

DEVELOPMENT OF A STANDARDIZED MANAGEMENT PLAN AND IMPLEMENTATION TEMPLATE FOR SEYCHELLES' MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

Authors : Elke Talma¹, Marie-May Jeremie ¹, Helena Sims³

¹*Seychelles Conservation And Climate Adaptation Trust (SeyCCAT)*,²*The Nature Conservancy*

E-mail Address: etalma@seyccat.org

ID: 12160

Submission:

Background

Seychelles is an archipelagic nation with globally significant ecosystems including endemic and IUCN Red-listed marine species in the vast 1.35 million square km marine area. The ocean also plays a critical role to support Seychelles' national economy including the two most important pillars – tourism and fisheries. Owing to the importance of the ocean for Seychelles' blue economy, the management of biodiversity and sustainable uses is essential for the long term health and well-being of Seychellois. In March 2020, more than 410,000 square km in new marine protection areas were designated as an output of the Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan (SMSP Initiative, building on the more than 20 marine protected areas designated since the 1970s as well as other new proposals for protection (e.g., Temporal Protected Areas). Effective management of protected areas is a core component of global best practice such as developing management plans with standard components to support implementation of multiple areas and the monitoring, compliance and enforcement requirements. The SMSP is a participatory and inclusive process, designed to integrate national marine conservation, sustainable use, Blue Economy and Climate Change Adaptation objectives, and be monitored and adapted over time. Due to the geographic and biological complexities in Seychelles' Exclusive Economic Zone, the 13 marine protection areas legally designated during the Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan (SMSP) Initiative will require a variety of approaches to implement national and site-based priorities, respectively. The purpose of this project is to develop a standardised management plan template to support the implementation of the MSP marine protection zones and other protected area categories in Seychelles.

Method

The methodology for this project is underway as of February 2022 and will run through to 2024, in five pilot areas in Seychelles. The project aims to develop a template that is applicable for a range of marine protections from high or fully protected to medium protection and sustainable use categories. Working with the Government of Seychelles, Seychelles MSP, stakeholders, consultants and partners, SeyCCAT will develop pilot evidence-based management plan templates in accordance to global best practice and lessons learned in Seychelles and elsewhere. To enable the informed and adaptive management of the SMSP process, it is essential that common cross-cutting themes of management, monitoring, control and surveillance are identified and mandatory minimum common requirements and standards for all management plans established. This approach includes the process

of data gathering, how it is managed, the format in which it is presented in reports and various management protocols for matters as diverse as accounting and enforcement. Additional site-based priorities will form the second level of each management plan, but again should share the same management and monitoring approaches with all other plans for areas that address the same natural features and/or operational issues / challenges (e.g., habitat types, usage scenarios, key threats etc.). This will ensure that a common baseline of management data will be compiled by all sites, as well as compatible methodologies and datasets for equivalent sites and comparison between sites over time.

The template is being developed through an iterative process of stakeholder consultation (i.e. all national and potential future MPA management entities, and those responsible for control, monitoring and surveillance of these areas) based on a review of best international and national practice to provide an MPA management template tailored to the specific circumstances of Seychelles. The template will then be applied and tested in 4 representative protected area categories in the Seychelles (Special Reserve, Marine National Park, Sustainable Use and Seasonal Protected Areas) with management plans developed, applied, and assessed for 12 months, enabling a review and refinement of the template in the final phase of the project.

Results

This standardized approach will enable systematic and site-based monitoring and evaluation of management measures and their informed adaptive management. It will also foster collaboration and exchange between agencies responsible for Protected Areas and serve to build a common national capacity for MPA management. Permanent as well as Seasonal Protected Areas also have a role to play in the SMSP, in particular regarding seasonal critical habitats such as species aggregation sites, breeding and nursery areas within (or outside) any protected areas within the Seychelles EEZ. Work has been underway for several years and seasonal or temporal protected areas (TPAs) will therefore also be incorporated into the management plan template utilizing the model for TPAs around the southern coastline of Mahé for marine turtle rookery and aggregation sites.

Conclusion

The development, testing, and refinement of a standardized Seychelles MPA management plan template will enable a phased approach for convergence of all MPAs to a common management approach and ultimately the strategic management and coordinated management of the entire MPA network in Seychelles. This is a long-term process as areas with new and/or existing plans will not be required to immediately adopt the new format but rather will be required to do so within the logical and natural process of their current management cycles. Furthermore, the diverse formats and approaches that currently exist will provide greater scope for the longer-term optimization of the template. This exercise will provide the foundation for the integrated strategic management of the MPAs and for the SMSP within the next 5-10 years.