, Indigenous Peoples and vulnerable or marginalised groups by ensuring participatory and equitable governance.
- Meet regional and international commitments, particularly in ocean health, poverty alleviation and climate adaptation.
- Leverage additional capacity and capability through transboundary partnership and cooperation.

The Guide's flexible, context-driven approach enables countries to build MSP systems that are democratically legitimate, scientifically robust, and institutionally sound, laying a strong foundation for sustainable blue growth, ecological resilience and recovery, and enhanced wellbeing across the Caribbean Region.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BE	Blue Economy
BE-CLME+	Blue Economy Priorities Through Marine Spatial Planning in the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem Project
CARICOM	Caribbean Community and Common Market
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CCCFP	Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy
CLME	Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem
CRFM	Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism
CROP	Caribbean Regional Oceanscape Project
CMSP	Coastal and Marine Spatial Plans
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zones
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
FPIC	Free, Prior, and Informed Consent
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GEDSI	Gender, Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
GOB	Government of Barbados
GRID	Green and Inclusive Development
HWM	High Water Mark
ICZM	Integrated Coastal Zone Management
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IOC	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission
IPLCs	Indigenous Peoples and local communities
ILK	Indigenous and Local Knowledge
KM-GBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
LWM	Low Water Mark
MARPOL	International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships
OECS	Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States
PSMA	Port State Measures Agreements
MARPOL	International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MSP	Marine Spatial Planning
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NOP	National Ocean Policy
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SMARTIE	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound, Inclusive and Equitable
SMMA	Soufriere Marine Management Area
SOP	Sustainable Ocean Planning
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNEP	United National Environmental Programme
UNESCO	United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UWI	University of West Indies

1 ABOUT THIS GUIDE

1.1 Purpose of the Guide

The Caribbean Regional Marine Spatial Planning (CRMSP) Step-by-Step Guide is a vital output from the Promoting National Blue Economy Priorities Through MSP in the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem Plus (BE-CLME+) Project. The BE-CLME+ Project initiative aims to promote and further progress a blue economy in the Caribbean Region through MSP and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, and Panama.

The Caribbean Regional Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) Step-by-Step Guide (hereafter ‘the Guide’) aims to assist Caribbean countries to develop and implement their own MSP process. The Guide sets out the general principles of MSP, followed by a step-by-step process covering the decision to initiate MSP, through to development, implementation, monitoring and plan review. As the Guide covers the entire MSP cycle (Figure 1), it is designed to assist countries no matter what stage they are at in that cycle.

This Guide draws from and aligns with international best practice and guidelines (Section 1.5), translating them into a Caribbean Regional context. It showcases best practice examples from BE-CLME+ Project participating countries and the broader Caribbean Region, and addresses opportunities and challenges specific to the Region, particularly in the context of Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

Large Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) relative to the landmass of many Caribbean countries, alongside rich marine resources and abundant biodiversity that underpins marine economies and social wellbeing, provide substantial blue economy opportunities. As one of the top five biodiversity hotspots in the world, pressures on marine ecosystems can have environmental, economic and social implications. High vulnerability to climate change, and high dependence on healthy marine ecosystems from activities such as fishing and tourism, drive the need to resolve spatial use of the marine space. MSP provides a useful tool to realise blue economy opportunities and to resolve challenges by providing a framework to develop an integrated vision and management approach across space, time and institutions, with opportunities for meaningful stakeholder participation.

Specific challenges include limited high-resolution spatial data (especially for offshore areas), limited funding, human resource and capability in MSP, and limited institutional arrangements to embed integrated MSP at varying scales of governance. Caribbean countries also have a complex set of stakeholders that include vulnerable and marginalised groups which require specific proactive engagement approaches to ensure they have a voice and can participate in MSP development and implementation. MSP in the Caribbean must be developed in an inclusive manner by providing a platform and opportunities for Indigenous Peoples, rightsholders, local communities and women to participate in addressing regional and national marine management matters that affect their lives.

1.2 Who is the Guide for?

This Guide is designed for practitioners, planners and decision-makers that are involved in marine management at both the national and regional levels. It is useful for policymakers, government agencies, academia, private sector entities, consultants, development partners, community groups, planners and

civil society organisations to support the development and implementation of marine spatial plans within the Caribbean Region. It can be used by MSP trainers and educators to develop teaching and learning material for students and the public.

1.3 How was the Guide developed?

The Guide was developed through extensive country-level stakeholder consultation, review of existing regional and national MSP documents, legislation and policies, and validation workshops with key MSP stakeholders in the Caribbean Region. MSP profiles were developed at the start of the process for the Caribbean Region as a whole, and for the six BE-CLME+ Project countries, to understand the regional and national context. The profiles were based on the [UNESCO-IOC MSP typology](#) to present an overview of national MSP processes, challenges, best practice and recommendations.

To inform Guide development, in-country consultation meetings were held in July and August 2025 in Jamaica, Belize, Barbados, Panama and St. Lucia. Virtual consultation meetings were also held with Grenada, and St Vincent and the Grenadines. The consultation engaged over 100 key MSP stakeholders involved in MSP or similar initiatives, including the lead MSP and Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) agencies, non-governmental Organisations (NGO's), women's groups, fisherfolk groups and Indigenous community representatives. National MSP Steering Committees, where established, were consulted as a group or as individual members, to discuss key challenges and opportunities for MSP in their respective countries. Regional institutions such as UNESCO, United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and United National Environmental Programme (UNEP) in the Caribbean Region were also consulted.

Once drafted, the Guide was presented for further feedback via virtual national validation workshops for Jamaica, Belize, Barbados, Panama, St. Lucia, and one regional level validation workshop, held between October to December 2025. Workshops included representatives from CRFM and its Project Management Unit (PMU), the BE-CLME+ National Focal Points, and key MSP stakeholders. A separate Workshop Report has been produced and is available from CRFM.

1.4 How to use the Guide

The Guide begins by setting the scene and context for ocean governance and MSP at the international and Caribbean Regional scale (Sections 1 and 2), before setting out a nine-step process for developing, implementing and monitoring MSP (Section 3). The Guide is designed to be used no matter what stage a country is at with its MSP process, from the pre-planning stage, plan development, through to implementation and revision of the plan. Guide sections are structured to enable readers to find information relevant to their current stage in the MSP process. Users of the Guide are encouraged to refer to the earlier and later steps to establish context. A checklist of steps is included at the start of Section 3, and Figure 1 illustrates the 9 steps and the underpinning processes of information and data, strategic assessment, and stakeholder participation.

The Guide includes 'How to' boxes throughout to assist with particular activities. The boxes should be considered as prompts and can be tailored to the individual needs and capacity available in country.

'Case study' boxes highlight where Caribbean countries have undertaken activities within the MSP process; they demonstrate best practice and aid knowledge sharing across the Region.

‘Information’ boxes provide additional context where it can help to support the implementation of the steps outlined in this Guide.

This Guide should be read and applied in accordance with the accompanying *Protocol on MSP under the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy (CCCFP)*. The Protocol defines key requirements and ways of working to facilitate MSP progress across the Region, particularly in the context of transboundary cooperation.

1.5 Other helpful guidance

This Guide complements a wide range of existing and ongoing MSP-related initiatives being delivered on all continents globally, and it should be viewed, used and interpreted against that backdrop. Users can determine how best to integrate the Guide based on their own needs, objectives, capacity and capabilities to develop transparent, inclusive and socially responsible MSP.

The following international MSP guides, best practice and additional documents have informed the development of this Guide:

- The MSPglobal International Guide on MSP (2021) and MSP Step-by Step Guide (2019)
- Caribbean Regional Oceanscape Project (CROP) MSP processes
- The MarViva MSP: Concepts, Principles, and Methodological Guide (2021)
- World Bank. 2022. MSP for a Resilient and Inclusive Blue Economy
- The Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy (CCCFP) and its protocols
- National MSP data gaps assessments: Panama, Jamaica, Belize, Barbados and St. Lucia (2024)

Table 1 maps the relevant sections of the first three documents as they relate to the nine steps in this Guide to demonstrate alignment and not duplication or deviation from international best practice.

Table 1. Alignment between existing MSP guidelines and the Caribbean Regional MSP Step-by-Step Guide

CRMSP Guide Steps	UNESCO-IOC Steps	CROP MSP Steps	MarViva MSP Steps
Step 1: Preparation and pre-planning	Step1. Identifying Need and Establishing Authority	Completion of policy, legal and institutional assessment	Governance, governance, and participation in marine planning
	Step 2. Obtaining Financial Support		
	Step 3. Organising the Process through Pre-planning		
Step 2: Plan and initiate stakeholder participation	Step 4. Organizing Stakeholder Participation	Identification and analysis of key stakeholders and vulnerable populations	

Step 3: Information and data collection, and analysis	Step 5. Defining and Analysing Existing Conditions	Collection and review of existing background information and data	Delimitation of the geographic area to be planned and diagnosis of the state of the natural environment
	Step 6. Defining and Analysing Future Conditions	Integrated analysis using EBM-DPSER conceptual model	Diagnosis of human activities and uses in the planning area
Step 4: Set vision, goals and objectives	N/A	Vision, goals, and objectives from the National Ocean Policy	Design of a desired future scenario
Step 5: Zoning and policy options, and management actions	Step 7. Preparing and Approving the Spatial Management Plan	• Definition of marine spatial zoning • Identification of blue economy investment opportunities • Evaluation and selection of priority blue economy project profiles • Preparation of MSP	Formulation of a management plan
Step 6: Public consultation and plan approval	N/A	Consultation and approval of plans at ministerial level	N/A
Step 7: Implementation	Step 8. Implementing and enforcing the spatial management plan	Preparation of the implementation and monitoring framework	N/A
Step 8: Monitoring	Step 9. Monitoring and evaluating performance		Monitoring and corrective measures to the management plan
Step 9: Plan review and revision	Step 10. Adapting the marine spatial management process	Revision of implementation roadmap	N/A

2 CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction to ocean governance and MSP

‘Ocean governance’ is defined as the way in which ocean affairs are governed, not only by governments, but also by local communities, industries, and other stakeholders, including national and international law, public and private law, local custom, tradition and culture, and the supporting institutions and processes (UNESCO-IOC/European Commission, 2021).

Although ocean governance *includes* conservation, protection and restoration of marine ecosystems, and climate change considerations, it is challenging to directly manage the natural environment without also considering how the management of other activities and sectors influence environmental outcomes, and vice versa. Various integrated management approaches are available to help define policies, planning approaches, and management measures for marine uses. These approaches can also provide frameworks

to support integrated data and evidence collection and management, stakeholder engagement, holistic management across government, sectors and institutions.

This section briefly explains the commonly used approaches, including how they differ and interact with MSP, to help set MSP within the broader ocean governance context.

2.1.1 Definition of MSP

Several definitions of MSP exist, but the most widely and globally accepted and used definition and framing of MSP is the following, provided by UNESCO-IOC:

“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 have been specified through a political process” (Ehler and Douvère, 2009).

The definition provides a holistic approach based on the three key elements of sustainability: environmental, economic and social. MSP is a context specific process, and the overarching aim can be weighted towards environmental, social or economic outcomes, or provide a good balance across all three, depending on the context and priorities of those using it.

2.1.2 MSP in the context of broader ocean governance

The following approaches are often discussed in the context of MSP, and though they differ in scope, objectives, and implementation, each has specific relationships with MSP:

- Blue Economy (BE)
- Sustainable Ocean Planning (SOP)
- Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM)
- Island Systems Management (ISM)
- Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

Each approach can be complementary and is often implemented through, supported by, or nested within MSP according to coastal and marine policy settings. MSP functions as a spatial planning instrument that supports these approaches by balancing uses, integrating conservation, and translating broader policy or economic goals into mapped, practical management solutions. The key differences and relationship with MSP are summarised below in Table 2.

Blue Economy (BE)

A sustainable BE is an emerging strategic approach to drive sustainable economic growth, jobs, and innovation derived from ocean resources, while ensuring environmental protection and restoration, and social equity. It encompasses a wide policy and governance domain, including fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, energy, shipping, and biotechnology. Its core goal is sustainable, integrated and inclusive economic development set out at a strategic level that considers all relevant sectors and stakeholders.

MSP is a key enabling tool for the BE, organising marine uses spatially to maximise sustainable economic outcomes and reduce conflict between sectors. MSP provides the “where” and “how” for activities proposed under BE strategies, giving certainty to investors and policymakers, ensures social and

environmental priorities are integrated, and provides the platform to enable a participatory approach to delivering a BE.

Sustainable Ocean Planning (SOP)

SOP, as defined by the Ocean Panel¹, is a broad strategic process that guides management of 100% of a nation's marine space for long-term sustainable prosperity, integrating protection, production, equity, climate, and governance under one national vision. SOP is policy-driven and encompasses regulatory reform, finance, participation, data management, and diverse knowledge system.

The relationship with MSP is similar to that of the BE. MSP provides an operational and spatial tool within SOP, used to implement core SOP objectives by organising where and when activities occur. SOP sets the national strategy and vision, while MSP deploys specific mechanisms to achieve those aims.

Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM)

ICZM is a process focused on the integrated management of both the terrestrial and marine components of coastal zones, emphasising cross-sectoral, cross-governance and land-sea interactions. ICZM covers dynamic, continuous management of development, conservation and user conflicts along the coastline, often with a narrower geographic scope than MSP.

Although ICZM and MSP follow similar processes, MSP usually operates at larger scales and includes deeper offshore areas within the Exclusive Economic zone (EEZ), while ICZM concentrates on coordination and development at the coastal interface. ICZM can be nested within national MSP plans or vice versa, and both terrestrial planning frameworks and/or MSP provide the broader marine planning context within which ICZM operates. Given the geographic jurisdiction of ICZM, it can be a useful tool to bring the marine and terrestrial planning systems together under a single integrated framework.

Island Systems Management (ISM)

ISM refers to holistic approaches for managing island environments, focusing on sustainability by integrating social, economic, and ecological factors. It includes the suite of analytical and institutional approaches commonly employed by SIDS to understand and manage complex interactions on islands including land sea interactions. ISM expands the 'ridge to reef' concept and its primary goals include:

- Attaining the sustainable management and use of natural resources;
- Reducing vulnerability and building resilience of the island and its inhabitants to natural hazards
- Maintaining essential ecological processes, life support systems and biological diversity in the area extending from the ridge to the limits of the EEZ.

ISM is well-suited for small islands as it recognises that the footprint of what constitutes the "coastal area" and the "marine area" can often apply to the island as a whole and should be considered in an integrated manner.

¹ The High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy (Ocean Panel) is a unique global initiative by serving world leaders that is working to build momentum towards a sustainable ocean economy in which effective protection, sustainable production and equitable prosperity go hand-in-hand. The Ocean Panel consist of world leaders across 20 countries including Australia, Canada, Chile, Fiji, France, Ghana, Indonesia, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Namibia, Norway, Panama, Palau, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Seychelles, United Kingdom, United States of America, Indonesia, and Norway

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

MPAs are specific, spatially defined zones where human activity is managed to achieve conservation objectives. The designation and management of MPAs are typically outcome-focused (biodiversity protection or restoration) rather than process-driven or integrated across all uses like MSP.

MPAs are one of many tools used within an MSP framework. MSP can identify optimal locations for MPAs and design them as part of a balanced suite of allocations for fisheries, tourism, energy, etc. Conversely, MPA networks can be integrated into spatial plans produced by MSP to maximise conservation and other ecosystem benefits.

Table 2. Key differences and relationship between MSP and other ocean governance approaches

Approach	Differences from MSP	Relationship to MSP
Blue Economy	Focused on economic growth, innovation, jobs, and sustainable sector development. Less spatially oriented; driven by investment, policy, and enabling sustainable ocean sectors.	MSP provides the spatial base for blue economy sectors, helping optimise and de-risk investments, and ensure ecological/socio-economic sustainability.
Sustainable Ocean Planning	Broader, strategic national/integrated approach—guides management of 100% ocean area for production, protection, climate, equity. Policy-driven, includes finance, governance, and stakeholder engagement.	MSP is a key spatial instrument nested within SOP; it turns SOP goals into mapped zones and allocations for ocean uses.
Integrated Coastal Zone Management	Emphasises integrated land-sea management mainly at coastlines; deals with local/regional issues and continuity across terrestrial and marine systems. More process-oriented than spatial.	ICZM complements and can be nested in MSP; MSP often covers offshore areas while ICZM bridges the coast and near shore, fostering continuity.
Marine Protected Areas	Designates specific zones for conservation and biodiversity. Focused on ecological outcomes—not on balancing multi-sector uses. Area-based but not a full planning framework.	MPAs are outcomes and building blocks within MSP; MSP guides the location, design, and network integration of MPAs for broader ecosystem protection and multiple-use balance.

2.1.3 Types of MSP approach

There are three common types of MSP approach:

- 1) Spatial zoning plan
- 2) Strategic policy-based plan
- 3) Hybrid plan (spatial zoning and policy based)

Caribbean countries are predominantly applying either the spatial zoning plan approach, or the hybrid approach. Table 3 provides a brief comparison of the approaches.

Spatial zoning plan

A spatial zoning plan is common to most MSP approaches. It includes spatially defined areas with associated management measures to manage activities in line with the overarching vision and objectives of the plan. Zoning can be used to allocate rights and responsibilities for use of space.

Implementation of a spatial zoning plan typically occurs across multiple levels – national and local jurisdictions - with coordination mechanisms to ensure consistency and integrated management across the entire marine area covered by the plan. Implementation responsibility can sit across public, private and community depending on the management measures set out within the plan. Government institutions typically apply the spatial plan to their respective roles, such as issuing permits, authorisations and permissions, regulating activities, and monitoring and enforcing zones. As planning decisions are made based on zoning requirements over time, spatially zoned areas can provide certainty for the lifetime of the marine activities, particularly in the case of fixed infrastructure such as oil and gas infrastructure and offshore wind.

Strategic policy-based plan

A strategic policy-based plan provides an integrated framework to guide future decision-making affecting a marine plan area, aiming to balance environmental, social, and economic outcomes aligned with its overarching vision and objectives. It guides decisions on new proposals, sea user behaviour, or new management measures, mainly through strategic policies rather than prescriptive spatial designations or spatially defined zones. These policies offer a flexible framework that leaves ultimate decisions on use of space to the relevant authorities at the time of an authorisation or decision.

Implementation is typically carried out by those with decision-making powers that influence the marine area covered by the plan. Policies may direct future spatial allocations and preferred scenarios, covering sectoral development, ecosystem protection, and timing, but decision-making remains with the relevant authorities. This flexibility can be useful in contexts with data or evidence gaps which make setting prescriptive zones challenging.

Plan policies can guide decision-makers on prioritising conflicting activities and reinforce MSP principles, covering topics across economic, social, and environmental pillars, as well as issues of governance including:

- Considerations for locating marine activities to achieve balanced objectives.
- Management actions related to stakeholder dialogue, data collection, institutional arrangements, and capacity building.
- Cross-cutting issues such as coordination between land and sea planning and between governance levels.
- Future use safeguarding policies.
- Strategic policies supporting diversification, skills enhancement, and employment.
- Policies endorsing preferred methods and best practices for successful project implementation.

Hybrid plan

A hybrid plan combines strategic policies, spatial zoning and management actions to effectively manage the use of marine space. Strategic policies can guide future spatial scenarios and sectoral priorities, offering high-level direction especially in areas where specific zones are not yet designated or flexibility is needed due to data gaps. The policies can provide overarching guidance to coordinate and balance environmental, social, and economic objectives, addressing cross-cutting issues such as stakeholder engagement, data collection, institutional coordination, and economic diversification that zoning alone cannot cover. Zoning can translate the plan vision and policies into clear, defined spatial allocations, providing operational management and investment certainty.

This combined approach allows precise zoning of well-understood areas while providing flexible guidance for emerging or less studied uses, facilitating adaptive management as knowledge improves. Zoning informs permits and enforcement, while policies guide investments, capacity building, and monitoring frameworks, enhancing resource efficiency and long-term sustainability.

Table 3. Comparison of different MSP approaches

MSP Approach	Useful For	Considerations	Implementation
Spatial Zoning Plan	Situations with detailed spatial data and well-defined uses; where legal clarity and enforceable spatial boundaries are needed.	Requires sufficient data to delineate zones and assess impacts from any spatial trade-offs, plus clear governance and enforcement capacity; useful for reducing conflicts through explicit spatial allocation.	Typically involves creating legally binding maps with defined use zones tied to permitting and regulatory frameworks.
Strategic Policy-Based Plan	Contexts with limited spatial data or where flexibility is needed due to emerging activities or rapidly changing conditions.	Provides high-level guidance without strict spatial prescriptions; requires less data but is reliant on strong institutional coordination and adaptive governance.	Focuses on strategic policies guiding decisions across sectors, often suited for early stages of MSP or complex governance landscapes lacking zoning infrastructure.
Hybrid Plan	Cases where a balance between clarity and flexibility is required; combining enforceable spatial zones with strategic direction for broader objectives.	Offers flexibility to zone well-understood areas while guiding emerging or less understood sectors with policies; spatial elements can reflect data availability; supports adaptive management.	Integrates zoning maps with strategic policies covering cross-cutting issues like stakeholder engagement, monitoring, and capacity building; provides both regulatory certainty and policy guidance.



How to... Choosing the right approach

There is no single best approach. The right approach will depend on the needs, capacity and capability of the country setting out to develop a marine plan. Spatially zoned plans offer spatial precision and regulatory certainty where conditions allow, policy-based plans provide flexibility and broad guidance where data or capacity are limited, and hybrid plans combine strengths of both for comprehensive, adaptive, and enforceable marine spatial management. All three approaches can provide a framework to address transboundary issues, land sea interaction, and to foster integration between sectoral agencies, regulatory bodies and local stakeholders from neighbouring countries when making decisions about the distribution of coastal and marine uses. Coordination between activities and practices of actors in planning transboundary areas is imperative in advancing sustainability as most marine problems are exacerbated in transboundary areas.

Key factors to consider:

- **Data availability and quality:** adequate spatial and sectoral data to support zoning versus reliance on policy guidance if data are lacking.
- **Governance capacity:** ability to enforce zoning and manage compliance versus capacity for policy coordination and adaptive management.
- **Stakeholder context:** level of stakeholder engagement and acceptance needed; zoning may face more resistance without participation.
- **Objectives and scale:** complexity of marine uses, conservation goals, economic activities, and governance scales involved.
- **Flexibility needs:** the pace of anticipated future changes in policy direction, or environmental, economic or governance changes necessitating adaptive or fixed spatial management.
- **Legal and institutional frameworks:** existing laws and institutions' readiness to support zoning or policy-led approaches.

2.2 MSP to deliver international, regional and national obligations and commitments

MSP can support the delivery of international, regional and national obligations and commitments, including conservation and restoration of marine and coastal ecosystems, blue carbon, ocean-based renewables, maritime transport, carbon capture and storage, coastal resilience and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture.

Key international, regional and national obligations and commitments relevant to MSP in the Caribbean Region:

- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
- Basis for the declaration of the various maritime jurisdictions
- Stipulates international principles of controlling shipping and right of innocent passage
- Indicates extent of responsibilities for protection of biological marine resources
- Authority to manage and prohibit extraction activities within national jurisdiction
- Addresses piracy and prosecution of illegal activities within national jurisdiction and international/territorial sea cooperation
- United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and related agreements and protocols, such as the 2015 Paris Agreement
- The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF)
- United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement
- Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Compliance Agreement
- FAO International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter, and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IUU) Fishing
- International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS)
- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
- International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL)
- Port State Measures Agreements (PSMA)
- Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar)
- The Convention for the protection and Development of the Marine Environment in the Wider Caribbean Region (the Cartagena Convention) and associated protocols
- Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM)
- The Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy (CCCFP) and its protocols
- The Eastern Caribbean Ocean Policy
- St George's Declaration of Principles for Environmental Sustainability in the OECS
- Regional Marine Spatial Planning Framework for the Coastal and Marine Spatial Plans (CMSPs)

Key international obligations and commitments relevant to MSP regarding Indigenous Peoples and traditional knowledge:

- ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (1989)
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (2007)

2.3 Overview of ocean governance and MSP in the Caribbean Region

The Caribbean Region is unique due to its location as one of the top five biodiversity hotspots in the world, pressures on marine ecosystems and challenges particularly in the context of Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The Region's unique challenges, including high vulnerability to climate change and economic dependence on marine ecosystems, such as fisheries and tourism, serve as a driver for developing marine spatial plans and coordination among countries. The development and implementation of MSP, however, is faced with challenges such as limited high-resolution spatial data especially for offshore areas, limited funding in SIDS and limited governance structures to institutionalise MSP. MSP in the Caribbean needs to be developed in an inclusive manner by providing a platform and voice for stakeholders including Indigenous Peoples, rightsholders, local communities, including a voice for women, to address these national and regional challenges.

MSP in the Caribbean Region is still at the early stages and there is a need to align marine spatial plans with sustainable blue economy objectives whilst ensuring coordination across relevant countries. Through initiatives such as Caribbean Regional Oceanscape Project (CROP), led by the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), marine spatial plans have been developed for Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Barbuda's MSP has also been developed and is a notable example of a participatory process that balances economic, conservation, and cultural uses. The development of MSP in Barbados has been supported by a “blue bond” debt conversion, through an agreement signed in September 2022 by the Government of Barbados (GOB), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC).

The Belize MSP process was launched in 2022 to guide the sustainable development and designation of up to 30% of Belize's ocean as biodiversity protection zones. The MSP and designations are core conditions of Belize's blue bond and associated conservation funding agreement. In Jamaica, the government launched a national level MSP in 2018. With support from TNC, Jamaica developed MSP and a zoning design for the Pedro Bank in 2018, through a participatory process. In Guyana, Panama and other Caribbean countries the MSP process is still at early stages through pilot projects and scoping initiatives. For example, in Guyana and Suriname, the Promoting Integrated and Participatory Ocean Governance in Guyana and Suriname project has produced technical reports on data and capacity needs assessment that will inform future MSP efforts. The Protecting and Restoring the Ocean's Natural Capital, Building Resilience and Supporting Region-Wide Investments for Sustainable Blue Socio-Economic Development (PROCARIBE+) project is currently supporting MSP processes in countries including Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and Trinidad and Tobago.

The BE-CLME+ project seeks to build on the progress through CROP, national MSP efforts and early participatory and local MSP initiatives such as in Grenada Bank (St. Vincent & the Grenadines and Grenada), Pedro Bank (Jamaica) to strengthen regional cooperation by assessing existing MSP planning efforts and developing a regional MSP framework.

The Caribbean marine and coastal areas face growing and conflicting demands from human activities such as shipping, fishing, tourism, recreation, oil exploration, and coastal development. These pressures and activities are transboundary in nature, hence the need to ensure collaboration and alignment between countries in the region to address conflicts among users.

2.4 Key MSP Principles for the Caribbean Region

There is increasing use and competition for marine space in the Caribbean Sea which requires an integrated, cross-sectoral and participatory approach to manage human activities and to improve resilience against environmental change, such as the current and future impacts of climate change and natural disasters. MSP is a process for analysing, coordinating and allocating the spatial and temporal distribution of human activities in marine areas to achieve a balance between economic, environmental, social and any other interests in line with internationally and nationally agreed objectives.

There is a need for coherence across MSP activities within the Caribbean Region to address transboundary issues, to prevent the activities of neighbouring countries unintentionally hindering the achievement of objectives and management efforts of another, and to promote sustainable development at the regional scale. Although substantial MSP activity has already been carried out by national governments and regional bodies in the Caribbean Region, significant differences exist between countries in terms of MSP development and implementation, and countries are at different stages in their MSP process.

To help guide and facilitate improved MSP coherence at the regional scale, 13 Key MSP Principles have been developed based on international best practice and refined through consultation with stakeholders in the Caribbean when developing this Guide.

Caribbean Regional MSP Principles

Principle 1: Driven by high level commitment by national government

In order to ensure ownership, political will and a common reference point for the development and implementation of MSP. National governments must commit to high level outcomes and national budgets to support not only the development of MSP but also its implementation. National governments must identify or define conservation, climate, blue economy, ocean policy and planning targets and commitments and use MSP as a process to deliver on these targets. Commitments must extend across political parties and beyond the timeframe of single term and administration with long-term backing by national parliaments.

Principle 2: Integrated across sectors

MSP must be a multi-objective planning process that establishes coordination mechanisms e.g. cross sectoral working group and coordination body to integrate knowledge, sectors, administration, and brings together relevant authorities with sectoral responsibilities on ocean management. Integrated planning and management are essential to resolve multiple and divergent political ambitions (e.g., blue growth, sustainable use, legitimate decision-making) to achieve a balance of competing goals.

Principle 3: Capacitated and resourced

The MSP process must consider the development of institutional capacity (e.g. skills and knowledge in relevant agencies) for developing, implementing, monitoring, evaluating and

revising the plan. The MSP must be supported by long term and sustainable funding sources. Funding needs to be backed by policy and legislation to legitimise the MSP process and ensure long-term budget allocation not only the development of the plan but implementation.

Principle 4: Inclusive

MSP must be an inclusive process which engages stakeholders, rightsholders, communities, women's groups, Indigenous groups, generations, and marginalised groups about their needs and vision for the use of marine space and, where appropriate, for their active participation in implementation of resulting plans. An inclusive MSP process should consider stakeholder power dynamics and the distribution of benefits achieved by the plan.

Principle 5: Based on best available information and data

MSP development must be dependent on the best available data including systematic collection, integration, and analysis of environmental, social, economic, traditional knowledge and local information. Data collection and management should be prioritised and funded as part of the MSP process. The decisions that are made during the development of the plan e.g. zoned areas should be based on the best available information to inform sustainable resource use.

Principle 6: Characterised by subsidiarity and unique conditions of the planning area

MSP is a place-based approach that encompasses all marine and coastal areas under national jurisdiction and enhances integrated planning across the land-sea interface and jurisdictional borders. These areas could be captured in one single plan or via a suite of plans (e.g. one per type of marine ecosystem within the national jurisdiction) as well as spatial challenges should be dealt with at the lowest most appropriate spatial level. MSP should consider the unique characteristics of islands, isthmus, continental areas and cover the surface, water column and seabed of the defined planning area as well as prioritise hotspots and key issues.

Principle 7: Coherent across the land-sea interface

MSP in the Caribbean Region must facilitate alignment between terrestrial planning systems, and MSP systems. It must include the understanding of environmental impacts of nutrient load and eutrophication, climate change impacts, marine and coastal infrastructure development e.g. cables, connections between land and sea transport, ports and cultural use of coastal areas. For SIDS and coastal states in the Caribbean Region, synergies between MSP, ISM and ICZM are critical to avoid duplication of institutional roles, or the activities of one decision-making framework unintentionally undermining the activities of another, especially when addressing coastal erosion, vulnerability issues, mangrove management and sea level rise.

Principle 8: Future-orientated and anticipatory

MSP is considered to be a future-oriented process that allows the public and stakeholders to shape actions that could lead to a more desirable future. To achieve this, MSP processes should focus on setting a vision for a sustainable future which encompasses socio-political and environmental scenarios and develop plans to realise them. This requires a review of trends, and consideration of potential conflicts between traditional marine uses and new and emerging activities, climate change and how they may be resolved or exacerbated in the future.

Principle 9: Take an ecosystem-based approach

The coupling of MSP and ecosystem-based management is necessary to ensure sustainable development through the effective management of human activities and the need to understand the cumulative impacts of multiple human activities on the ecosystem at the appropriate scale. It is critical the MSP process includes spatial direction for the country's blue economy vision by protecting, restoring, and maintaining ecosystem services and cultural values to support economic development.

Principle 10: Define clear and realistic spatial priorities

The delivery of MSP must be proportionate to the country's priorities, capacity, resources, and knowledge while building on existing processes. MSP must be seen as a continuous process and the marine spatial plan as an instrument to deliver spatial priorities that are clear and realistic to be achieved. This allows for the delivery of key issues and minimum requirements for MSP identified by stakeholders and rightsholders while allowing for future iteration of the plan as defined by Principle 6.

Principle 11: Enforceable and implementation driven

The development of MSP must be proportionate to the country's ability to implement and enforce the objectives of the plan. There is the need for long term funding, legislative instruments as indicated in Principle 10 to endorse the plan and provide capacity for implementation especially in countries where MSP is financed based on project funding.

Principle 12: Facilitate transboundary cooperation on MSP

MSP in the Caribbean Region needs to apply international and regional conventions and agreements that are relevant for MSP. Where possible, MSP must be developed to consider transboundary impacts on neighbouring countries including maritime zone delimitation, fisheries, pipe and cables, shipping and conservation measures. Transboundary consultation and dialogue on draft plans must be conducted in a cross-sectoral context between all coastal countries, competent regional organisations and stakeholders.

Principle 13: Iterative

MSP is not a one-off event and must have a defined timeframe with an in-built process for periodic monitoring and evaluation to check progress against agreed-upon goals and indicators. MSP must be designed to be adaptive, and plans updated to ensure that the socio-economic and political context as well as natural disasters and other externalities are factored into the iteration of the plan.



Figure 1. The MSP step-by-step process showing the nine stages, with participation, evidence and strategic assessment as underpinning processes

3 CARIBBEAN REGIONAL MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

Step-by-Step Checklist

BUILD THE FOUNDATIONS

Step 1: Preparation and Pre-Planning

- ☐ Identify the high-level objectives and drivers for undertaking MSP
- ☐ Review the existing legal and institutional frameworks
- ☐ Define the planning area and agree its timeframe
- ☐ Establish the lead authority and organisational structure for MSP
- ☐ Identify and secure sustainable finance for MSP
- ☐ Secure parliamentary commitment
- ☐ Develop a Work Plan
- ☐ Create awareness about MSP

Step 2: Plan and Initiate Stakeholder Participation

- ☐ Identify stakeholders and their role in the process
- ☐ Develop a Stakeholder Engagement Strategy
- ☐ Ensure ethical inclusion of vulnerable, marginalised and gender groups
- ☐ Initiate stakeholder engagement

ASSESS THE BASELINES

Step 3: Information and Data Collection, and Analysis

- ☐ Develop an information and data strategy
- ☐ Set up a public information system
- ☐ Identify physical, environmental, social, economic and governance baselines
- ☐ Identify future trends

- ☐ Identify potential spatial use conflict and opportunities for co-location

DEVELOP THE PLAN

Step 4: Vision, Goal and Objective Setting

- ☐ Define the MSP vision statement
- ☐ Define MSP goals and SMARTIE objectives

Step 5: Agree Zoning and Management, and Draft the Marine Spatial Plan

- ☐ Develop alternative zoning scenarios
- ☐ Initiate a strategic environmental and social assessment
- ☐ Select the preferred zoning scenario
- ☐ Define management measures and reassess environmental and social impact
- ☐ Develop an Implementation Plan
- ☐ Develop a Monitoring Plan
- ☐ Draft the Marine Spatial Plan

Step 6: Public Consultation and Plan Adoption

- ☐ Publish the Draft Marine Spatial Plan and associated documents for public consultation
- ☐ Amend and finalise the Marine Spatial Plan
- ☐ Submit the finalised Marine Spatial Plan for approval and adoption

IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR

Step 7: Implementation Phase

- ☐ Initiate the Implementation Plan
- ☐ Apply the Marine Spatial Plan to decisions that affect the plan area

Step 8: Monitoring Phase

- ☐ Initiate the Monitoring Plan
- ☐ Adapt management measures and actions as needed

REVIEW AND REVISE

Step 9: Plan Review and Revision

- ☐ Review the Marine Spatial Plan against current context
- ☐ Revise the Marine Spatial Plan (begin at Step 1 or 2 as needed), or determine the next review point (then repeat Step 9)

BUILD THE FOUNDATIONS

Step 1: Preparation and pre-planning

- ☐ Identify the high-level objectives and drivers for undertaking MSP
- ☐ Review the existing legal and institutional frameworks
- ☐ Define the planning area and agree its timeframe
- ☐ Establish the lead authority and organisational structure for MSP
- ☐ Identify and secure sustainable finance for MSP
- ☐ Secure parliamentary commitment
- ☐ Develop a Work Plan

The pre-planning and preparatory stages of the MSP process are critically important because they set the foundations for a successful, effective, and adaptive plan. These stages include defining clarifying principles, goals, and objectives, the required legal and governance frameworks, human resource capacity and capabilities, the spatial and temporal boundaries, the lead planning authority and delivery team, sources of funding, and a clear delivery plan that identifies risks and contingency plans.

This preparatory work facilitates cross-governmental support, reduces future conflicts, supports adaptive management, fosters stakeholder trust, ensures alignment with legal and policy frameworks, and improves the overall quality and sustainability of the MSP outcomes. Because MSP is an iterative and evolving process, thorough pre-planning allows the plan to accommodate change and new information more effectively over time.

Identify the high-level objectives and drivers for undertaking MSP

Why develop and implement MSP? Identifying the reasons for undertaking MSP in the first place is important because it provides a clear purpose and direction for the planning process, ensuring that it aligns with national priorities. It helps justify the investment of resources and fosters stakeholder buy-in by clarifying what the MSP process aims to achieve. MSP drivers could include the need to operationalise strategic priorities such as a national Blue Economy Strategy, to improve integrated management of the marine space, to deliver MPA targets and commitments such as protecting 30% of the ocean by 2030 ('30 by 30' goals), or simply to help manage conflicting use. An agreement on these drivers and high-level objectives is important in securing political will and ensuring high-level strategic commitment right from the start of the MSP process. The high-level objectives and drivers should be tested with stakeholders and used to inform the development of the plan-level vision and objectives.



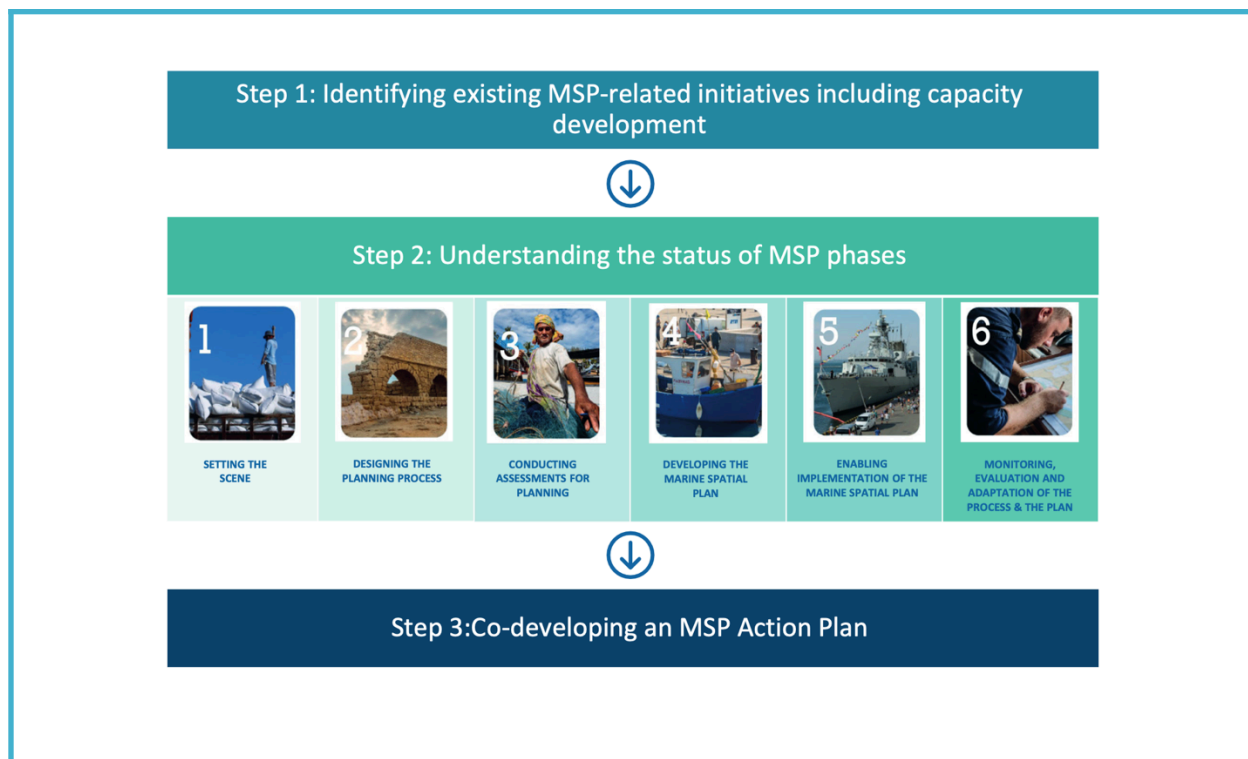
Case Example... Application of the Rapid Assessment Methodology (RAM) in Colombia and Dominican Republic

The Rapid Assessment Methodology (RAM) is being used as a tool in the Caribbean region to coordinate national and regional workshops that engage institutional stakeholders, governments and international partners to define high level priorities for MSP. The methodology makes it possible for countries that wish to engage in MSP but face difficulties, to define a clear pathway towards identifying actions and budget allocations that can help to progress MSP. As part of the PROCARIBE+ Project the RAM is being applied in Colombia and the Dominican Republic as the first step in identifying high level actions and objectives in advancing MSP. The steps being applied by both countries include:

The Step 1 involves understanding existing MSP-related initiatives, their aim and objective as well as the main outcomes and gaps for advancing MSP.

The Step 2 involves understanding key activities that have already been done or ongoing by the initiatives identified in Step 1. This step is developed based on the six MSP phases described in the MSPglobal International Guide on MSP.

The Step 3 includes the formulation of actions to advance MSP. The compilation of suggested recommendations from the Step 2 should be used here to further define an action plan for MSP organised under key themes, such as capacity development, institutional arrangements, stakeholder engagement, data, monitoring, MSP pilots and resource mobilisation.



Review the existing legal and institutional frameworks

Most plans developed in the Caribbean Region will be first generation plans and may need to focus on issues and opportunities that can be addressed within existing or emerging legal and institutional frameworks with the resources available. In some cases, countries may not have the foundational prerequisite legislative frameworks, or adequate financial, human and technical resources to develop and implement MSP.

A critical first step is to analyse and understand the legal and institutional frameworks on which to anchor the various stages of the MSP process. Conducting a thorough legal and institutional framework review ensures that MSP is grounded in existing legal contexts, clearly defines governance structures, has enforceable authority, and is capable of effective, adaptive implementation aligned with national goals and stakeholder expectations.

Findings from the review should inform decisions on the type of legal instruments and institutional frameworks that will be used or established to develop and implement MSP, and whether the MSP process and resulting plan will be statutory or a voluntary guiding approach. The MSP legislation must set out long term requirements that ensures cross-government and cross-party commitment at the outset to reduce the risk of changes in policy direction mid-process. Legislative gaps, however, do not make it impossible to deliver MSP as countries can still proceed without specific legislation if there are other drivers, for example the blue bond commitments in the case of Belize.

Table 4 sets out the key requirements that must be defined in MSP legislation to ensure effective delivery, coordination and implementation.

Table 4. Key considerations for drafting an MSP legislation

Consideration	Description
Statutory framework	Robust legal basis, clear scope, defined authority for MSP and integration with existing laws
Stakeholder engagement	Mandated and desirable participation, public access to information
Environmental and social goals	Ecosystem-based management, SEA, protection zones, livelihood, cultural and wellbeing targets as defined by international and national environmental commitments and targets
Coordination	Defined institutional roles, cross-sector collaboration
Conflict resolution	Processes for managing sectoral and spatial disputes as well as trade-offs and prioritisation criteria



How to... A typical review of legal and institutional frameworks should consider:

- **Existing laws and regulations:** identify all relevant international, national, regional, and local laws that govern ocean-related activities such as fisheries, marine protected areas, shipping, pollution control, offshore energy, and coastal development. Understanding these helps ensure MSP compliance and identifies legal gaps or overlaps.
- **Institutional roles and responsibilities:** Map out government ministries, agencies, and other institutions involved in marine management, their mandates, how they interact, for example Blue Economy or Environmental Ministries, Department of Fisheries, Physical Planning Department, etc. Determine whether a specific legal authority exists for MSP, including mandates to create, adopt, and enforce marine spatial plans. If lacking, explore how to incorporate MSP provisions into existing laws or whether standalone MSP legislation is needed.
- **Capacity and capability needs assessment:** in the Caribbean Region, the MSP remit primarily resides with the Fisheries, Environment and Coastal Zone Management agencies. It is important that the capacity and capabilities of these agencies to deliver MSP are assessed to inform decisions on the lead authority for MSP. A capacity and capability needs assessment is also beneficial for resourcing and empowering the legally mandated lead agencies for MSP, and ensuring they have access to the right training and equipment.
- **Plan status:** clarify whether marine spatial plans will be legally binding or advisory documents, and how conflicts between MSP plans and other regulations will be resolved. This influences plan effectiveness and stakeholder commitment.
- **Sectoral plans and policies:** assess existing sectoral or regional plans, for example existing ICZM plans and policies, overlapping terrestrial plans, environmental policies, strategies, commitments and targets, management plans. This helps to align MSP with ongoing initiatives, avoid duplication, and ensure coherence.

- **Jurisdictional and boundary issues:** consider maritime boundaries, EEZs, and jurisdictional limits to address governance overlaps and transboundary cooperation needs. Identify any boundary conflicts that may need to be resolved or factored into the process.
- **Compliance and enforcement provisions:** examine mechanisms to monitor, enforce, and ensure compliance with MSP policies and zoning, including sanctions and accountability measures.
- **Public participation and access to information:** review any legal requirements or agreements regarding ethical stakeholder participation and use of information, particularly in relation to engagement with vulnerable, marginalised and gender groups, including engagement with Indigenous Peoples and use of Indigenous Local Knowledge (ILK).
- **Enabling governance arrangements:** evaluate if institutional frameworks already exist that can support adaptive management, cross-agency collaboration, and sustained stakeholder involvement essential for the iterative nature of MSP.
- **Gap analysis:** identify where critical gaps exist that could hinder the effective development or implementation of MSP and determine if and how they will be addressed. This should also include anticipated gaps in equipment or training for those involved in developing or implementing MSP. The MSP process and resulting plans must be proportionate and realistic based on what can be achieved with existing and anticipated future legal and institutional frameworks, and within available budget, resources and capability. It is better to start small and build on the plan in future iterations following review points, than to be too ambitious at the outset.

Define the planning area and agree its timeframe

The review of existing legal and institutional frameworks will inform decisions on the geographical scope of the area to be planned. For the marine spatial plan to be enforceable and effective, its boundaries must align with the maritime space over which the country has sovereignty or jurisdictional rights in accordance with national and/or international laws. Maritime boundary disputes and contested areas may need to be resolved where possible, or decisions taken on if and how planning activities can work within the context of no agreement. The chosen lead planning authority must also have a legal mandate to operate in the area.

The following decisions are likely to be needed:

- Will the plan cover the entire EEZ, or will the EEZ be divided into sub-national planning units to be developed in sequence? Or will the plan target a single small area to begin with, with a view to expanding MSP in future iterations?

Identifying the plan area(s) should be informed by the specific country context, priorities and needs, as well as resource constraints. Smaller areas or a sequenced approach can ensure a more manageable process where resources are limited, and it can help with prioritising hotspot areas, or where attention for data collection and planning is needed within a planning cycle.

- In the coastal zone, how will the plan area interface with the terrestrial planning framework's geographical jurisdiction to support integrated land and marine planning?

The coastal zone can be defined as the area adjacent to/from (e.g. 3 km inland) the high-water mark (HWM) or low-water mark (LWM) and can extend into adjacent inshore waters to three or six nautical miles (nm), or sometimes out to the boundary of the territorial sea (12nm) or contiguous zone (24m), where defined.

Review of existing spatial zones, and the remit, monitoring and surveillance capacity and capabilities of key ministries, departments and coastal authorities can help to inform a decision on a plan area that can be realistically enforced and monitored. The decision on a plan area should be proportionate based on appetite, resources, relevance to stakeholders and capacity to deliver. The process can be tested in a small area and expanded in later generations of MSP.



How to... When defining a planning area, consider:

- Jurisdictional boundaries and issues.
- The geographical extent of internal, archipelagic and territorial waters.
- The extent of exclusive economic zones, if established pursuant to UNCLOS.
- The outer limits of jurisdictional powers, likely to depend upon the enclosed or open nature of the sea basin.
- Sub-national borders and responsibilities in the coastal zone and offshore.
- National / sub-national departmental responsibilities and areas of competence.
- National / sub-national MSP initiatives and planning areas.
- The extent of integrated coastal management and river basin management initiatives.
- Relevance to stakeholders on the right geographic scale and scope of MSP especially for first generation plans.
- Other international marine regions and administrative areas.

Timeframe and review points

Defining a timeframe for a marine spatial plan provides clear messaging on the plan's duration, aligning it with policy, management, political, administrative, and funding cycles. It balances long-term sustainability ambitions with practical, manageable goals. This timeframe supports adaptive implementation by enabling strategic anticipatory planning rather than reactive decision-making. It also facilitates stakeholder engagement, regulatory processes and institutional coordination. Additionally, setting a timeframe helps anticipate future pressures and opportunities and establishes milestones for implementation, monitoring, evaluation and review, to keep the plan responsive and adaptive over time. The review points throughout the MSP process are important as the political and national drivers may change over time.



How to... When defining a plan timeframe:

- Identify a base year for the plan from which to anchor assessments of current and future conditions and management actions.
- Select a planning horizon, typically ranging from 10 to 20 years or more, depending on ecological processes, sectoral development trends, and governance contexts.
- Establish interim review periods within the timeframe to evaluate progress, incorporate new information and changing contexts, and adjust the plan as needed to ensure relevance and effectiveness.
- Consider legal or policy requirements that may specify plan durations or necessitate updates for compliance.

Establish the lead authority and organisational structure for MSP

The next step involves setting up the lead authority and organisational structure for MSP development and implementation. It is important that the arrangements and legal mandate are set up to be sustainable beyond short-term political cycles by obtaining early broad parliamentary commitment to MSP. Arrangements should be informed by the review of legal and institutional frameworks and should be set up according to the needs of the country and the area(s) to be planned. The structure must facilitate efficient flow of information and communication between those leading, steering and developing MSP, and those effected by the MSP process and outputs. There is the need to consider existing arrangements, including formal, informal and voluntary arrangements when setting up the organisational structure for MSP. Existing National Ocean Governance Committees (NOGCs), Ocean Coordination Mechanisms (OCM) and related MSP structures must be considered as a platform for coordinating and leading MSP activities. Informal arrangements and structures could be strengthened and formalised for coordinating and leading MSP processes.



How to... A typical organisational structure might include the following components:

- **Lead authority:** a central governmental authority (e.g., Ministry of Environment, Fisheries, or Marine Affairs) responsible for overall leadership, coordination, and accountability of the MSP process and outcomes.
- **Steering Committee or Executive Committee:** a high-level group comprising senior representatives from relevant government ministries/departments (environment, fisheries, energy, transport, tourism, defence, etc.). This committee provides strategic oversight, approves major decisions, ensures cross-sector coordination, and allocates resources. The

Committee should be prepared to operate for the full duration of the MSP process, including implementation, monitoring and review and revision stages.

- **Technical working groups:** multi-disciplinary teams focusing on specific thematic areas such as ecological data, socio-economic factors, spatial analysis, sectoral uses, ecosystem services, and legal frameworks. They conduct detailed assessments, prepare technical outputs, and provide expertise to inform decision-making.
- **Stakeholder advisory groups:** configured to include civil society organisations, scientific institutions, local communities, Indigenous Peoples, rightsholders, private sector representatives, and other relevant stakeholders to ensure inclusive participation, transparency, and social legitimacy.
- **Core Planning Team:** a dedicated operational team responsible for day-to-day coordination, facilitation of meetings, communication, data management, and reporting. Often acts as the interface between committees, working groups, and external stakeholders. The Core Planning Team is also responsible for the technical development and monitoring of the plan. The team will typically track and support MSP implementation, and if resources allow, monitor ecological and socio-economic impacts and assess plan effectiveness, and recommending adaptive management actions. The team generally consists of members of staff from the lead authority and should include individuals and leads with expertise in planning, law and policy, coastal and marine sciences, environmental, economic, social and cultural matters, public outreach, stakeholder engagement and participation. The recommended skills and competences for the core planning team are set out in Table 5.

Table 5. Skills and competencies recommended for the Core Planning Team

Skills	Competencies
Stakeholder engagement	Knowledge of existing jurisdictional boundaries and bioregions.
Policy and legal understanding	Programme and project management expertise, including logical framework analysis.
Spatial analysis and GIS	Ability to use and interpret scenario analysis, sector assessment, and socio-economic analysis.
Data management	Technical skills in policy analysis, sustainability appraisal, and environmental impact assessment.
Communication and presentation skills	Capacity to work with cross-border projects and to cooperate with agencies and cultures
Synthesis and multidisciplinary approaches	Social and cross-culture intelligence
Adaptive and novel thinking about zones and management actions	Systems thinking

Identify and secure sustainable finance

MSP requires adequate, sustained funding for both plan development and long-term implementation. Most MSP activities are funded through a range of financial mechanisms, such as government budget allocation, public-private partnerships, grants, debt conversion and donor funding.

Secure funding commitments before or during the preparatory and pre-planning stage, where possible. When funding is secured beforehand, revalidate the budget once pre-planning is complete to ensure alignment between budget allocation, available resources, timelines, and priorities. This validation step helps to mitigate against cost overruns and ensures the plan scope remains realistic and achievable.

Budget planning must extend beyond plan development to include implementation and enforcement costs. Sustainable financing mechanisms are essential for:

- Policy implementation and enforcement
- Capacity building and institutional strengthening
- Stakeholder engagement throughout the plan lifecycle
- On-going monitoring and adaptive management

When existing funding proves insufficient, it may be necessary to explore innovative and diversified financing options including blended finance, debt-for-nature conversions,² and blue bonds. Blended finance approaches, particularly those involving Multilateral Development Banks, can provide upfront capital and risk mitigation for both government and private sector participants. Table 6 lists some examples of financing options that are relevant to the Caribbean Region.

A public expenditure review and budget tagging exercise by national governments can help identify where funds or resources across government agencies can be redirected to MSP development and implementation. This kind of cross-agency approach often reveals untapped resources that already support marine planning objectives.

Comprehensive MSP budgets should consider:

- Core planning team salaries, remuneration for external support (consultants) and operational costs
- Technical assessments (ecological, economic, social)
- Stakeholder consultation processes (meetings, workshops, outreach)
- External consultants with specialised expertise, if needed
- Planning and decision-support tools (MarXan, SeaSketch, GIS software)
- Administrative infrastructure, equipment, and logistics
- Implementation, monitoring, and enforcement capacity

Table 6. Examples of finance approaches for MSP in the Caribbean Region

Funding Approach	Description	Country Example
Endowment or trust fund	Long-term capital invested for annual disbursement	National Conservation Trust Fund for Jamaica, St. Lucia, Grenada
Competitive grants	Project-based funding from donors/agencies	EU Multiannual Programme for Overseas Countries and Territories for EU Member States e.g. Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba

² A debt-for-nature conversion is a financial arrangement in which a portion of a country's external debt is forgiven, reduced, or refinanced in exchange for commitments to invest in nature or climate-related actions, such as MSP.

User fees and self-financing	Direct revenue from visitors, use permits, or other services	Bonaire Marine Park, Saba Marine Park
Government support	Direct subventions from national budgets	Belize, Barbados
Blended or innovative finance	Private + public investment instruments and technical assistance	Belize Blue Bond
Debt conversions or loans	Debt-reduction deals tied to conservation outcomes	Belize, Barbados

Secure Parliamentary commitment

Securing Parliamentary commitment for MSP is important to legitimise the process, allocate necessary resources, and ensure political and legal backing for effective implementation. Establishing commitment at the pre-planning and preparatory stages establish clear mandates, governance structures, and frameworks before substantive planning begins.

Parliamentary approval gives MSP formal recognition and authority within national legal frameworks, ensuring marine plans are binding and respected by stakeholders and public authorities. Commitment helps secure funding and institutional support needed for plan development, enforcement, monitoring and adaptive management. Broad political support facilitates coordination among government agencies and across sectors, reducing resistance and enhancing stakeholder engagement. Parliamentary endorsement clarifies the legal status of MSP, helping resolve conflicts between sectoral interests and streamlining decision-making processes.

Develop a Work Plan

Once the steps above are complete, there should be enough information to develop a detailed Work Plan of how the MSP process will be delivered. The Work Plan will provide a clear, structured roadmap that outlines the specific tasks, timelines, responsibilities, and resources needed to develop and implement MSP. It sets the foundations for organising and managing the planning effort effectively.

Work Plan development is typically led by the lead authority for MSP with close input from the Core Planning Team, and with engagement and input from relevant stakeholders, although there is no strict process and it should be tailored to the specific needs and context of each country.

As the Caribbean Region is generally in the early stages of MSP, efforts should be made to ensure the Work Plan sets out a realistic programme of work that is proportionate to the available resources, capacity and capability of those undertaking the work. The Work Plan should be designed from the outset from a good, realistic set of assumptions on what may be achievable within the specific round of MSP development and subsequent implementation. It may not be realistic to expect to develop a ‘gold plated’ first generation plan. Instead, it is recommended that a solid MSP process and foundations are established which show quick success and act as an incentive to continue and expand in future rounds of MSP. The process itself is as critical to success as the resulting plan. Starting with a small area provides opportunity for future rounds to expand to other marine planning areas within the country, more sectors and issues within the given planning area, or to adapt the MSP solutions (zones) following knowledge gained and lessons learnt during the implementation, monitoring or review stages.



How to... A typical Work Plan should include:

- **Clear objectives and scope of the MSP process:** to keep work on track and to avoid scope creep.
- **Activities and resources:** set out who will do what, when and how, aligning the efforts of multidisciplinary teams, stakeholders and institutions involved. The final approval, endorsement and adoption process should be agreed and set out.
- **Timelines and milestones:** set realistic deadlines and benchmarks for progress, facilitating monitoring, accountability and adaptive management throughout the process. It can be useful to include a high-level long-term plan (duration of the process), with more detailed nested short-term (next 3 months) and medium-term (3-6 months) plans that should be updated as the timeline progresses.
- **Schedule of stakeholder engagement:** agree a high-level schedule and plans for meaningful participation of relevant stakeholders, ensuring transparency and inclusion. Step 2 below covers the development of a Stakeholder Engagement Strategy which can be developed separately or as part of the overall Work Plan. If developed separately, the Work Plan as a minimum should include 'when' engagement will take place, while the more detailed strategy sets out the 'how'.
- **Schedule for information and data collection and analysis:** develop a high-level schedule of key points in the process where data and evidence will need to feed in. Although information and evidence collection and analysis will be ongoing throughout the process, there will be key points where efforts will ramp up, such as during the baseline assessment stages, or key points of engagement when stakeholder feedback is received and needs to be processed and actioned. Step 3 below covers the development of an Information and Data Strategy which can be developed separately or as part of the overall Work Plan. If developed separately, the Work Plan as a minimum should include a high-level schedule of key decision points throughout the process where information and evidence will be needed to make decisions. It identifies the 'when' while the detailed strategy sets out the 'how'.
- **Anticipated risks and issues and key dependencies:** identify risks and issues early, alongside proposed contingency plans and mitigation measures should they arise. This can help to prevent and manage problems that could delay or disrupt the planning process, such as key data or information not available at a given time, key stakeholders have not been mobilised to provide their input, or a political decision or change in government have affected the timely delivery of planned activities.
- **Identified budget and resource allocations:** setting out the required budget and resources helps to ensure the process is feasible and that strong business cases can be developed to secure and use resources effectively.

The Core Planning Team will typically keep relevant components of the Work Plan up to date as part of their project management role and for regular progress reporting, for example the timelines, activities and resource, risk and issues log, and budget management.

Create awareness about MSP

Awareness raising helps stakeholders and the public understand what MSP is, its role in ocean governance, how their activities interact with the marine environment, and how MSP can secure space for their interests and resolve user conflicts. It increases trust and legitimacy, because stakeholders and communities are more likely to understand the process, participate and accept management decisions when they know why it is being carried out. It also serves as a capacity building opportunity to ensure sustained participation and contribution towards sharing data and expertise to inform the process. Awareness activities usually target several groups including coastal communities, the public, coastal and marine sectors and government agencies and local authorities.

Common methods for creating awareness about MSP include public meetings, community workshops, and stakeholder forums to explain the MSP process, the timeline of activities and how stakeholders can contribute to the process as well address questions that they might have before starting the process. Interactive tools, such as role-playing games like the “MSP Challenge”, allow participants to discuss and understand the challenges and needs of different marine sectors, and negotiate over space to understand the value of MSP in resolving conflict and identifying opportunities for co-location.

Step 2: Plan and initiate stakeholder participation

- ☐ Identify stakeholders and their role in the process
- ☐ Develop a Stakeholder Engagement Strategy
- ☐ Ensure ethical inclusion of vulnerable, marginalised and gender groups
- ☐ Initiate stakeholder engagement, raise awareness of MSP and opportunities to participate

Stakeholder mapping and strategy development form the foundation for participatory MSP. This step establishes who, when and how to involve stakeholders, creating a framework to ensure meaningful engagement from the outset and throughout implementation. Identifying all relevant stakeholders early is critical to MSP success. This includes ocean users such as fishers and tourism operators, as well as government agencies, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women’s groups, youth organisations, NGOs, researchers, and emerging blue economy stakeholders. Recent practice recognises the importance of effectively engaging Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) and integrating Indigenous and Local Knowledge (ILK) in MSP processes. Special attention should also be given to identify any

vulnerable, marginalised and gender groups who may be impacted by the MSP process, decisions or resulting plan, as specially tailored engagement approaches may be needed.

A well-planned engagement strategy ensures no key voices are excluded, reduces conflict, improves the knowledge base for decisions, and builds the necessary social licence for implementation. For Caribbean SIDS, where marine resources underpin livelihoods, culture and development, inclusive engagement is vital for equitable outcomes and community stewardship. Stakeholder engagement is an ongoing process that continues through all phases of MSP development and implementation. Engagement needs will vary across different stages, for example:

- **Build the foundations (Steps 1-3):** Introduction to MSP concepts, stakeholder mapping validation, agreeing the participatory approach
- **Assess the baselines (Step 3):** data and knowledge sharing, identifying issues and opportunities.
- **Develop the plan (Steps 4-6):** Vision and objective setting, reviewing zoning and policy options, developing management measures, providing technical input and local knowledge, responding to public consultation, addressing concerns and amendments, building support for adoption.
- **Implement and monitor (Steps 7-8):** Ongoing collaboration in implementation, monitoring and evaluation participation, adaptive management input.
- **Review and revise (Step 9):** Continuous engagement, learning, adaptive management input for plan review and revision.

Stakeholder identification and analysis

The stakeholder identification process should begin with broad sessions within the Core Planning Team to identify all potential stakeholders. The following categories of stakeholders can be a useful starting point:

- Government agencies (national, regional, local)
- Ocean user groups (commercial, recreational, subsistence)
- Civil society organisations
- Private sector entities
- Indigenous Peoples and local communities
- Women's groups
- Academic and research institutions
- Regional and international organisations

For each identified stakeholder/stakeholder group, assess and map their:

- Level of interest in MSP outcomes
- Degree of influence over the process
- Potential impact from MSP decisions
- Capacity to participate meaningfully
- Preferred communication methods
- Potential concerns or barriers to participation

Adopting a participatory approach to stakeholder mapping and analysis can help to mitigate assumptions and ensure that the full scope of relevant stakeholders is captured at this stage. Where possible, mapping and analysis should be co-developed with stakeholders or at least validated by them. The mapping process should identify the type of economic interests that stakeholders have, and those that could be displaced due to the plan to inform subsequent impact assessment and compensation measures.



How to... Stakeholder mapping tools and techniques that can be applied include:

- **Stakeholder matrices:** Visual tools to map stakeholders by influence/interest levels, helping prioritise engagement approaches.
- **Social network analysis:** Understanding relationships and communication pathways between different stakeholder groups.
- **Power analysis:** Identifying who holds decision-making authority and influence, ensuring engagement strategies account for power imbalances.
- **Geographic mapping:** Spatially representing stakeholder locations and areas of interest to understand geographic dimensions of engagement needs.
- **Participatory workshops:** Engaging initial stakeholders to help identify others who may have been missed in desk-based mapping exercises.

Stakeholder Engagement Strategy development

Develop an engagement strategy that accounts for different stakeholder categories, considering power dynamics and ensuring marginalised groups receive adequate attention and resources for meaningful participation at relevant points throughout the MSP process. The strategy should also align with any legal or policy requirements identified in the legal and institutional review regarding engagement with certain groups. It should also include a clear grievance redress mechanism to address concerns, complaints, or disputes arising during the MSP process.



How to... A comprehensive engagement plan should include:

- **Key messages:** Clear, consistent information about MSP purpose, process and opportunities for involvement.
- **Target audiences:** Tailored messaging for different stakeholder groups.
- **Communication channels:** Multiple platforms to reach diverse audiences.
- **Timing:** Strategic scheduling of communications aligned with engagement activities.

- **Feedback mechanisms:** Systems for two-way communication and response to stakeholder input, including a grievance redress mechanism (outlined below).
- **Resource requirements:** Budget and capacity needs for effective communication.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Methods to assess communication effectiveness and adjust approaches throughout the process, if needed. This should include disaggregated data gathering to assess gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI) performance, which is often a reporting requirement for multilateral or philanthropic funding.

The grievance redress mechanism should:

- Provide multiple channels for raising concerns (in-person, phone, email, written).
- Ensure confidentiality, where requested.
- Establish clear timelines for responses and resolution.
- Include appeal processes for unsatisfactory outcomes.
- Be accessible to all stakeholder groups, including marginalised communities.
- Document and track all grievances for process improvement.

Ensure ethical inclusion of vulnerable, marginalised and gender groups

Special attention must be paid to ensuring vulnerable, marginalised and gender groups are meaningfully and ethically included this also includes how information and data shared by these groups is used. This requires dedicated approaches which recognise that different groups may face unique barriers to participation (UNESCO-IOC and UNESCO-LINKS, 2024; Castano et al., 2021).

Successful engagement requires respecting the unique cultural, linguistic, and historical dynamics of each community. Aligning with local practices and valuing diverse knowledge systems, builds trust and fosters inclusive participation, for example:

- **Respect cultural protocols:** Understand and follow local customs for community engagement
- **Consider language needs:** Provide interpretation and materials in appropriate languages
- **Account for seasonal patterns:** Align engagement timing with local calendars, fishing seasons, and cultural events
- **Recognise diverse knowledge systems:** Value both scientific and traditional knowledge contributions
- **Address historical context:** Acknowledge past experiences with planning processes that may affect trust levels



How to... Actions to include vulnerable, marginalised and gender groups in MSP may include:

Indigenous Peoples	● Recognise Indigenous rights and traditional governance systems. ● Ensure Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) processes. ● Provide resources for Indigenous representatives to participate fully. ● Create space for traditional knowledge sharing in culturally appropriate ways. ● Consider separate consultation processes that respect Indigenous protocols.
Women and Gender-Diverse Individuals	● Address structural barriers that may limit participation (timing, location, childcare needs). ● Ensure women's voices are heard in traditionally male-dominated sectors. ● Recognise women's roles in informal marine economies. ● Recognise that there may be overlapping barriers to participation based on gender, combined with other factors such as age, ethnicity, economic status, or location. ● Provide childcare options for women with children to be able to attend meeting. ● Ensure that engagement times are convenient for the attendance of women.
Youth	● Create specific platforms for youth engagement and leadership. ● Use communication methods and technologies that resonate with younger participants. ● Recognise youth as future ocean stewards with unique perspectives on long-term planning.
Elderly and Elders	● Value traditional knowledge and historical perspectives. ● Ensure accessibility of engagement formats. ● Create respectful spaces that honour elders' wisdom and experience.
Economically Marginalised Communities	● Address practical barriers such as transportation costs and lost wages from participation. ● Provide interpretation services where needed. ● Schedule meetings at accessible locations and times.

Initiate stakeholder engagement

Initiating engagement marks the first stage of direct interaction with the public in the MSP process. At this stage, the planning team introduces the MSP process, explains opportunities for participation, and

seeks early feedback, particularly on the proposed engagement approach. This step helps set the tone for transparent, inclusive and collaborative dialogue. The goal at this stage is not to gather detailed input on technical issues, but rather to validate the engagement process itself. Stakeholders should be invited to reflect on:

- Whether the proposed approach feels inclusive and accessible
- How engagement methods could be adapted to meet community needs
- Any barriers to participation that should be addressed upfront

This early validation increases trust and ensures that subsequent engagement phases are accessible and aligned to stakeholder needs and expectations. MSP may be a new concept to many stakeholders, requiring time and effort to introduce and build understanding.



How to... Approaches for building trust and transparency, and enhancing stakeholder capacity to engage:

- **Start with relationship building:** Invest time in getting to know stakeholders and understanding their perspectives before diving into technical MSP discussions.
- **Use simple, accessible language:** Avoid jargon and explain MSP concepts using local examples and analogies, where possible.
- **Be transparent about limitations:** Clearly communicate what MSP can and cannot achieve, and how stakeholder input will be used.
- **Demonstrate early wins:** Show how stakeholder engagement is making a difference in the planning process and celebrate stakeholder contributions publicly.
- **Capacity building:** Allow time for stakeholders to develop their understanding of MSP and how they can engage with the planning process.

In the early stages of MSP, it is important to anticipate a gradual build-up of participation rather than immediate high levels of engagement. Momentum can be developed over time by starting with smaller, more informal gatherings before moving to larger public meetings, working through trusted community organisations and leaders, and offering multiple opportunities for people to participate in ways that suit them. By learning from these initial experiences and refining approaches as needed, planners can foster stronger and more sustained engagement as the process progresses. It is also important to ensure stakeholder engagement moves past the sheer numbers of people engaged and focuses on the proportion of people's interests that are represented. A range of techniques can be used, but they should focus on securing adequate and appropriate representatives, awareness raising and feedback on the process, such as:

- Introductory community meetings to explain MSP and the engagement plan
- Short surveys or questionnaires (digital or paper-based) to capture feedback on communication preferences

- Use of local media and social platforms to invite broader participation
- Visual tools (infographics, maps, or short videos) to make MSP concepts accessible



How to... Communication and engagement methods that can be adopted to meet the needs of stakeholders and the planning process:

- **Traditional media:** Radio, television, and newspaper coverage to raise broad awareness.
- **Digital platforms:** social media, websites, and online forums for information sharing, feedback collection and tracking plan development and changes, for example SeaSketch and MARXAN.
- **Community meetings:** Face-to-face gatherings in accessible locations within communities.
- **Focus groups and listening sessions:** Targeted discussions with specific stakeholder groups, such as consulting fisher folks and women.
- **Participatory workshops:** Interactive sessions using mapping, visioning, and consensus-building exercises through virtual, in person and hybrid platforms.
- **One-on-one interviews:** In-depth conversations with key informants and representatives.
- **Cultural events:** Integration of MSP discussions into existing cultural gatherings and festivals.
- **Online meetings:** While face-to-face engagement is often the default preferred option, stakeholder feedback received when developing this Guide suggested that busy parents, particularly women, value the ease of joining a call or meeting remotely from home. This of course requires good internet connection and availability of technology so may not be appropriate for all, but it should not be discounted as an option.

Effective engagement depends on well-resourced, skilled teams and empowered stakeholders. Careful planning, training, and long-term investment ensure that participation is inclusive, sustainable, and continually improving. Efforts should be made to:

- **Budget adequately for engagement:** Ensure sufficient resources for meaningful participation of all stakeholder groups
- **Build internal capacity:** Train planning team members in facilitation, cultural sensitivity, and conflict resolution
- **Support stakeholder capacity:** Provide resources and training to help stakeholders participate effectively
- **Plan for long-term engagement:** Ensure engagement strategies are sustainable beyond initial planning phases
- **Document learning:** Capture lessons learned to improve future engagement



Case Example... Use of partnerships for stakeholder engagement in Jamaica

Jamaica's National Fisheries Authority (NFA) partners with NGOs to undertake targeted stakeholder engagement. This is delivered through the issue of letters of undertaking to the NGOs who will conduct extensive stakeholder engagement and data collection on behalf of the NFA. This stakeholder engagement approach is used to address issues of insufficient resources. Such as approach also ensures that engagement is easily facilitated with stakeholders that have continuous working relationship with the NGOs.

ASSESS THE BASELINES

Step 3: Information and data collection, and analysis

- ☐ Develop an information and data strategy
- ☐ Set up a public information system
- ☐ Identify physical, environmental, social, economic and governance baselines
- ☐ Identify future trends
- ☐ Identify potential spatial use conflict and opportunities for co-location



How to... Getting started!

The scale of the challenge when considering information and data needs can feel overwhelming, but it is important to remember that no one ever started an MSP process with a perfectly complete evidence base, and incomplete information and data need not be a barrier to getting started – the important thing is to make a start. Break the work down into the components described below, know where your gaps are and have a plan to address priorities. Develop a marine spatial plan that reflects and is proportionate to your MSP drivers, evidence base and data collation and analysis capacity and capabilities and build from there through prioritised information and data collection and periodic plan reviews as your evidence base and capabilities grow. Setting out your needs and your approach in a strategy is a great way to get started.

Best available information and data underpin effective MSP, with evidence gathering and analysis occurring continuously throughout the MSP process. The evidence base will develop and evolve as data gaps are filled and as new information emerges. A summary of how information and data are used throughout the MSP process is provided in the information box at the end of this Step.

Step 3 is one of the most comprehensive stages of evidence gathering and analysis. It involves assessing the current and potential future conditions and uses for the area being planned, the institutional and regulatory context in which activities are managed, and the potential for co-location or conflict between activities. Step 3 continues the baseline assessments undertaken in Step 1 by identifying the data and evidence needs for the MSP process. Due to the potentially substantial amount of information and data that may be gathered and analysed, it can help to develop a strategy at the beginning of the process.

Developing an information and data strategy

Developing an information and data strategy can help to clarify information and data needs and how they will be collected, used, managed and shared. A strategy can also identify evidence gaps, including if, how and when they should be addressed. Data protocols, standard and requirements can also be defined to ensure data quality and inter-operability at national, transboundary and regional scales (See Article 6 of *Protocol on MSP under the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy (CCFP)*). A strategy can also be a useful tool to set out how information and data will be shared with the public to support stakeholder engagement and transparency in the process, and it should closely align with engagement and communication approaches set out in the engagement and communication strategies.



How to... Useful components to include in an information and data strategy

- Identify and prioritise information and data needs.
- Identify how and when information and data will be sourced.
- Identify information and data gaps and any future plans to address priority gaps.*
- Define data standards and metadata requirements to ensure compatibility and inter-operability.
- Define protocols for adhering to any legal requirements for data management.
- Define protocols for gathering and using Indigenous and Local Knowledge (ILK).
- Ensure alignment between the information and data strategy and the engagement approach.

** CRFM recently (2024/25) commissioned an MSP data needs gap analysis for countries participating in the BE-CLME+ Project which can be used, along with the associated recommendations, as the gap analysis component of the broader strategy.*

Setting up a public information system

Due to the large quantity of information and data collated during the MSP process, using a public information system to document and organise it is recommended, particularly to support public engagement. An information system can provide a single repository for all relevant information and products associated with the MSP process, providing transparency and credibility. A public information system need not be complicated or costly and should be proportionate to the level of information collected and the resource and technical capacity and capability available. The use of existing systems should be considered where possible, for example existing systems for land or coastal zone management.



How to... Examples of public information systems

- **Data register:** a list of data, its availability and coverage, and where to source it.
- **Data portal:** online datasets that can be directly accessed or downloaded.
- **Data viewer or GIS tool:** an online tool to view spatial data.

- **Knowledge hub:** a place to store information, often report summaries, factsheets, papers, etc.
- **Analysis support tool:** a specialised tool to support analysis and interpretation of information.



Case Example... Barbados Geospatial Data Portal

Barbados uses a dedicated [MSP Geospatial Data Platform](#) to support its MSP process, helping to collect, manage, and share spatial data that informs sustainable ocean management and blue economy objectives. The Barbados MSP Geospatial Data Platform, publicly available and launched in 2023, provides planners, decision-makers, and stakeholders with centralized access to vital spatial information covering fisheries, energy, conservation, and other sectors. This platform is managed in coordination with the Coastal Zone Management Unit (CZMU) and supports analysis and decision-making for zoning, monitoring, and ocean resource management. The use of the data portal ensured early buy-in and engagement of stakeholders for the Barbados MSP.

Key features of the Barbados MSP Geospatial Data Portal

- The portal offers interactive access to spatial datasets relevant to marine habitats, fisheries, coral reefs, resource use, and infrastructure.
- It supports visualisations and scenario planning, such as mapping conservation priorities, marine use conflicts, and resource allocation.
- Data from remote sensing, on-site surveys, and numerical modelling are integrated to provide comprehensive environmental baselines and inform future MSP scenarios.
- The portal includes sectoral "pillars" such as fisheries and energy, with sections for other uses like maritime transport and conservation under development.
- Used for project planning, monitoring, zoning, stakeholder engagement, and reporting on national and international commitments, including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework '30 by 30' conservation target.
- The platform enhances transparency and public engagement, enabling stakeholders and the public to visualise marine data and input into planning decisions.

Identifying physical, environmental, social, economic and governance baselines

Identifying current baselines is the process of understanding the existing physical, environmental, social, economic and governance characteristics of the marine plan area. Understanding these characteristics is crucial for identifying the current and emerging uses of the marine space to be planned, and for assessing the most viable locations on a spatial and temporal scale.

Baseline information can be broken down into the following broad categories, with examples of data and information under each category shown in Table 7.

- Physical oceanographic
- Environmental
- Social
- Economic
- Governance

Physical oceanographic conditions are important to understand when identifying appropriate locations for some maritime uses, for example offshore renewables which can require specific underlying geology, or where underlying geology or sediments support priority habitats. Certain oceanographic processes, such as those amplified through by the effects of global warming and climate change, can directly impact habitats and species, including those harvested for food and livelihoods, coastal areas, communities and activities, and inshore and offshore infrastructure.

Environmental carrying capacity and ecological resilience must be understood in order to plan activities in a manner that avoids or minimises environmental harm in line with international, regional and national environmental obligations and priorities.

Social conditions are closely intertwined with physical, environmental, economic and governance conditions, but for the purpose of MSP they are often assessed from a cultural, health, safety and well-being perspective. It is important that that illegal and unregulated activities (such as drug trafficking, or fishing in prohibited areas) are accounted for as part of the social conditions. Management decisions that seek to enable economic and environmental priorities can have both positive and negative consequences for socio-cultural conditions.

Economic conditions can be understood through comprehensive mapping of the spatial and temporal distribution and density of important human activities in the plan area. It is only by understanding how the space is used that an effective integrated approach to managing activities can be pursued. It is important to include both commercial and recreational activities, and to recognise that activities can be fixed or mobile and are distributed differently across space and time - beneath and on the seabed, in the water column, on the sea surface and the space above, and the coast where complex land-sea interactions occur.

Governance conditions include the legislative, regulatory, policy and institutional frameworks in which the physical, environmental, social and economic conditions are managed. The frameworks for the area to be planned must be considered alongside adjacent or overlapping landward, neighbouring, regional and international frameworks that apply in or adjacent to the planned area. For example, national or international targets to protect 30% of the ocean by 2030 ('30 by 30') under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework will require space within a nation's marine area that must be factored into plan development.

Table 7. Types of data to inform baseline analysis

Physical Oceanography	Environmental	Social	Economic	Governance
• Bathymetry • Geology • Sediments and sediment transport • Currents	• Species distribution and abundance • Habitats	• Religious or socio-cultural values • Community demographics	Distribution of activities - Fishing - Aqua/mariculture - Shipping/transport	• National priorities • Existing and planned management areas

• Waves • Temperature • Salinity • Sea level • Coastal erosion • Flooding • Wind force • Storm activity • Tectonic activity	• Breeding and nursery areas • Feeding and foraging areas • Convergence zones • Upwelling areas • Water quality • Invasive non-native species • Condition assessments	- and gender distribution • Socio-cultural ecosystem services • Current use of coasts and seas • Past use of coasts and seas • Traditional land tenure • Coastal heritage assets • Standing, submerged and buried heritage assets • Recreational and wellbeing values /uses • Views and vistas - Illegal and unregulated activities (e.g., drug trafficking fishing in certain protected areas)	- Tourism - Coastal infrastructure - Energy and minerals • Value of activities • Ecosystem services relied on by activities	• Land tenure and right holders • Access rights • Resource rights • Indigenous governance frameworks • Co-management agreements • Statutory requirements/ targets obligations etc • Institutional arrangements
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Case Example... Addressing MSP data gaps through seafloor mapping in Barbados

Initial data gaps assessment in Barbados to inform MSP highlighted that existing data sources, such as [General Bathymetric Charts of the Ocean \(GEBCO\)](#) satellite imagery predictions, were too broad for detailed planning. The Government of Barbados signed an MOU with the Marine Institute of Ireland to conduct a bathymetric survey of Barbados' ocean floor to address this data gaps. The seafloor mapping was led by the MSP Unit, which is a division of the Coastal Zone Management Unit (CZMU) of the Ministry of Environment and National Beautification, Green and Blue Economy as the MSP authority in Barbados. The national bathymetric survey was completed in November 2025 aboard the Irish research vessel RV Celtic Explorer. The survey brought together a team of scientists and a group of Barbadian volunteers, who worked collaboratively to collect high-resolution data of the seafloor, now accounting for 25% of the Barbados EEZ. The bathymetric data provides detailed information on underwater terrain and potential resources to inform MSP.



Information... Information and data collection techniques

Just as the range of information and data required to inform MSP is broad, so are the techniques and methods for its collection. Efforts should be proportionate to the resources and capacity available. Some of the most commonly used techniques are described below and Table 8 lists specific tools that have been used by MSP practitioners to collect, manage, analyse and share information and data.

Leveraging existing sources: MSP heavily depends on information from government and institutional bodies, scientific literature, expert scientific opinion, and private sector data and information. This includes data from existing atlases, data portals, and national statistical databases. Collecting information and data from multiple sources, however, is not without challenge due to differences in collection methods and timeframes metadata standards, formats and uses. Global initiatives and regional organisations such as CRFM support efforts by establishing data protocols and standards. Article 6 and 7 of the *Protocol on MSP under the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy (CCFP)* should be read to understand how information and data collection and management across the Caribbean Region can better support regional-scale interoperability and use.

Participatory mapping: This is a vital method for engaging stakeholders and local communities, including vulnerable, marginalised and gender groups such as Indigenous Peoples, women, youth and the elderly. It allows them to visually represent their connection to marine areas and share valuable insights not typically found in formal databases, such as details on conflicts, synergies, and the importance of specific areas from their unique perspectives. Building trust and obtaining prior consent, especially for indigenous and local knowledge (ILK), are crucial for this method. Tools such as SeaSketch have been used very successfully in Jamaica, Belize and Barbados. Where digital options are not available, paper maps are also a very effective way to gather information, although digitising the outputs may need to be factored into the planning and should be considered when developing the recommended information and data strategy.

Direct field surveys and assessments: While often costly and time-consuming, this method is essential for gathering new data where significant gaps exist. For example, Barbados recently (2025) partnered with the Irish Marine Institute to gather deep sea bathymetric data for the entire EEZ. The survey, utilising Ireland's research vessel, the RV Celtic Explorer, collected high-resolution data on water depth and underwater topography to inform the MSP process.

It is important that the right tool is selected to support data analysis and visualisation based on the capacity needs of those leading and supporting the plan development. It is also critical that stakeholders are provided access to tools, such as SeaSketch and MARXAN, so they can see and track plan developments, including the movement of boundaries. Table 8 lists some key tools and their use in MSP application.

Table 8. Example tools useful for the collection, managing analysing and sharing information and data

Tool	Description and MSP Application
Geographic Information Systems (GIS)	Essential for spatial data compilation, analysis, and decision support, forming the backbone of MSP through advanced mapping and data integration techniques.
ArcGIS Online	Cloud-based platform for creating and sharing interactive web maps; used in MSP for data visualisation and offshore planning tools through groups like Marine Cadastre.
SeaSketch	An online participatory mapping platform allowing planners and stakeholders to share data, plan scenarios, and analyse spatial information collaboratively in MSP.
TerraGo Toolbar	A portable tool for georeferenced comments on GeoPDF maps, supporting participatory mapping and stakeholder engagement in MSP.
Marine Cadastres	Decision-support tools that legally define marine spaces, rights, and restrictions, facilitating clear governance and stakeholder consultation in MSP.
Marxan	A conservation planning tool for designing marine reserves and multi-use zoning plans, including site selection for projects like offshore wind power in MSP.
Artificial Intelligence for Environment & Sustainability (ARIES)	A modeller that creates adaptive and dynamic assessments of how nature benefits people, supporting rapid natural capital accounting for sustainable MSP decisions.
Ecopath with Ecosim (EwE)	A modelling software suite for exploring ecosystem dynamics and policy effects on marine environments, aiding scenario analysis in MSP.
EcoImpact Mapper	An open-source tool mapping human impacts on marine ecosystems using additive impact models, useful for assessing environmental pressures in MSP.
Symphony	A model for assessing cumulative impacts and climate change scenarios on ecosystems with maps and sensitivity matrices, facilitating ecosystem-based MSP.
Tools4MSP	A suite of web and open-source tools focused on analysing marine use conflicts and cumulative human impacts, providing data layers and conflict mapping for MSP.
InVEST	Free software models that map and value ecosystem services, helping MSP decision-makers evaluate management trade-offs.
The Marine Spatial Planning Challenge	Engages planners and stakeholders using advanced game technology and simulations to enhance learning and management strategies in MSP.
Ocean Wealth Explorer	Live mapping portal showcasing the value of marine ecosystems globally, offering data analytics to inform blue economy and MSP decisions.



Information... Ecosystem based assessments to inform MSP

The MSP process seeks to understand the state and trends of ecosystems, and how these are impacted by human activities to support better decision-making. The following are ecosystem-based assessments that can inform MSP:

Cumulative impact assessment (CIA): CIA is crucial for effective management of marine space as it provides an estimation of the combined effects of existing and planned human activities on marine ecosystems, and an understanding of how these impacts interact with the changes occurring in the environment. The following are steps to undertake CIA in MSP:

1. Identify pressures: map human activities (shipping, fishing, energy, pollution) and their environmental pressures (e.g., underwater noise, habitat loss).
2. Assess cumulative impacts: use tools to spatially analyse how these pressures combine and interact in specific marine areas.
3. Inform planning: use impact maps to identify vulnerable areas, conflicts, and opportunities for sustainable spatial arrangements, ensuring plans meet ecosystem goals.

Ecosystem service assessment (ESA): ESA in MSP uses tools to identify, map and value the benefits oceans provide (like fisheries, recreation, carbon storage) to help balance competing uses (shipping, energy, conservation) by revealing trade-offs, improving stakeholder dialogue, and informing sustainable decisions, ensuring plans account for both human welfare and ecosystem health. ESA in MSP helps in:

- Valuing marine assets: maps essential habitats and "hotspots" for service delivery (e.g., nursery grounds, nutrient cycling) to prioritise conservation and sustainable use.
- Identifying trade-offs and synergies helps visualise where different activities conflict (e.g., wind farms vs. fisheries) or complement each other, guiding zoning decisions.
- Informing decision-making provides evidence for planners to compare costs (risks) and benefits (services), leading to more efficient management objectives.

Climate risk assessment: Climate risk assessment for MSP involves identifying, analysing and mapping current and future climate impacts (like sea-level rise, warming, acidification) on marine ecosystems, species and human activities to inform the marine spatial plan. The following are steps to undertake climate risk assessment in MSP:

1. Use an analytical framework: employ structured approaches like the DPSI framework (Drivers, Pressures, State, Impact) to link human activities (D) to stressors (P) and their effects on ecosystems (S) and services (I).
2. Identify and characterise hazards: determine relevant climate change hazards (e.g., ocean acidification, extreme weather, sea-level rise) and their projected spatial/temporal changes.
3. Map exposure and vulnerability:
 - Exposure: map where human activities (fisheries, ports, aquaculture) and sensitive ecosystems (habitats, species) are located.
 - Vulnerability: assess how susceptible these assets/ecosystems are to the identified hazards, considering their adaptive capacity.

4. Assess impacts and risks: combine hazard, exposure, and vulnerability data to quantify risks, often using models like InVEST to generate spatial risk maps.
5. Integrate results into MSP steps:
 - Vision and objectives: embed climate goals from the start.
 - Planning: develop policies for climate resilience (e.g., siting low-carbon bunkering, identifying climate refugia for conservation).
 - Implementation and monitoring: track policy effectiveness with climate indicators.

Identifying transboundary issues: Identifying transboundary issues for MSP involves recognising cross-border impacts from activities like fishing and pollution, alongside shared ecological features such as ocean currents and species migration, requiring collaboration despite differing national legislation and institutional frameworks. Key issues include managing spatial conflicts (shipping vs. wind farms), environmental threats (marine litter), and socio-economic factors, necessitating coordinated approaches beyond national borders for effective ecosystem management. Identifying transboundary issues in MSP may include:

- Joint risk assessments: for shared environmental concerns like marine litter or sargassum.
- Data and knowledge sharing: essential for understanding transboundary issues like currents or habitat connectivity.
- Integrated planning: considering land-sea interactions and the broader ecosystem context.
- Stakeholder engagement: involving domestic and foreign stakeholders in the planning process.

Future trends analysis

MSP provides a framework to manage activities in a way that supports the achievement of a future vision for the marine area being planned. Future aspirations may include enabling new sectors and uses such as offshore renewables, or the need to protect space for the diversification of livelihoods, such as optimal locations for future sea moss farming, as well as identifying areas to be protected under '30 by 30' commitments. It is important, therefore, to project how the marine area might and could look in the future to achieve a nation's strategic vision and objectives.

Analysis of future conditions should also account for the effects of climate change. Accurate long-term projections at spatial and temporal scales that are useful for MSP remain limited so assessment can only be based on current best available evidence. Biodiversity is particularly vulnerable especially when faced with cumulative impacts from other marine and coastal activities; strengthening the resilience of important habitats and species by removing other pressures is one way to help protect against inevitable impacts of climate change.

Different plan area scenarios over the agreed timeframe of the plan can be considered when developing the MSP vision, goals and objectives (Step 4). The outcomes can then inform zoning options, trade-off decisions and management measures (Step 5).

Identifying potential spatial use conflicts and opportunities for co-location

It is important to establish a good understanding of the potential for spatial conflicts and the opportunities for co-location of activities in Step 3 before exploring different zoning options in Step 5. Best available information and data and thorough stakeholder engagement are critical to assessing conflicts and synergies. Stakeholders from all sectors should be invited to participate, and visual maps and data on current knowledge of spatial use should be used to discuss where current and future activities occur. Participatory mapping during this stage can also help to fill data gaps on where activities currently occur.

Current activities along with ecological features and socio-cultural values should be mapped to identify areas of overlap and compatibility. Once the different uses are mapped, participatory spatial analysis can identify areas of physical overlap and assess the degree of potential conflict using predetermined criteria. Ecological carrying capacity plus the conservation objectives of current or emerging protected areas and biodiversity priorities must be considered when assessing potential conflicts and synergies.



How to... Assessing conflicts and compatibility

Use of a 'compatibility matrix' can be a useful tool to identify potential conflicts and synergies between different human activities and uses of a marine area. By assigning scores for the interaction between each pair of activities, areas of potential conflict and opportunities for co-location or multi-use can be visualised. The outputs can provide a useful starting point for dialogue with stakeholders.

The example below illustrates how a simple hypothetical matrix could be used to assess the compatibility of six different marine activities. The assessment often uses a color-coded or numerical scale to represent the level of conflict or synergy.

	Marine Protected Area	Aquaculture (shellfish)	Offshore wind farm	Commercial fishing (trawling)	Commercial fishing (static gear)	Recreational boating
Marine Protected Area (no-take zone)						
Aquaculture (shellfish)						
Offshore wind farm						
Commercial fishing (trawling)						
Commercial fishing (static gear)						

Recreational boating						
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-  = **High compatibility:** Activities can safely and effectively share the same space.
-  = **Some conflict/management needed:** Activities can potentially coexist, but require careful planning, separation, and mitigation strategies (e.g., specific rules, seasonal restrictions).
-  = **High conflict/mitigation needed:** Activities have a significant conflict potential but may be resolved with specific measures, such as operational agreements, technology, or spatial separation.
-  = **Mutually exclusive:** Activities are incompatible and cannot share the same space due to significant safety, operational, or environmental conflicts.

Once potential conflict areas are identified they can be further assessed to understand the degree of conflict and the potential to manage it through MSP. The following mitigation hierarchy is commonly used to manage spatial conflict:

- **Avoid:** to relocate an activity to prevent interactions with conflicting uses
- **Minimise:** to adjust the timing or intensity of an activity to reduce the level of interaction
- **Mitigate:** to compensate for negative impacts, such as financial compensation or technical solutions

The feasibility and desirability of implementing the options within the mitigation hierarchy can then inform decisions on the synergies that may be possible, and where trade-offs may be needed. The compatibility matrix and mitigation hierarchy offers insights about the impacts of displacement that may occur later in the planning process and consideration of contingency for relocation and compensation for displaced activities. The outcomes will then inform the strategic vision, goals and objective setting (Step 4), the zoning and policy options, and management actions (Step 5).



Information... Use of information and data throughout the MSP process

Best available information and data underpin MSP and are central to the process at multiple stages. The development of a strategic information and evidence strategy or plan can be a helpful way set out what information is needed, from whom, and at which stage. Some of the key ways information and data are used include:

- **Information on the existing and emerging strategic priorities** that MSP can help to progress can help to set out **why** MSP is needed, making it easier to communicate the purpose and benefits of MSP to stakeholders if included in engagement messaging.

- **Information on existing institutional arrangements** helps to identify **how** MSP can be developed within existing governance structures, and if any gaps need to be addressed, which can also inform budget and resource requirements.
- **Information on relevant stakeholders** informs **who** should participate. Stakeholder mapping aids the development of an effective engagement strategy and plan that meets the participation needs of multiple stakeholder types and helps to communicate at the outset how they can get involved, including who to involve in MSP governance groups.
- **Information and data on current and future marine uses, including rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, plus spatial targets and commitments**, helps to inform the plan level vision, goals and objectives, as well as the spatial space required to realise them. This information and data provide the basis for identifying the issues and opportunities that MSP can help to address.
- **Information and data on physical and environmental conditions**, including the current and projected future impacts of climate change, helps to identify preferred or viable locations for different marine uses, including the best locations for biodiversity, areas where co-location of multiple marine uses can be accommodated, or areas where certain activities may need to be excluded to further certain plan objectives.
- **Information on existing and emerging legislation and policy** used to manage marine activities can inform how spatial areas might be managed using existing mechanisms, including responsible regulators, and where regulatory and institutional gaps may need to be addressed. This information is particularly useful to inform the implementation plan.
- **Information on use of spaces** once a plan is adopted can inform whether the plan is being implemented as expected and if compliance is being achieved.
- **Information and data provided by stakeholders** will be critical throughout the entire process, whether this comes from formal steering committees or advisory groups, or the provision of local knowledge and community opinions, this information is all critical evidence to inform the overall process and development of zones and management measures.

DEVELOP THE PLAN

Step 4: Vision, goal and objective setting

- ☐ Define the MSP vision statement
- ☐ Define MSP goals and SMARTIE objectives

The MSP vision, goals and objectives must align with strategic national priorities that MSP is being used to deliver, but they should also respond to the legal framework review in Step 1 and the baseline analysis

and findings in Step 3. This is crucial for refining national priorities and turning them into plan-level aspirations, particularly if plans are sub-national as the more localised vision and objectives may require further testing and refinement with stakeholders.

The MSP vision, goals and objectives must also take account of existing sustainability goals and targets stipulated by National Ocean Policies (NOPs) and other relevant strategic documents, such as BE Strategies and SOPs. It is important to ensure existing policies that are relevant for MSP are translated from general goals into a clear vision that can be implemented using MSP approaches, such as key themes/pillars, location requirements, participatory multi-use zoning, policy and spatial mapping.

Define the MSP vision statement

The MSP vision statement should highlight the key priorities and need for MSP at national and local level. The vision statement is important in setting the strategic direction for the MSP efforts of the country that all stakeholders can buy into, support in the development and implementation of MSP. The vision must consider key thematic issues including sustainability, ecosystem health, governance, blue growth and capacity building. The strategic plan-level vision then informs the development of zoning and policy options, and subsequent management actions (Step 5). Vision setting provides a valuable opportunity to stimulate stakeholder's engagement and capacity building, particularly where MSP is a new process. It can be a creative process, for example offering the opportunity to propose positive scenarios in the plan area without the limitations of having jurisdictional borders by considering external impacts.

Engage and agree with government departments and stakeholders on their key and shared aspirations for MSP. Co-developing the vision statement is a key stakeholder engagement point in the process that should have been identified in the Work Plan (Step 1) and Engagement Strategy (Step 2). Engagement and participatory approaches for vision setting should have already been agreed at this stage and can now be implemented, ensuring participation from vulnerable, marginalised and gender groups, including Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, and community leaders.



How to... When co-developing a vision statement with stakeholders, consider:

- The timeframe the vision statement will look forward to – for example, will the plan aim to achieve vision outcomes over a 5, 10, 20, etc. year timeframe?
- What do stakeholders want to see happening in the future – in their ideal view, what will the plan area look or feel like, what will be the main activities and economies, how will it be affecting their lives?
- What needs to change within the plan timeframe horizon to meet their needs?
- Will there be a good balance of environmental, social and economic opportunities progressed through via the vision, or will one sector be more heavily weighted? For example, a plan designed to meet MPA targets may need a vision more heavily weighted towards environmental priorities, still while enabling social and economic prosperity.
- What are some of the key challenges and opportunities that MSP can help to address? For example, the effects of climate change, demography, transboundary issues and regional commitments.
- Are there any institutional or governance challenges and opportunities that can be addressed through the process, for example a vision could include points about improved integration across the land-sea interface, increased data sharing, or improved capacity and capability of those involved in ocean management.
- Key issues and opportunities identified in the legal and institutional framework review (Step 1) and baseline assessment (Step 3) can be useful to feed into the discussion.

Define MSP goals and SMARTIE objectives

The next step involves defining the goals and objectives to achieve the vision, informed by ecological, socio-cultural, and economic considerations and stakeholder input. Goals should reflect key ambitions for the marine area (the vision), such as conservation, sustainable use, and climate change adaptation, while the objectives must reflect the desired outcomes and behavioural changes that ensures the achievement of the MSP goals. While goals tend to be broader, objectives must be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound, Inclusive and Equitable (SMARTIE). For instance, “Protect 30% of our marine habitats by 2025” ensures that objectives are clear and actionable. The review of existing legislation, policies, plans, and agreements at the different governance levels in (Steps 1 and 3) should inform the identification of relevant international policy targets and priorities that MSP can help to progress, for example the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework targets, or emission reductions under the Paris 2015 Agreement. National policies and priorities, as well as transboundary obligations, for example by the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), CRFM and UNESCO, should be integrated. A good guide to ensure an objective is SMARTIE, is to follow a structure such as:

By [a certain date], **implement a** __ [(aspect of) law, policy, programme, project, or institutional structure] __ **to achieve** __ [some sort of measurable progress towards a MSP goal] _.

SMARTIE objectives provide a clear direction for plan development, focusing activities and resources on agreed priorities rather than vague or aspirational concepts. They allow planners and stakeholders to align around specific goals, reducing misunderstandings and increasing buy-in throughout the process.

The defined objectives must consider key sectors such as biodiversity, fisheries, ports, energy, tourism, aquaculture, heritage, security as well as integrate land sea/freshwater marine interactions (pollution, ports, agriculture, runoff). The objective should embed gender, equity, access rights, and youth inclusion. The definition of SMARTIE objectives should strive for co-existence and synergies, but planners must be prepared to make trade-off decisions to prioritise the achievement of key targets. The SMARTIE objectives help define conflict resolution processes based on agreed trade-offs, statutory obligations, and physical, environmental, and governance constraints. The draft objectives must be discussed with stakeholders and amended to ensure that they are realistic and achievable. Government Ministers should be involved at this stage to avoid the risk of the plan and its activities being blocked at the ministerial level during sign-off and implementation.



Case Example... Vision statement for the transboundary Grenadines multi-use zoning plan

“We see the Grenadines as a place comprising sustainable livelihoods with equity for the people through good governance, optimal utilisation and conservation of resources and enhancement of human capacity (empowerment) using participatory integrated sustainable development processes.”

Key elements:

- Sustainable livelihoods: Emphasising equitable opportunities for all residents through sustainable economic practices and resource use.
- Good governance: Encouraging transparent, participatory, and accountable decision-making for resource management.
- Resource conservation: Promoting optimal use and protection of marine and terrestrial resources to ensure long-term ecological health.
- Human capacity and empowerment: Focusing on building local skills, knowledge, and engagement so communities can help lead change.

Participatory development: Integrating broad stakeholder involvement, including civil society and marine resource users, into planning and implementation to maximise sustainability and local benefit.



Case Example... Belize Sustainable Ocean Plan (BSOP) Goals and Specific Objectives

Process Governance Goal: To design and implement a science-based, data-driven, participatory, equitable, and inclusive MSP process which delivers on Belize’s MSP-related commitments under

the Blue Loan Agreement and Conservation Funding Agreement, in conformance with the guiding principles for decision making.

- Specific Objective 1: Design and execute the process of developing a legally enforceable Marine Spatial Plan for Belize's Ocean by November 2026.
- Specific Objective 2: Develop and implement the necessary mechanisms, processes, and procedures to ensure that the MSP process is functional, effective, and in accordance with the governance framework.

Marine Conservation Goal: To legally protect up to 30% of Belize's Oceans as Biodiversity Protection Zones.

- Specific Objective 1: Design Biodiversity Protection Zones to protect priority habitats, areas, and species identified through the MSP process, integrating climate resilient safeguards.
- Specific Objective 2: Strengthen the Marine Protected Area (MPA) network in conformance with national governance frameworks and ecological, economic, social, and cultural criteria set forth by the IUCN.
- Specific Objective 3: By November 3rd, 2026, sign into law and gazette Biodiversity Protection Zones covering up to 30% of Belize's Ocean space using a phased approach.
- Specific Objective 4: By November 3rd, 2026, complete, enact and publish legislation(s) to legally enforce the Marine Spatial Plan.

Blue Economy Goal: To support the sustainable growth and development of Belize's blue economy in alignment with legislation, policy, and planning frameworks

- Specific Objective 1: Identify and evaluate ocean spaces for their functional suitability to support projected sustainable expansion and management of traditional, existing, and emerging economic uses.
- Specific Objective 2: Map, measure, and monitor blue carbon ecosystems to meet conservation targets and leverage conservation financing opportunities.

Equity Goal: To ensure fair and equitable access for all Belizeans to benefits derived from ocean resources and spaces, with respect for traditional social, environmental, cultural and economic uses.

- Specific Objective 1: Between August 2022 and November 2026, implement a stakeholder engagement plan ensuring that 75% of quarterly targets for engaging with key multi-sectoral interest groups are met.

Specific Objective 2: Identify cultural, Indigenous, social, and economic uses, through stakeholder engagement, to determine the allocation of ocean spaces to safeguard community traditions, livelihoods, and participation in emerging sustainable economic activities.

Step 5: Agree zoning and management, and draft the Marine Spatial Plan

- ☐ Develop alternative zoning scenarios
- ☐ Initiate a strategic environmental and social assessment
- ☐ Select the preferred zoning scenario
- ☐ Define management measures and reassess environmental and social impact
- ☐ Develop an Implementation Plan
- ☐ Develop a Monitoring Plan
- ☐ Draft the Marine Spatial Plan

Step 5 translates the vision, goals, objectives and national policy targets into potential spatial zoning scenarios for the sustainable use, conservation and conflict resolution within the marine plan area over the plan's timeframe horizon. The scenarios should account for current and future uses and align with existing international and national legislation, policy and commitments relevant to the plan area. The likely environmental, social and economic implications of each scenario should be assessed to help reach a decision on the preferred scenario, often through a dedicated strategic assessment process that runs from the scenario development stage right through to the plan approval stage (Step 6). Once a preferred zoning arrangement is selected, Step 5 then involves defining the management measures required to deliver the management aims, setting the 'rules' for each zone and identifying any additional legislative or institutional arrangements that may be needed to achieve the overall vision, goals and objectives of the plan. Where spatial zoning is not possible or desirable to address a specific issue or opportunity, policies to guide future decision-making can be defined at this stage and should be subject to the strategic assessment to identify and mitigate any sustainability issues. Rigorous stakeholder engagement and participation is required to explore and reach the preferred zoning scenario and associated management requirements, including input and participation in the strategic assessment scope and findings as this assessment forms a key piece of evidence to inform scenario decisions. Step 5 should be a key engagement point in the Work Plan (Step 1) and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy (Step 2).



How to... From zoning options towards plan approval

The following approach should be tailored to individual needs, but Step 5 typically unfolds in the following way:

1. Define spatial scenario objectives and criteria

- Compile baseline data (gathered at Step 3) on ecological, social, cultural, and economic uses.

- Establish clear spatial management goals and objectives based on ecological, social, and economic priorities, informed by the MSP vision, goals and objectives.
- Set criteria for evaluating scenarios, such as biodiversity conservation, stakeholder equity, economic viability, and legal compliance.

2. Develop multiple zoning scenarios

- Generate multiple spatial zoning options representing different ways to allocate uses, protections, and activities across the marine area.
- Each scenario should reflect different balances of trade-offs among uses and conservation.

3. Conduct a strategic environmental and social assessment

- Assess environmental and social impacts of each zoning scenario, including cumulative effects and potential conflicts.
- Invite stakeholder participation to gather input and validate scenario assessments.

4. Evaluate and compare scenarios

- Use the established criteria to score or rank scenarios based on their environmental, social, and economic outcomes.
- Invite participation and input from stakeholders and expert reviews.

5. Select the preferred scenario

- Choose the zoning scenario that best balances ecological sustainability, social benefits, economic development, meets the vision, goals and objectives of the MSP, and has broad stakeholder acceptance.
- Ensure the choice incorporates mitigation or enhancement measures identified through strategic environmental and social assessment.

6. Develop management measures for the preferred scenario

- Produce detailed maps and define the zoning rules to realise the scenario's objectives, plus any policies needed to guide future decision-making that may affect the plan area.
- Continue the strategic environmental and social assessment process to ensure sustainability as management measures and actions are developed.

7. Draft the plan

- Bring everything together into a single plan, including implementation and monitoring approaches.

8. Consult the public and secure approval (Step 6)

- Publish the draft plan and associated documents and amend following public feedback.
- Submit the final plan to the designated authority for approval.

Develop alternative zoning scenarios

A range of spatial zoning options should be developed for consideration by stakeholders, each showing a different way of arranging use of the plan area over time and space.

The process should aim to develop a range of scenarios or zoning options that define where specific uses (such as fishing, shipping, conservation, recreation) can occur, now or in the future, and the intensity or restrictions for each. These alternatives should then be compared using explicit criteria, such as ecological sensitivity, economic value, social needs, and conflict minimisation. Stakeholder participation is critical to ensure zones reflect real priorities, cultural practices, and allow for workable solutions to spatial conflicts.

Typical zones considered in MSP often include:

- Strict protection or “no take” zones (high biodiversity protection)
- Sustainable use or managed zones (moderate protection with regulated activities)
- Multiple-use zones (varied uses allowed, often with general restrictions)
- Special use zones (for example ports, renewable energy, shipping lanes)

Special use zones are often used for activities that are dependent on the use of a specific geographical area. These can be referred to as “immovables” since they cannot be moved to alternative locations. A list of immovables – for example, shipping lanes, ports, extraction sites – can be identified and ranked by priority. Immovables are also the first uses to be mapped. Existing zoning areas also include existing designated MPAs, informal arrangements for sea use or other types of marine designated areas, including those protecting heritage and cultural assets such as submerged historic sites and wrecks. Some designations may protect features that are also “immovable”, such as critical feeding, breeding and nesting sites. In most cases, such designations will have already been identified through earlier statutory and participatory processes.

The zoning process should consider more than one zoning scenario for discussion with stakeholders to agree preferred future uses. The question “where do we want to be over the lifetime of the plan?” considered at the vision setting stage can be useful to guide the future scenario process, informed by the vision, goals and objectives of the MSP. These multiple scenarios represent the “non-planned” potential future spatial use of the area to be planned; they show potential only and are not the preferred option or the draft spatial plan at this stage.



How to... Key considerations when developing potential and preferred zones

- Decision support tools, such as [SeaSketch](#), [Marxan](#), [InVEST](#), and data sources identified in Step 3 are important for credible and transparent decision-making about potential and preferred spatial zones.
- Areas where conflicts are most acute, such as tourism hubs, fishing grounds, ports and sensitive areas should be prioritised for conflict resolution, especially when developing first generation plans. These priority areas and hot spots should be characterised in terms of their importance, for example, for endemic, vulnerable or threatened species, both nationally and regionally.

- Space should be reserved for future uses in a way that still enables current use, as far as possible without hindering the area's ability to accommodate the anticipated future activity. These areas should be identified on the basis of their mixed use, sectoral influence (fisheries, shipping, tourism, among others), customary local use (artisanal fisheries, recreational use, and so on), and ecological sensitivity.
- When selecting the location for specific activities, the sensitivity of areas and those activities to likely impacts of natural disasters and likely consequences of climate change and sea-level rise should be considered to ensure areas are 'future-proof' and resilient.
- Specific blue growth investment schemes that have spatial implications, such as incentive zones, should be indicated for various coastal and maritime uses.
- Conservation areas including protected or ecologically sensitive areas, restoration areas, biodiversity hotspots, and cultural heritage areas should be defined based on clear and replicable criteria. It is important to consider identifying different types of areas (e.g., areas in need of protection, areas where pressures need to be reduced, areas that require active restoration, areas that require further research, etc.). Conduct spatial biodiversity prioritisations using the most appropriate method/tool.
- Ensure flexible zoning categories to accommodate adaptive management, for example no-take, seasonal, gear restrictions, managed access.
- Incorporate livelihood support by identifying fishing priority areas, displacement compensation, diversification options.
- Secure transparent protocols for beach and marine access rights, especially in countries lacking foreshore rights.
- Integrate heritage and cultural exclusion zones, anchoring restrictions, and port/shipping corridors.
- Ensure that zoned areas follow safety protocols to support user safety and sustainable use
- Ensure transboundary consistency where MPAs, shipping and fisheries rules across shared waters are aligned.



Case Example... Saint Lucia's Coastal Master and Marine Spatial Plan Zoning Scenarios

Scenario 1 was set up to produce a zoning configuration which achieved national conservation policy targets, with the aim of allocating 20% of most natural features to a conservation designation while still accounting for Blue Economy goals.

Scenario 2 was set up to produce a zoning configuration which achieved higher targets for conservation of natural features, set on the basis of inputs from the risk assessment mapping, while still attempting to account for Blue Economy goals.

Scenario 3 was set up to produce a zoning configuration which achieved the highest targets for conservation of natural features, set on the basis of inputs from the risk assessment mapping and policy objectives given in the National Ocean Policy, 2020, while still attempting to account for Blue Economy goals.

Initiate a strategic environmental and social assessment

Undertaking a strategic assessment of the likely environment and social impacts of proposed plan scenarios and management measures is recognised globally as best practice and it ensures a more transparent and credible decision-making process. It is highly recommended that the assessment begins at the scenario development and evaluation stages, ensuring that all ecological and social risks are evaluated and integrated into decision-making. It should continue, however, throughout the plan development stage as management measures and actions are developed, including the development of new guiding policies designed to address issues that will not be managed through spatial measures. While the assessment process is designed to inform the selection of a preferred spatial zoning scenario, it must be a continuous iterative process that informs multiple stages right through to the finalisation of the plan before it is submitted for approval (Step 6).

Strategic assessment can improve the legitimacy, transparency, and sustainability of the preferred spatial plan by flagging unintended impacts early in the process and supports the development of any necessary mitigation measures to manage impacts. The assessment can help to optimise the use of marine space in line with the MSP objectives, and can help to reduce conflicts, and safeguard human uses and marine ecosystems. It must be underpinned by thorough stakeholder participation to ensure transparent decision-making and ensures the evolving and finalised plan option is evidence-based and stakeholder-led.

Outcomes of the initial assessment should feed directly into the selection of the preferred zoning scenario and the development of associated management measures, including the development of any guiding policies within the plan. The assessment should identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects of the different scenarios on habitats, species, water quality, cultural heritage, human health, and socio-economic conditions, including their cumulative environmental and social impacts. The assessment should apply ecosystem-based, precautionary, and long-term principles in evaluating trade-offs for each scenario. Measures to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible mitigate or offset any significant adverse effects on the environment as a result of implementing the scenarios must also be explored.

Mitigation measures identified by the assessment should inform the implementation and monitoring approaches. The strategic environmental and social assessment of the final draft plan must be published as evidence alongside the draft plan at public consultation stage (Step 6), allowing the public to give feedback to inform any amendments to the plan before it is finalised. The assessment may need to be revisited and revised as zones and management measures evolve during the public consultation and plan

finalisation stage to assess the environmental and social implications of any changes made. There will be constant feedback loops as the MSP process progresses.

It is important to engage all relevant stakeholders at the earliest stage and throughout (the key stakeholders and approach should be a key consideration within the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy) to refine the assessment scope, and to provide feedback and input to the assessment findings as they develop.



How to... Considerations for the strategic environmental and social assessment

- Plan for the assessment in the workplan (Step 1), considering any national legislation or policy that stipulates the requirement or process for carrying out such an assessment.
- Begin the assessment process at the scenario development and evaluation stage but continue the process as the marine spatial plan zones and management measures evolve.
- Evaluate combined effects of all current and proposed activities (e.g., fishing, shipping, offshore energy, tourism) across the spatial zones to avoid incremental ecosystem degradation and social disruption.
- Assess risks and benefits to priority habitats and species, ecosystem services, protected areas, and ecological connectivity within and across zones. Ensure scenarios uphold ecosystem-based management principles and international and national biodiversity obligations.
- Consider implications for local livelihoods (including fisheries, tourism, transport), equitable access, customary and traditional use, rightsholders and Indigenous governance systems, and distribution of benefits and burdens among stakeholder groups, including vulnerable and marginalised communities.
- Identify potential spatial and temporal conflicts among uses (e.g., fisheries and tourism) and propose mitigation or co-management measures to foster multi-use compatibility.
- Integrate climate risks (such as sea-level rise, ocean warming, extreme events) and adaptation needs into scenario evaluation, supporting both ecological and community resilience.
- Ensure scenario compliance with national legislation, international agreements (e.g., OSPAR, CBD, regional seas conventions), and overarching sustainability and blue economy goals.
- Involve stakeholders at all assessment stages, ensuring their input shapes scenario scoring, trade-off decisions, and selection of preferred options. Maintain transparent documentation of choices and rationales.
- Use the best available data for ecological and social baselines, while documenting limitations and uncertainties. Recommend measures to address critical data or knowledge gaps.
- Continuously assess any relevant changes to the proposed zones, management measures or policies to keep the assessment findings up to date as the preferred plan options evolve.
- Publish the assessment alongside the draft plan for public consultation.

- Update the assessment following consultation if changes to the plan impact the initial assessment findings to maintain assurance of sustainability.

Define the management measures and reassess environmental and social impact

Management measures are the specific ‘rules and controls’ put in place to operationalise and turn the preferred spatial scenario into reality. The management measures for each zone must be agreed based on the objectives for each zone and the plan as a whole. In addition to the rules for each zone, policies to guide future decision-making (in the case of hybrid plans), including guidance on how the policies should be applied, should also be defined. Together, the spatial rules and controls and guiding policies (if used) provide the framework to achieve the overall plan vision, goals and objectives, and they must be thoroughly tested with stakeholders, including but not limited to those responsible for enforcement, such as the coastguard, maritime police, port authorities, wardens and co-managers.



How to... Defining the management measures for the preferred spatial scenario

- Start by revisiting the overall goals and objectives set for the plan area and the outcomes are you aiming for in each zone.
- Identify allowed and prohibited uses by listing which activities are allowed (e.g., fishing, tourism, shipping) and which are restricted or prohibited (e.g., dredging in conservation zones) for each zone.
- Set specific conditions or limits, such as spatial or seasonal limits to reduce conflict, or gear type restrictions to protect habitats.
- Consider any policies that might be needed to guide and steer future decision-making, for example where zones or areas are identified for coastal development, especially when associated with tourism infrastructure, it may be desirable to compliment the prohibited use with a policy that requires maintained access to the foreshore for the local community if access rights are not already protected through existing law.
- Ensure the measures comply with existing legislation and policy or related initiatives such as climate resilience, and if institutional roles are clear for implementation and enforcement.
- Update the strategic environmental and social assessment to evaluate the management measures for sustainability.
- Discuss the proposed measures with stakeholders, including those responsible for regulation and enforcement, to test feasibility and acceptability; amend if needed and update the strategic assessment. This engagement can be led by the relevant agencies such as fisheries departments.
- Document the management measures for each zone, linking them to objectives and clear maps for inclusion in the draft plan. Use external consultants where needed to undertake relevant zoning impact assessment.

- Refine mitigation measures for displaced activities and livelihoods. This includes considering how affected stakeholders could be provided with compensation or alternative livelihoods.
- Provide opportunities for submission of grievances about the management measures to address complaints and social safeguard issues.
- For hybrid plans, draft any new policies and guidance for how they should be applied to future decision-making.

Develop an Implementation Plan

Once the management measures (spatial rules and controls, and any guiding policies) have been defined, ‘how’ the rules will be established, complied with, enforced and monitored must be agreed and set out in a clear Implementation Plan, including the structures, tools, resources, training and funding that are needed.

An MSP implementation committee should be established at a high-level office where necessary (e.g., Office of Prime Minister, CEO-level committees) to ensure political commitment.

A thorough Implementation Plan provides not just a roadmap or actions for putting the management measures into practice but should also include the tools and structures required to adapt and improve these measures over time. When developing the Implementation Plan, it is essential to address both operational and adaptive needs to ensure that management actions are effective, coordinated, and sustainable. Successful plans are clear, feasible, and actionable, with strong links to monitoring, adaptation, and enforcement to enable ongoing improvement and achievement of marine spatial plan objectives.

Many of the components needed to deliver the management measures may already exist (as identified by reviews in Step 1 and 3), for example Fisheries Departments may already be set up with necessary legal powers to manage fishing activities in established MPAs and can easily be deployed as a management action. In the gazetting of zones, MPA creation may already be underway in relation to international obligations, but the process can be brought into the broader MSP process.

Gazetting and legislating zones can occur before, during or after the approval of the marine spatial plan, as the plan sets out the ‘ambition’ to put zones and the necessary management measure in place, while the Implementation Plan will set out the overall approach and timescale for setting up or apply the relevant legislation for gazetting. It will be up to the individual country to decide the most appropriate time (pre- or post-approval of the marine spatial plan) depending on preferred timescales and sequencing.



Lucia

Case Example... A management action proposed to support integration across ICZM, the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) and National Ocean Policy in Saint

Lead Agency: Department of Sustainable Development, in collaboration with the Department of Physical Planning

Outcome: Improved in-house technical capacity for various government agencies and well-coordinated efforts that implement integrated planning.

Description: Policies which address coastal matters are spread across multiple documents, and supportive legislation falls under the purview of many Ministries, creating administrative and enforcement challenges. For the benefits of the NOP to be realised on the ground, it is critical that there is integration between the NOP, the NAP and the Cabinet endorsed ICZM policy. This will integrate policy and regulatory delivery, providing a coordinated framework to guide future coastal development and land-use plans.

Disaster and climate resilience considerations and recommendations:

- Consideration should be given to developing a process to integrate the existing documents into decision making, rather than generating additional documents, which may repeat consultative, review and compilation processes recently undertaken.
- Consideration should be given to engaging the National Emergency Management Organisation and the department(s) responsible for hazard mapping to ensure efforts to consider known hazards are adequately integrated, including the risks associated with man-made areas like quarries (e.g., rock falls, landslides).
- Consider the marine pollution strategy (Project 4) and the beach management strategy (Project 5) and identify opportunities to synergise the documents.

Preliminary Project Costs: ECD \$1,350,000 / USD \$500,000



Case Example... Gazetting Special Fishery Conservation Areas in Jamaica

One of the key activities at the implementation phase of the MSP process is the gazetting of the planning zones, such as conservation areas and MPAs. In Jamaica, the gazetting process starts with defining the boundary of the zone, including the GPS coordinates or use of local names where possible, as well any relevant boundary description.

The gazetting document with the boundary descriptions is submitted to legal department at the Ministry for Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries, then it is submitted to the Minister who signs the document before it is shared with the Government of Jamaica printing office for printing before the site becomes gazetted.

Developing a structured Implementation Plan also provides an opportunity to consider any additional training, equipment or staff needed to fully deliver the requirements of the marine spatial plan, especially

if new management measures now fall under their remit. It is, therefore, important as part of implementation planning to consider what arrangements are already in place that can be used.

Adequate skills, training and capacity are critical for successful implementation. Capacity needs should have been considered early in the process (Step 1) when deciding the scope of the marine spatial plan, taking into consideration who the main plan users and enforcers will be. Once the preferred zoning scenario and associated management measures have been agreed, the capacity needs can be reassessed, with clear actions developed to address gaps and requirements. A capacity needs assessment may help to formally identify organisational, planning, resource and internal control needs (Table 9).

As well as the skills, capacity and resources for regulatory and enforcement staff, capacity building may also be required to support the delivery of other functions that support an effective MSP process, such as stakeholder engagement, transboundary cooperation, and streamlined administrative or financial processes. Where resources are limited, partnerships and collaboration to share knowledge and expertise can help to address gaps, for example partnerships with University of West Indies (UWI) and other research organisations who can act as trusted technical advisors. International knowledge exchanges between sea users to communicate the benefits of management measures and compliance, such as the knowledge sharing visits by fishers to Belize to hear firsthand from local fishers of the spillover benefits of MPAs, can be a powerful and effective way to demonstrate benefits and encourage compliance, reducing the resource needed for enforcement proceedings.

Table 9. Capacity needs assessment for MSP

Capacity needs assessment	Definition/Description
Governance and organisation	This capacity area addresses the governance structure of the institution in question including whether its mandate and purpose provide scope for MSP delivery and to what extent, whether by law, policy.
Planning and programming	This capacity area addresses an institution's processes for planning and management, including mechanisms to facilitate multi-sectoral engagement with other relevant agencies and neighbouring planning authorities.
Resource management	This capacity area addresses the human, technical, evidence and financial resource needs of institutions leading and supporting MSP.
Internal controls	Internal measures that support the effective implementation of agency mandates are addressed under this area, including monitoring and evaluation processes and data management.

The management actions required to implement the plan's management measures should be considered and discussed with relevant stakeholders when developing the management measures to ensure they are realistic and achievable. The actions should be refined through the development of the Implementation Plan which should be agreed before approval and adoption of the marine spatial plan (Step 6) so that clear, actionable steps are embedded in the final plan to secure political commitment.

The management actions should be co-developed with all relevant agencies and bodies who will be responsible for implementation and monitoring, including coastguards, maritime police, port authorities, and any co-management organisations. Management actions must align with their statutory powers,

provisions and functions set out in existing legislation or agreements. The actions should also be shared with relevant stakeholders for input and should be recognised as a key engagement point in the Work Plan (Step 1) and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy (Step 2).

Co-management

Co-management can serve as an effective implementation and enforcement mechanism where participatory governance models are established with stakeholders including governments, local communities, industry, and NGOs to collaboratively manage marine resources and spaces to achieve the objectives of the MSP. It serves as a process to build trust, gather traditional and local knowledge, and increase buy-in for management actions defined by the plan.

Co-management agreements and MOUs must be designed to ensure shared decision-making and responsibilities between the relevant parties in the governance of the identified zones, including local fishers, government agencies, industry representatives, and conservation groups. Any arrangements must respect existing arrangements for rightsholders and traditional Indigenous governance and management structures. The co-management structure and processes must promote continued adaptation based on feedback, scientific learning, and shifting socio-economic realities. Robust legal and funding mechanisms should be set up for co-management partners as to receive minimum enforcement packages including patrol boat and rangers for operational, enforcement and outreach activities.



Case Example... Co-management of Special Fishery Conservation Areas in Jamaica

Special Fishery Conservation Areas (SFCAs) in Jamaica are co-managed through formal partnerships between the Jamaican Government - primarily the National Fisheries Authority (NFA) - and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or fisher cooperatives. These community-based organisations are legally recognised and empowered by Memorandums of Agreement, which set out specific roles and responsibilities for both the government and the co-managers.

Structure of co-management arrangements

- The NFA is responsible for the legal designation of SFCAs, setting and amending regulations, and overall oversight, while also retaining the authority to gazette boundaries and impose sanctions. Fishers are actively engaged throughout the process.
- Local NGOs or fisher cooperatives take on operational management, such as hiring and supervising wardens, conducting regular patrols, enforcing no-fishing regulations, carrying out environmental monitoring, and leading community outreach.
- These community managers are often responsible for reporting activities, submitting management results, and facilitating local participation in decision-making and enforcement.
- Partnerships extend to law enforcement agencies such as Marine Police and the Coast Guard, particularly for surveillance and enforcement support beyond community capacity.

Setting up co-management arrangements

- The government, through the NFA, selects local organisations that demonstrate capacity and willingness to take on management, often after assessment and public consultation phases.
- Formal agreements (MoUs) specify management zones, rights, and responsibilities, including financial provisions for patrols, equipment, and capacity building.
- Training, technical support, and monitoring tools are typically provided to ensure compliance and build local capability.
- Regular meetings and reporting mechanisms ensure coordination, address challenges, and allow for adaptive management.

Co-management in Jamaica is successful due to the training, resources, employment and payment provided by the government to support co-managers.



Case Example... Co-management of the Soufriere Marine Management Area (SMMA) in Saint Lucia

The Soufriere Marine Management Area (SMMA) in Saint Lucia is recognised as a leading example of marine co-management in the Caribbean, established specifically to resolve user conflicts and support sustainable marine resource use and conservation. Its co-management structure is based on a multi-stakeholder approach that blends government authority with meaningful participation and operational roles for local organizations and resource users.

How the SMMA is co-managed

- The SMMA is governed by the Soufriere Marine Management Association Inc., a non-profit company established under Saint Lucian law to coordinate management of the area.
- The Association's Board of Directors includes representatives from five government agencies (Tourism, Fisheries, Planning, National Conservation Authority, Air and Sea Ports Authority), community organizations (Soufriere Regional Development Foundation, Fishermen's Cooperative, Dive Association, Hotel & Tourism Association, Water Taxi Association), and local political representatives.
- Government agencies retain statutory authority, but the day-to-day administration (e.g., enforcement, fee collection, local outreach, visitor management) is primarily led by the local stakeholders through the Association.

How the arrangements are set up

- The co-management framework was established through a legal agreement (the SMMA Agreement), approved by government Cabinet decisions and negotiated among all key

stakeholders. This agreement defines the Association's mandate, governance structure, management zones, and the allocation of institutional roles.

- The area is legally designated under the Fisheries Act as a Local Fisheries Management Area, providing a regulatory foundation for rules, zoning, and enforcement.
- The SMMA Board meets regularly, and a Stakeholder Committee with broad representation provides an advisory and consultative function, helping to ensure ongoing participation and buy-in from all user groups.
- Funding is generated primarily through user fees (e.g., dive permits, mooring), supplemented by grants and government support, supporting activities like patrolling, monitoring, community education, and conflict resolution.

The SMMA's co-management model is built on local legitimacy, strong legal backing, transparency, institutional collaboration, and adaptive management that actively involves and empowers local stakeholders, while ensuring technical and political support from government.

Develop a Monitoring Plan

The Monitoring Plan should establish a systematic approach for how the marine spatial plan's implementation and outcomes will be tracked to ensure goals and objectives are met and to inform adaptive management. It should be grounded in clear objectives, defined indicators, robust data management, and stakeholder participation.

The first step should define what success looks like by specifying clear, measurable ecological, social, and economic indicators directly linked to the marine spatial plan's objectives. Both quantitative and qualitative indicators should track environmental, economic, governance, and social dimensions realistically, accounting for external influences such as political and socio-economic changes. Baseline conditions against which future changes will be compared should then be set, along with realistic medium- and long-term targets to assess progress, plus means of verification, external factors, and assumptions. Indicator definitions should guide evaluation questions to assess plan effectiveness (e.g., ecological objective achievement), efficiency (cost-benefit), relevance (local alignment), implementation (use in decision-making), planning process quality (including stakeholder engagement), and coherence (policy compatibility). First generation marine spatial plans are expected to have more "process" focused indicators than "outcome" oriented indicators as it will take time to gather the necessary data and understand the actual impact and outcomes MSP.

It is also important to state when monitoring will begin, and this will likely require a staggered timeline depending on the outcome, target or indicator being assessed. Detailed methods for consistent and systematic monitoring, including frequency, geographic scope, and responsible parties should be set out, alongside roles and responsibilities of relevant agencies, institutions, or stakeholder groups for data collection, analysis, reporting, and review. For example, data from Automatic Identification system (AIS), Vessel Monitoring System (VMS), integrated shipping systems, patrol data, or data gathered for other regional reporting obligations can be used to inform monitoring. The plan must establish data collection and management protocols and standards to ensure consistency, transferability and usability of data across the various sectors, institutions and transboundary (see Article 6 of *Protocol on MSP under the Caribbean*

Community Common Fisheries Policy (CCCFP)). These protocols must include gathering, storing, and sharing monitoring data, including GIS, metadata standards (such as ISO19115) as well as roles and responsibilities for data management and reporting.

Consideration should be given to reporting and communicating results to stakeholders and making reports publicly available to ensure transparency to support ongoing engagement. The plan should state how feedback mechanisms will work so monitoring data informs decisions to adjust spatial zones, management measures, or governance protocols as needed. Given constraints on resources, monitoring efforts should be integrated with other existing or planned monitoring programmes where possible, and should seek to serve multiple reporting obligations, for example international standards and regional programmes (CPPS, CRFM, OECS). Finally, the Monitoring Plan should identify necessary funding, technical capacity, and technology requirements to implement effective monitoring. Long-term staff and funding must be secured for monitoring to avoid donor dependency and staff turnover. This can be achieved through partnerships with sector agencies to support the monitoring process, for example support from local communities and citizen scientist groups, fisheries wardens, NGOs, co-operatives, tourism guides in co-monitoring roles. Use of an independent external reviewer should be considered to lead the monitoring process to increase transparency and credibility.

The Monitoring Plan should be included as a key supporting document to be published with the Draft Marine Spatial Plan and should be agreed before final plan approval and adoption to secure political commitment.



How to... Implementation and Monitoring Plans

When developing the Implementation Plan, consider:

- **Management actions:** clear, detailed description of actions to be taken, linked to goals and objectives, including regulations, permits, enforcement, monitoring, and education.
- **Roles and responsibilities:** assign specific tasks, leadership, and coordination duties to agencies, organisations, or stakeholder groups, with mechanisms for collaboration and conflict resolution.
- **Timetable:** establish a schedule for implementation that sets out immediate, medium, and long-term steps, milestones, and deadlines for each action.
- **Resource allocation:** identify funding, staffing, and materials necessary for operation, along with sources of support and strategies for filling gaps.
- **Legal and institutional backing:** ensure all actions are supported by appropriate regulations, laws, or governance structures, including new institutional arrangements if needed.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** set out processes for ongoing stakeholder communication and participation, to support transparency, buy-in, and adaptive management.

- **Compliance and enforcement procedures:** specify how regulations will be applied, monitored, and enforced, including inspection regimes, sanctions, incentives for compliance, or compensation schemes or diversification support for displaced activities.
- **Integration with other policies:** describe how the plan fits with or supports other relevant marine, coastal, or sectoral management strategies and frameworks.

When developing the Monitoring Plan, consider:

- **Objectives and indicators:** define what success looks like by specifying clear, measurable ecological, social, and economic indicators directly linked to the marine spatial plan's objectives.
- **Baseline data and targets:** establish baseline conditions against which future changes will be compared and set realistic targets to assess progress.
- **Data collection methods:** detail methods, standard and protocols for consistent, systematic monitoring including frequency, geographic scope, and responsible parties.
- **Roles and responsibilities:** assign responsibilities to relevant agencies, institutions, or stakeholder groups for data collection, analysis, reporting, and review.
- **Reporting and communication:** specify how monitoring results will be reported, communicated to stakeholders, and made publicly accessible to ensure transparency and support ongoing engagement. A defined timeline will allow enough time for organisations to set up processes to provide information and data for monitoring and implementation.
- **Adaptive management:** integrate feedback mechanisms so monitoring data informs decisions to adjust spatial zones, management measures, or governance protocols as needed.
- **Integration with other monitoring programs:** where applicable, coordinate with existing environmental or sectoral monitoring frameworks to maximize efficiency and data sharing.
- **Resources and capacity:** identify necessary funding, technical capacity, and technology requirements to implement effective monitoring. There is an opportunity here for partnerships with civil society groups.

Secure legal and institutional endorsement of the full Implementation and Monitoring Plans through official processes to enable enforcement and legitimacy, especially regarding the appetite to fully enforce once breaches and infringements reach the court hearing stage.

Draft the Marine Spatial Plan

The drafting phase translates the vision, objectives, spatial zones and management measures into a comprehensive, actionable plan that sets the foundation for the subsequent implementation and monitoring phases. Once all zones and associated management measures have been defined, they should be synthesised and documented in a coherent, structured plan that clearly articulates the spatial arrangements, rules, and objectives. The preferred spatial zoning scenario with its respective management measures should be consolidated into a formal draft plan, which outlines the spatial boundaries, specifies allowable and restricted activities in each zone, and details the rationale behind these measures. The

drafting phase includes compiling technical maps, zoning plans, regulations, and implementation guidelines, ensuring the plan is practical and legally enforceable. Any policies and guidance on how they should be applied to future decision that may affect the plan area should also be included, alongside guidance on how the plan as a whole should be considered by authorities in their decisions and when carrying out their duties. The draft plan should also integrate supporting information and data collected throughout the process, including, stakeholder inputs, legal and institutional frameworks, and findings from the strategic environmental and social assessment to justify the zoning and management choices. The drafted plan serves as a critical communication tool for stakeholders, government agencies, and the public, providing transparency on how competing marine uses will be balanced and managed as agreed through the participatory MSP process.



How to... Example of a Draft Marine Spatial Plan structure

Introduction

- Background and context
- Need for the plan
- Geographic and temporal scope
- Planning process and participatory approach
- Plan review cycle

Vision, Goals and Objectives

- Long-term vision for the marine plan area
- Overarching goals and SMARTIE objectives

Policy and Legislative Context

- Relevant national and regional laws, policies, and international agreements
- Institutional roles and governance framework

Baseline Assessment

- Ecological and environmental conditions
- Socioeconomic and cultural characteristics
- Current uses and activities
- Key issues and challenges

Future Scenarios and Trends

- Projections of social, economic, environmental changes
- Potential impacts and pressures on marine resources

Zoning and Spatial Management

- Description of zoning categories with maps

Regulations and permitted uses by zone

Rationale and criteria for zoning decisions

Management Measures

Specific measures for use regulation, conservation, and development

Policies to guide decision-making (if included)

Implementation and Monitoring

Implementation Plan: Roadmap for enforcement and compliance

Monitoring Plan: Monitoring, evaluation, and adaptive management strategies

Glossary and Acronyms

References and Supporting Documents

Step 6: Public consultation and plan adoption

- ☐ Publish the Draft Marine Spatial Plan and associated documents for public consultation
- ☐ Amend and finalise the Marine Spatial Plan
- ☐ Submit the finalised Marine Spatial Plan for approval and adoption

Public consultation and plan amendments

Public consultation on the Draft Marine Spatial Plan is a critical step and should be carefully planned at the start of the process through the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy. A structured approach ensures the consultation is inclusive, transparent, and meaningful, building broad support for the final marine spatial plan. The Strategy should guide the public consultation and plan validation process on who should be involved, the aims of engagement, methods to be used, and time period for the consultation. Relevant transboundary and neighbouring countries and regional stakeholders should have been identified, along with vulnerable, marginalised and gender groups and how best to involve them.

The draft plan and associated documents should be presented to stakeholders through the right channels and cultural processes as a draft and not a final decision. The purpose of the consultation is to invite final feedback from a broad range of stakeholders at this final planning stage, allowing further refinement of the final plan before endorsement and adoption. Targeted consultation sessions may need needed for effective communication and to manage power dynamics, for example separate sessions may be needed for fisherfolk and fisheries regulators.

The plan amendment process starts with analysing all comments submitted by stakeholders and the public to assess how they might influence the final plan. It is important to keep a clear record of how feedback

has been addressed in the final plan so stakeholders can understand how their issues have been resolved. A “You said → We did” database can provide a useful audit trail tool.

The comments from stakeholders should be addressed and the Draft Marine Spatial Plan modified as appropriate. Comments that are not addressed or are contentious should be marked out for further discussion, negotiations or follow conflict resolution processes with the key interests and stakeholders involved. The feedback from the consultations should be used to adjust zone demarcations and management measures transparently before final adoption.

The team responsible for managing public consultation feedback and plan submission (usually the Core Planning Team) will need to establish a process for dealing with inevitable late responses submitted after the consultation closes but ahead of plan submission. Creating a response database to enter late responses so they can be prioritised for action can be helpful to avoid delaying submission.

After the amendment process, depending on the scale of the changes made, another round of consultation may be essential prior to the plan being finalised for endorsement and adoption. A consultation report is often published, summarising themes, responses, and how feedback led to changes to facilitate any further discussions with stakeholders.



How to... Running the public consultation

A simple process for the public consultation stage:

1. Prepare clear, accessible consultation materials summarising the draft plan including maps and key zoning proposals.
2. Publicise the consultation widely to reach all relevant stakeholders and the general public through diverse channels. Dedicated approaches may be needed for vulnerable, marginalised and gender groups.
3. Documents must be in accessible language and formats, including on websites and social media, but lack of internet access or ill literacy must also be considered.
4. Organise public events such as workshops, open houses, and webinars to explain the plan and encourage discussion.
5. Provide multiple avenues for submitting feedback, including online forms, email, physical mail, and in-person comments.
6. Engage key stakeholder groups in focused discussions to address concerns and gather detailed input across common themes.
7. Invite participants to complete consultation registration and consent forms.
8. Publish a consultation report summarising responses received and how they influenced plan revisions.
9. Revise the draft plan as needed to reflect valid input and improve support and effectiveness.

Final submission and adoption

The submission, approval and adoption process should have been defined in as much detail as possible in the Work Plan at the start of the process.

Once all stakeholder feedback has been applied and the plan and its documents are finalised, the Core Planning Team will submit the documents to the designated approval body or government authority for approval. The responsible body should then review the plan against policy objectives, legal requirements, and stakeholder input and it may request additional information, modifications, or conduct hearings.

Once approved, the plan is then formally adopted through legal or administrative means, granting it official status. This may include issuing legislation, regulatory orders, or executive decisions. The planning process itself will likely identify where new legal instruments are required as it may not be known at the start of the process when the Work Plan is being developed.

The approved and adopted plan should then be published and made publicly available. Communication efforts should be made to ensure that stakeholders and marine users understand the plan's status, provisions and requirements. Once adopted, management actions, monitoring, and enforcement can begin as laid out in the marine spatial plan and its associated implementation framework.

Where MSP is delivered by a timebound project, the approval and adoption process may fall outside of the project scope and timeframe. In this case, it is important that roadmap for approval and adoption is developed before the end of the project for continuity, and the general process should be agreed as far as possible through the Work Plan at the outset of the MSP process to account for the procedures and requirements of the designated approval and adopting authorities.

IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR

Step 7: Implementation phase

- ☐ Initiate the Implementation Plan
- ☐ Apply the Marine Spatial Plan to decisions that affect the plan area

Initiate the Implementation Plan

The implementation phase moves the marine spatial plan from paper to action and begins once the plan has been formally adopted. The Implementation Plan developed in Step 5 should provide the roadmap for implementation activity. Although individual management components may already be in place under existing frameworks, the adopted plan provides the overarching framework to draw all existing and new

management measures and actions together into an integrated and coordinated approach to manage the plan area. Implementation involves designated agencies or coordinating bodies initiating the management actions specified in the plan, such as issuing permits, enforcement of spatial regulations, habitat restoration, and stakeholder engagement activities. Enforcement mechanisms, including monitoring, inspections, and legal sanctions, are initiated to prevent unauthorised activities that could undermine plan objectives. Implementation also involves setting up any necessary resources, training, awareness raising, obtaining equipment, and so on, to enable regulators and enforcement agencies to deliver their actions. It also involves supporting sea users and the public through effective and proactive communication (including clear demarcation of zones and areas), helping them to understand the plan and how it interacts with their activities. Decision-makers will need similar support to help them apply the plan in their day-to-day roles and responsibilities. It is important to build in sufficient time to raise awareness of new plans to enable public bodies and marine users, for example sea moss farmers, to become accustomed to the plan requirements.

The implementation stage also encompasses ongoing coordination, resource mobilisation, and adaptive management to adjust actions based on monitoring results, stakeholder feedback, and environmental changes. Essentially, it transforms the vision and spatial framework of the marine plan into real-world outcomes, maintaining momentum through committed governance, transparent processes, and practical management tools.

Apply the Marine Spatial Plan to decision-making

The use of marine spatial plans in decision making helps to deliver sustainability targets and reduces risk of legal challenge when decisions, for example consent for infrastructure projects, are made by public authorities. The marine spatial plan provides a central reference point to understand the spatial priorities of marine stakeholders and government in addressing social, economic and environmental objectives. A marine spatial plan can be used by decision makers, developers, and stakeholders as a:

- **Planning prescription:** use of plan zoning specifications or spatial management measures by public bodies to inform a decision about the location of an activity.
- **Planning guidance:** use of plan principles, goals, policy, and non-spatial management measures by public bodies to inform or guide decision making about the location of an activity
- **Evidence and public data information system:** use of data and evidence collected during the planning process by the public, stakeholders, and applicants for permits to assess the location of proposed activities or uses in their area of concern
- **Linkages and synergies:** the use of the marine spatial plan by public authorities can provide the necessary linkages and synergies within ocean governance systems especially for land sea planning, marine management processes at micro and macro level

Step 8: Monitoring phase

- ☐ Initiate the Monitoring Plan
- ☐ Adapt management measures and actions as needed

Initiate the Monitoring Plan and adapt management

The monitoring phase involves tracking and evaluating the marine spatial plan's implementation and its effects to ensure that its objectives are being met effectively. This stage initiates and delivers the monitoring framework developed in Step 5 which should include clear indicators directly linked to the marine spatial plan goals. It involves collecting data on marine environmental conditions, human activities, and socio-economic trends within the plan area using well-defined methods and baselines. Regular, accurate, unbiased reporting, and technically sound analysis are critical to assess plan performance, detect unintended consequences, and identify areas needing adjustment. Stakeholder involvement remains important throughout monitoring to provide insights and maintain transparency. Importantly, monitoring should feed into adaptive management by providing the evidence base necessary for revising spatial arrangements, management measures, or governance approaches to respond to changing conditions or knowledge. Evaluation should be both qualitative and quantitative and should facilitate participative, cross-sectoral learning and regular stakeholder engagement. The selection of the lead authority and monitoring champions should seek to avoid appointing individuals that are bound by or easily influenced by short-term political agendas and should instead appoint those with the technical skills to lead the process. It is important that planners train those who will be leading the monitoring process and align MSP with ongoing monitoring projects for effective use of resources.



Case Example... Aligning MSP and Blue Economy monitoring in Belize

The Belize Blue Bond issued in 2021 is a debt restructuring mechanism that converted a portion of Belize's external debt at a discount in exchange for securing its blue natural capital (e.g., coast, water, mangroves, and fish) and supporting human well-being and economic prosperity. The Blue Bond is being used to finance Belize's Marine Spatial Plan. The Resilient Bold Belize (RBB) program, a Project Finance for Permanence (PFP) model aims at securing long term funding for marine and coastal conservation. The two results-based finance mechanisms are designed with specific goals which are closely tied to environmental outcomes and socio-economic impacts. This aligns with Belize's Blue Economy strategy, which emphasises progress in nature conservation, ecosystem health, and human well-being.

How monitoring is delivered

- The monitoring and management of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are carried out through a structured [Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification \(MRV\) process](#) and central platform ensuring transparency and accountability in achieving the intended outcomes.
- Progress toward MSP and blue economy goals is tracked using a clearly defined set of KPIs that cover areas such as finance, nature, climate, and livelihoods.
- An integrated team, including local Belizean government partners (the Blue Bond Finance Permanent Unit within the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Economic Transformation, a local NGO (WWF-Belize), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and researchers from Stanford University's Natural Capital Project (NatCap) empower local leaders with approaches that quantify, track, and report the multiple benefits of Belize's blue natural capital
- The integrated team have created a new Blue Economy Jobs monitoring survey tool that involves local community members in data collection process and builds capacity to track KPI associated with the blue economy

Monitoring results are used to inform updates to Belize's Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan (ICZMP) and the Belize Marine Spatial Plan.

REVIEW AND REVISE

Step 9: Plan review and revision

- ☐ Review the Marine Spatial Plan against current context
- ☐ Revise the Marine Spatial Plan (begin at Step 1 or 2 as needed), or determine the next review point (then repeat Step 9)

The MSP process does not end when a plan is adopted. It should be a cycle of continuous refinement and improvement as contexts change and as new evidence becomes available. This step formalises a periodic review (typically every 3-5 years) to assess whether the context has changed in such a way to warrant a revision of the plan in full, or in part. If the context remains stable, the review may determine that no revisions are needed at the current time, and may simply set a date for the next review. The findings and lessons from implementation and monitoring phases will provide crucial evidence to inform the review and any required revisions, both of the plan and the MSP process more broadly to ensure it is fit for purpose.

Review the Marine Spatial Plan against current context

Periodic plan reviews (every 3–5 years) should be formalised as part of the MSP process with dedicated budgets and linked to parliamentary and government timelines. The review process should start with the collection and analysis of data about the existing plan by public bodies including the status of key

indicators to understand if the plan is on track as well as how the plan is being used in decision making (Table 10).

The review should further consider existing conditions that have an impact on the plan including policies developments and reviews, socio-economic and political context and well as geographical changes. The findings from the analysis should provide an understanding of the progress toward set objectives using targeted monitoring programs and evaluate effectiveness in addressing desired outcomes based on the monitoring reports and key questions (Table 11).

The review process should include both top-down government-led actions and bottom-up community and stakeholder participation, adjusted to local regulatory contexts to address the review results. Participatory approaches can include formal consultation rounds, theme-based workshops and public/international meetings to gather feedback and suggestions on the review results. The decision on the revision of the whole plan (or relevant components) should be taken collectively by the government, community and relevant stakeholders.

Table 10. MSP review tasks, activities and questions. Source: UNESCO-IOC/European Commission, 2021

Review Tasks	Key activities and questions
Collect results of the existing plan	- Monitoring and evaluation of results. Check status of the key indicators to see if the plan is on the right track. If not, why? - How has MSP influenced maritime sectors and decision-making? - How was the plan used to inform decision-making about development proposals? - How did proposals show compliance with the plan? - Are we on the right track in relation to the objectives? - Are the existing capacities and resourcing (e.g. equipment) sufficient for the plan activities including review? - Equity and adequacy of the process? - What is the perception of different stakeholders about the existing process? - Was the budget sufficient?
Revisit the existing conditions	- How have the maritime sectors, communities and the environment changed? - Are there illegal and unregulated activities such as drug trafficking boats that need to be addressed? - Have there been major policy reviews (e.g. in sectors) or new commitments, including international? - What is the general context of the planning area (e.g. in environment, governance, technology, economy)? - Improve database and analytical methods?

Plan revision

If a decision is taken to revise the plan in full, or in part, the findings from the plan review report and monitoring evidence should form the basis for the changes needed, addressing gaps, and incorporating lessons learned. This step is a long-term (e.g., every 10 years), periodic and iterative process to accommodate new scientific, regulatory, or stakeholder needs. The revision process should be backed by legal provisions for updating and adaptive changes.

The revision process should start with identifying new and emerging needs and drivers for MSP and updating the plan, essentially going back to Step 1 of the MSP process as defined by Figure 1. New and emerging needs could be in response to evolving international commitments (30% by 2030 protected area targets, climate treaties, debt-for-nature swap commitments), as well as new national priorities for the marine space.

Table 11. MSP revision tasks, activities and questions. Source: UNESCO-IOC/European Commission, 2021

Revision Tasks	Key activities and questions
Revisit future conditions and objectives	• What are the new and emerging needs? • Update the vision and specific objectives
Revisit the scope of pre-planning	• Update the vision and specific objectives • New time frame • Do the boundaries need to be rethought? • Adequacy of the team • Reorganise the planning process
Update the marine spatial plan <i>Note:</i> This is the final part of the review – all other parts should feed into this.	• Indicate clearly which spatial policies / requirements / zones are obsolete or are no longer considered. Likewise, clearly indicate new zones or spatial policies • Update the marine spatial plan to respond to both new needs and lessons from the implementation of the previous plan(s) • Improve plan-making practices

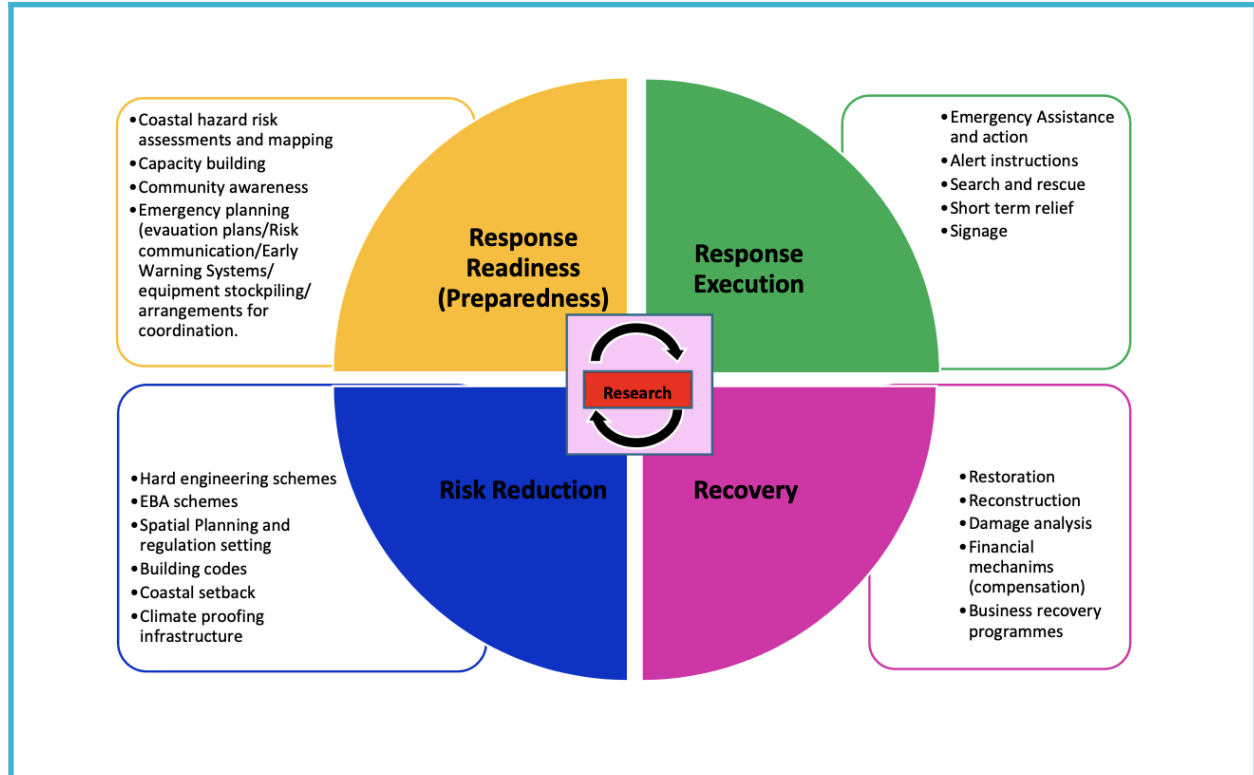


Case Example... Review and revision of the Barbados Integrated Coastal Zone Management Policy Framework & Plan

The “Integrated Coastal Management: The Barbados Policy Framework” was first published by the Government of Barbados in 1998. The ICZM Policy Framework and related ICZM Plan was updated after 20 years to set a new direction that embraces Disaster Risk Management (DRM) and Climate Change Adaptation (CCA).

The update was needed to support effective coastal planning by incorporating the latest results from an Inter-American Bank (IDB) funded programme named the “Coastal Risk Assessment and Management Program (CRMP)” and a supporting tool entitled the “National Coastal Risk Information and Planning Platform (NCRIPP)” which was undertaken and developed by the CZMU between 2011 and 2020. The CRMP supported the analysis of the current and future key issues for facing coastal management delivery in Barbados by collecting new scientific information in addition to gathering stakeholder concerns, observations and suggestions.

Through the CRMP, new policy goals, priorities and updated management guidelines and implementation procedures are provided (to support public agencies and private individuals) to help with ICZM Plan implementation.



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5 GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Baseline data: the basic information gathered before a programme or activity begins, to be used later to provide a comparison for assessing impacts.

Blue economy: the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, preserving the health of ocean ecosystems and ensuring the equitable and inclusive distribution of benefits.

Climate change: refers to any change in climate over time, whether due to natural variability or as a result of human activity.

Decision support tool (DST): a wide range of computer-based tools (e.g. simulation models and/or techniques and methods) developed to support decision analysis and participatory processes.

Ecosystem: a community or group of living organisms that live in and interact with each other in a specific environment.

Ecosystem-based approach: a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way.

Ecosystem-based management: an integrated approach to management that considers the entire ecosystem, including humans. The goal of ecosystem-based management is to maintain an ecosystem in a healthy, productive and resilient condition so that it can provide the goods and services humans want and need.

Geographic information system (GIS): a conceptualised framework that provides the ability to capture, manage and analyse spatial and geographic data. It also connects data to a map, integrating location data (where things are) with all types of descriptive information (what things are like there).

Goals: high-level statements of desired outcomes that you hope to achieve within the marine planning area.

Governance: comprises the traditions, institutions, bodies and processes that determine how power is exercised, how citizens are given a voice and how decisions are made on issues of public concern which affects marine stakeholders and their use of coastal and marine resources.

Indicator: information based on measured data used to represent a particular attribute, characteristic or property of a system. An indicator is a measure, quantitative or qualitative, of how close we are to achieving what we set out to achieve, i.e. our objectives or outcomes.

Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM): process for the integrated management of both the terrestrial and marine components of coastal zones, emphasising cross-sectoral, cross-governance, land-sea interactions and addressing the complex management issues in the coastal area.

Management actions: the actions and steps that need to be carried out in order to set-up, monitor, enforce and ensure compliance with the management measures put in place to achieve the objectives of the marine spatial plan. This includes the establishment of legal and institutional mechanisms, enforcement powers, skills, training, capacity and equipment, funding and political commitment. These actions are typically set out in the Implementation Plan and Monitoring Plan and provide a roadmap to operationalise and turn the marine spatial plan into reality.

Management measures: the specific rules, conditions and policies put in place to achieve the objectives of the spatial zones and overall marine spatial plan, for example rules to prohibit, allow and manage activities, or policy to guide future decisions that may affect the marine plan area.

Marine protected area (MPA): a geographically defined marine area that is designated and managed to achieve specific (long-term biodiversity) conservation and sustainable use objectives (and that affords higher protection than the surrounding areas).

Marine spatial planning (MSP): 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 have been specified through a political process.

Ocean governance: the way in which ocean affairs are governed, not only by governments, but also by local communities, industries, and other stakeholders, which includes national and international law, public and private law, as well as custom, tradition and culture, and the institutions and processes created by them.

Outcome: an anticipated result of the implementation of a marine spatial management action.

Output: a product or service delivered from a process or set of activities.

Principle: in MSP, an essential quality determining the fundamental nature of the marine spatial planning process (e.g. sustainability, precaution, transparency).

Scenario: a plausible and often simplified description of how the future may develop based on a coherent and internally consistent set of assumptions about key driving forces.

Stakeholders: the individuals, groups or organisations that are (or will be) affected, involved or interested (positively or negatively) by marine spatial planning management actions in various ways.

Sustainable development: a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Sustainable Ocean Plan (SOP): describes policies and mechanisms to facilitate sustainable use of the ocean and maximise benefits and value creation for current and future generations. It provides a framework to reconcile conflicting uses of the ocean and its resources and enable long-term sustainable growth in the ocean economy.

Sustainable use: the use of natural resources in a way and at a rate that does not lead to the long-term decline of biological diversity, thereby maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations.

Synergies: the interaction or alignment of two or more marine management approaches, organisation, marine uses and activities.

Trade-offs: management choices that intentionally or otherwise change the type, magnitude and relative mix of services provided by ecosystems.

Transboundary: issues which are cross-border where impacts may extend across boundaries, not necessarily to immediate neighbouring countries only.

Vision: a desired or preferred future.

Zoning: spatial planning tool used to allocate rights and responsibilities for use of space.

The CRFM is an inter-governmental organization whose mission is to
“Promote and facilitate the responsible utilization of the region’s
fisheries and other aquatic resources for the economic and social
benefits of the current and future population of the region”.

The CRFM consists of three bodies – the Ministerial Council, the
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