

# MARINE PROTECTED AREAS: Initiatives and Opportunities

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Radisson Blu Resort & Spa Malta, Golden Sands

## Summary of the key outcomes

### General Messages on the Management of Marine Protected Areas (MPA)

- The work on MPAs does not end with the designation itself, it is actually the opposite, as the management and its enforcement requires the involvement of stakeholders.
- Management bodies provide an opportunity to bring different stakeholders, such as professional and recreational fishermen, sailors, and tourism together to discuss challenges and opportunities related to MPA management as well as broader marine issues.
- MPAs are a shared responsibility, not just the responsibility of environmental authorities.
- The knowledge gaps related to marine conservation issues need to be addressed, including gaps in social science related to MPAs. This is particularly important as terrestrial protected area management is believed to be 30 years more advanced than that for marine.
- There is a need to put more emphasis on the socio-economic dimension of the creation and management of MPAs as areas of governance such socio-economic information on the costs and benefits of MPAs are very valuable both for decision makers, managers and partners of MPAs.
- The long-term benefits generated by MPAs should be shared, specifically with fishermen as firstly, they can benefit from the MPA spill over effect, and secondly, they can be important partners in the governance and management of the MPA thanks to their knowledge and their own conservation and management.
- Awareness raising as well as involvement around MPA management should be extended to local schools and colleges as they can provide important intergenerational links (e.g. marine educative areas in French Polynesia).
- A valuable tool to improve the management of MPAs is through the exchange of best practices.
- Plastic can now be found throughout the ocean. As the public becomes increasingly aware of this, it provides an instrumental opportunity to highlight and raise the profile of this issue and advance marine conservation including marine protected area management.
- The main priorities for MPAs are:
  - Complete their designation and establish the management of protected areas – reinforce highly protected areas;
  - Long-term resource mobilisation to fill knowledge gaps and achieve conservation goals;
  - To raise awareness and participation;
  - Promote capacity building.

## Outcomes of the key challenges discussed during the event:

### 1. Stakeholder involvement

- Involving multiple stakeholders can generate additional challenges but the opinion of every individual should be considered .
- There is a weaker sense of ownership of the marine environment than that of terrestrial ecosystems. To improve this, the benefits of protecting marine ecosystems should be promoted. Open communication with stakeholders and including them in the management of MPAs can also help to increase a sense of ownership.
- Governance models should include all stakeholders.
- The use of marine spatial planning methodologies should be explored to overcome issues related to conflicts.
- Training programmes in marine biology for local fishermen and on fishing for scientists, managers and politicians can provide successful results for the management of MPAs.

### 2. Fisheries

- Fishermen understand the importance of fish reproduction cycles but due to a lack of ownership and resources, they are not incentivised to protect fish species. In this respect, MPAs can support the prevention of the tragedy of the commons.
- It is crucial that MPA managers establish communication (based on science and understanding) with fishermen.
- Local fishermen and industrial fisheries have different interests concerning the management of MPAs, therefore both views should be considered towards a more holistic management approach.
- Bottom-up management and concrete involvement of stakeholders has shown to be essential for safeguarding artisanal fishing communities.

### 3. Invasive Alien Species (IAS)

- Protected Areas (PAs) cannot stop the invasion of alien species, but can play a major role in their prevention and in managing the implications of the spread of invasive alien species.
- It is important to cooperate and coordinate the efforts of all stakeholders as IAS are not restricted spatially.
- MPAs are useful tools but their functions are limited. Therefore, citizen science and data collection are crucial for preventing ecosystem damage, specifically citizen science, which can serve as a tool to gain information on IAS. In some cases, such methods have been the only way to obtain such data.

### 4. Financing of MPAs

- There should be a shift in the approach for financing MPAs, from projects to investment in blue infrastructure.
- A key dimension to be further explored is the diverse economic benefits generated around marine conservation and MPAs, for example, from tourism. In Saint Martin €1 invested in the marine natural reserve generates €2 back in the local economy.
- The “one size fits all” solution does not exist; therefore, all approaches and solutions should be explored including for example, blue fees, debt-swap, private partnership, and trust funds.
- On EU funding:
  - The future EU funding must be result-oriented;
  - The EU funding should be more easily accessible to local stakeholders;
  - Neither EU funds or national budgets can support only by themselves sustainable long-term financing;
  - The use of different funding streams, such as LIFE, EU Maritime Fund, EU Social Fund, national funds as a successful strategy to access funding should be more actively explored.