



**St Helena
Government**

St Helena Marine Management Plan Annual Report 2024 to 2025



Acknowledgements

This MPA Annual Report has been developed by the St. Helena Government with assistance from the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) and the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) within the UK Government's Blue Belt Programme.

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Introduction

The St Helena Marine Management Plan (MMP) was published in May 2023. It sets out what will be done to effectively manage St Helena's Marine Protected Area (MPA) over the five-year period between 2023 and 2027. St Helena's goals are ambitious, but achievable. The realisation of these goals will take time. This annual review summarises what has been achieved during the period 1st June 2024 to 31st May 2025.

Highlights

The work in our MPA continues to build and strengthen. In particular, we were very proud to share our film entitled 'A small island with a big future: St Helena's Marine Protected Area', which was shown at a community event on MPA Day on 1st August 2024: <https://youtu.be/dNdSV9dcapo?feature=shared>.

Research on St Helena's marine environment continues with several significant scientific papers being published in the past year. Members of St Helena Government's (SHG) Marine and Fisheries Conservation Section (MFCS) contributed to a detailed summary of the status of shark and ray species around St Helena and the policies in place to protect them. This was included in 'The global status of sharks, rays, and chimaeras' published by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/52102>.

Other highlights have included:

- During Marine Awareness Week (17th to 21st March 2025), MFCS shared findings from four years of study on the impacts of climate change on St Helena's key marine species.
- In September 2024, stamps were released featuring deep sea species found around St Helena during a research cruise in 2022.

Goal 1: The islands marine environment and natural ecosystems are protected, conserved, and (where necessary) restored, with appropriate monitoring to track short and long-term changes

Objective 1.1:

The existing management framework is implemented within current resources to manage and protect the marine environment

Having a full team of staff is essential to continue delivery of St Helena's Marine Management Plan and Monitoring and Research Plan. This covers staff in MFCS, Marine Compliance and Enforcement Section (MC&ES) and the St Helena National Trust (SHNT) which is a total of 15 staff members supported by organisational leadership. Throughout the year, staffing levels have varied with short periods of absence in several roles.

This year there has been a change of personnel within the Marine and Fisheries Conservation Officer role and only one role within MFCS was vacant for more than 6 months: the Marine and Fisheries Conservation Assistant (MFCA). During this time the Senior MFCA and Fisheries Science Programme Coordinator supported work as well as the addition of a new role, Head of Nature Conservation which has helped to bridge the gap during vacancies within the MFCS. SHNT has had reduced staffing due to project funding coming to an end in March 2025 and MC&E has had a full complement of staff throughout the year.

The MFCS has continued working with the SHG Graduate Scheme this year. Helping to build resilience within SHG, it provides opportunities for returning graduates to acquire the necessary skills to complement their academic learning. This year the returning graduate student has continued aiding work within the MFCS and understanding essential components of marine management.

In house training activity logs have continued to be used this year to track training and upskilling undertaken by staff. Over the year, 7 different areas of training have been undertaken which amount to in excess of 450 hours.



MFCS team



MC&ES team

In October 2024, two officers from the MC&ES took part in a learning exchange to the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI). The purpose of the visit was to see how TCI carries out enforcement tasks, and the team had the opportunity to shadow TCI officers from three different islands (Providenciales, South Caicos and Grand Turk). All three islands use similar enforcement processes to St Helena. Grand Turk is the most similar to St Helena with a smaller family-like community, similar population size and a smaller number of fishing vessels compared to the other two islands. The TCI exchange allowed the St Helena team to experience and observe fellow officers performing the same roles and this has provided us with a valuable perspective. It reassures us that MC&ES are carrying out their duties correctly and has strengthened their confidence to continue moving forward with the same approach. The exchange was very successful and has helped to build working relationships and to share knowledge between the two UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs).

The MFCS received training from staff from the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) on new oceanographic equipment. This included CTD (conductivity, temperature and depth), mini-DOT (dissolved oxygen and temperature) loggers and HOBO loggers, which monitor ocean conditions of water temperature, salinity, dissolved oxygen and chlorophyll-a levels around the MPA. The new loggers (mini-DOT and HOBO) have been deployed in the MPA to gain a better understanding of the oceanographic characteristics around St Helena. Cefas staff also provided specialised training in the use of satellite tags for monitoring tuna movement and behaviour. MFCS staff were able to practice the application of internal tagging and gain an understanding of how the tags work. Training was also provided for a year-long project looking at ichthyoplankton around St Helena. Cefas provided training on analysing and identifying fish eggs and larvae.

The MFCS also received training led by the Ascension Island Government's Conservation and Fisheries Directorate in environmental DNA (eDNA), which introduced the team to new scientific techniques, expanding scientific capabilities and future research possibilities.

With assistance from the Blue Belt Programme and project partners, SHG is looking at options for filling the current MPA management funding gap. SHG are investigating two different sustainable financing options: ring-fencing tourist user fees and biodiversity commitments and are considering how each could work in St Helena. This will inform development of an MPA sustainable financing strategy.



MC&ES staff with Turks and Caicos enforcement officers

Objective 1.2:

A monitoring strategy is in place to understand baselines and track changes to the marine environment

Since June 2024, MFCS and SHNT have conducted 12 dedicated monitoring surveys. These have included:

- **BRUVS** - As part of the Global Ocean Wildlife Analysis Network (GOWAN), surveys were carried out in November 2024 and February 2025 to better understand the movements of semi-pelagic species around coastal pinnacles and shipwrecks. These surveys contribute to a broader dataset used to track seasonal patterns and habitat use by key species.
- **Underwater Visual Census (UVC)** - MFCS conducted two UVC survey periods in October 2024 and April 2025, continuing a long-term dataset that assesses abundance of fish species and quality of habitat around St Helena's coast.
- **Lobster monitoring** - over a three-month period between late 2024 and early 2025, MFCS assessed population numbers of both spiny lobster and slipper lobster using a combination of lobster pots and dive surveys. This work is the start of a new long-term monitoring programme aimed at understanding trends in local lobster populations.
- **Ichthyoplankton surveys** - In early 2025, the team began plankton sampling at 18 stations around the island. These samples will be analysed to study the recruitment of fish eggs and larvae into local stocks, providing a clearer picture of larval retention and connectivity in St Helena's waters.
- **Grouper tagging** - monthly tagging of grouper has continued, building on long-term work to better understand the species' movement patterns, growth rates and habitat use.



MFCS staff practicing deployment of the CTD



MFCS staff carrying out internal tagging training

- **Tuna tagging** - Ad-hoc tagging of yellowfin tuna is ongoing with local fishers actively involved in the process. This collaboration supports the sustainable management of tuna fisheries by improving knowledge of migration and local residency.
- **Oceanographic monitoring** - regular *in-situ* measurements are being collected in waters less than 30m deep to track possible climate change impacts. Parameters recorded include temperature, dissolved oxygen and chlorophyll-a concentrations.
- **St Helena Open-ocean Time-series Study** - long term monitoring of oceanographic conditions continues through the SHOTS programme. The team regularly collects CTD profiles, plankton trawls and measures turbidity providing data on environmental conditions.

The SHNT continues to lead a series of research and monitoring projects within the MPA, contributing vital knowledge to support sustainable marine management:

- **Whale shark monitoring** - The 2025 season recorded sightings of 85 encounters and 73 individual whale sharks through ongoing photo-identification work. This research is contributing to long-term data on population trends and site fidelity. SHNT is also collaborating with international partners on 'Project William' to tag individuals and gain a better understanding of their migratory pathways across the South Atlantic.
- **South Atlantic Plastics Project** - This three-year initiative, which focused on tackling single-use plastic pollution on St Helena, has recently concluded. Final reports detailing the findings and recommendations are currently being compiled and will be publicly available in the coming months.
- **Pelagic Species Monitoring with BRUVS** - BRUVS continue to be deployed to assess pelagic biodiversity in the midwater column. This collaborative work under the guidance of MFCS, is helping to build a clearer picture of the broader marine ecosystem and the distribution of species within the MPA.
- **Seabird monitoring** - Seabird monitoring has resumed, with particular attention on nesting activity. A notable highlight this season is the rare sighting of a pair of red-footed boobies nesting on the mainland, a significant observation currently under close study.

Several reports have been generated from this work with additional publications underway to share key outcomes and findings.

Additionally, throughout the year several reports have been produced, helping to aid MPA and fisheries management.

These include:

- Climate projections and future thermal suitability assessment for priority marine species in St Helena (CR195- 10/2024)

- Baitfish biomass and distribution on St Helena and two adjacent seamounts (CR196- 06/2024)
- St Helena Grouper catch advice (CR201- 02/2025)
- St Helena Grouper assessment (CR202- 03/2025)
- St Helena Yellowfin Tuna documentation and review of the species, fisheries, data and biomass assessment procedures (CR203- 03/2025)
- Climate, Oceanography and Mass Fish Mortalities (Die-offs) in St Helena and Ascension (CR206- 03/2025)

Objective 1.3:

Current and future threats to the marine environment are understood and risk assessed to enable a proactive approach to risk management

The MFCS team has carried out four hull surveys of the monthly supply ship MV Karoline. During these surveys the team checks for any biofouling and its percentage cover. Any species that are not recognised within St Helena's marine environment are photographed and sampled to allow for further identification. This is part of a wider biosecurity effort to help protect St Helena's waters from possible invasive, non-native species.



Researcher tagging a whale shark in St Helena's waters



MFCS staff carrying out a dive survey

Goal 2: Use of natural resources is managed sustainably, using evidence-based decisions for appropriate management of human activities, aimed at securing economic, food and cultural security for St Helena

Objective 2.1:

Fishing practices are sustainable, with management methods for target species informed by scientific evidence and local knowledge

St Helena has continued to conduct scientific research on commercially and recreationally important fish species including yellowfin tuna, grouper and lobster to determine the status of stocks and understand the biology and ecology of these species. The data are shared with staff from Cefas who analyse it and make management recommendations for SHG to consider. Cefas has provided an assessment of grouper stock determining a slight increase in Total Allowable Catch available. Cefas also provided a report on the recent environmental die-offs which have impacted inshore fish populations. The report considered all environmental conditions experienced during the time of the die-offs but was unable to identify if the die-off could be related to any specific variable. Updates to logbook monitoring and visualisation have helped SHG to keep on top of their local fisheries management, with the provision of a tool that allows MFCS and MC&ES to visualise catch data and assess quota use.

Although there were no new fisheries management measures implemented for 2024, the following annual restrictions remained in place:

- The landing or retention of the following species caught by any method other than by pot during the period commencing **1 January and ending 31 March** is prohibited:
 - Brown spiny lobster (*Panulirus echinatus*)
 - Stump lobster (*Scyllarides obtusus*)
- The use of a main line with more than one hook attached (droppers) within the Fisheries Limits is prohibited during the period commencing **1 January and ending 17 March**, inclusive.
- The use of a handheld spear or lance and a handheld weapon designed to discharge a spear or lance is prohibited during the period commencing **1st January and ending 31st March 2025** to undertake fishing activities.
- The landing or retention of the following species within the fisheries limits is prohibited during the period commencing **1 October and ending 31 December**, inclusive, in any year:
 - Brown spiny lobster (*Panulirus echinatus*)
 - Stump lobster (*Scyllarides obtusus*)

With support from Cefas, St Helena reported fisheries data to the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), playing their part in the sustainable management of global fish stocks.

Objective 2.2:

Development activities in the marine environment are effectively managed to prevent, minimise and mitigate adverse impacts, whilst supporting sustainable economic development

The Attorney General's Chambers are currently drafting the new Marine Developments Regulations under the Environmental Protection Ordinance. This will ensure that any development activities taking place in the MPA are effectively managed and do not damage or disturb our important marine species and habitats.



MFCS staff carrying out lobster tagging

Objective 2.3:

Marine tourism activities minimise their impacts on the marine environment and large charismatic marine species, whilst supporting economic development

MFCS and MC&ES worked with the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) to contract some research on the sustainable management of marine tourism in the MPA to better understand current and future pressures. The consultants assessed the existing management framework as being effective for the current level of tourists to the island. They did however identify some risks if tourism grows in the future. They made some recommendations to ensure environmental protection whilst supporting new economic opportunities. MFCS and MC&E are considering how best to take forwards these recommendations to 'future-proof' management of the MPA.

Objective 2.5:

Activities within the marine environment are regulated and enforced, with clear and transparent information provided to all users

As part of the Blue Belt Programme, intelligence analysts from the MMO have continued to conduct near daily checks of vessels' Automatic Identification System (AIS) within and around the MPA. These showed close to full compliance within the MPA (Figure 1). One 2.8 nautical mile incursion by a longline fishing vessel was detected and followed up. The vessel's fishing gear had drifted into the MPA before it was retrieved due to adverse weather. Given the limited nature of the incursion and the cooperation received in following the incident up, an official warning letter was sent by SHG to the vessel skipper and owner.

In 2024, the MC&ES undertook a total of 64 compliance and enforcement actions to ensure adherence to regulations within the MPA. These actions reflected the continued commitment for effective management and protection. The enforcement actions consisted of:

- 6 formal warnings
- 58 interactions of informal advice

These enforcement actions contributed to an increased level of compliance within St Helena's MPA, demonstrating the effectiveness of ongoing monitoring and regulatory measures.

This year, St Helena met 100% compliance with ICCAT requirements (the only UKOT to do so!).

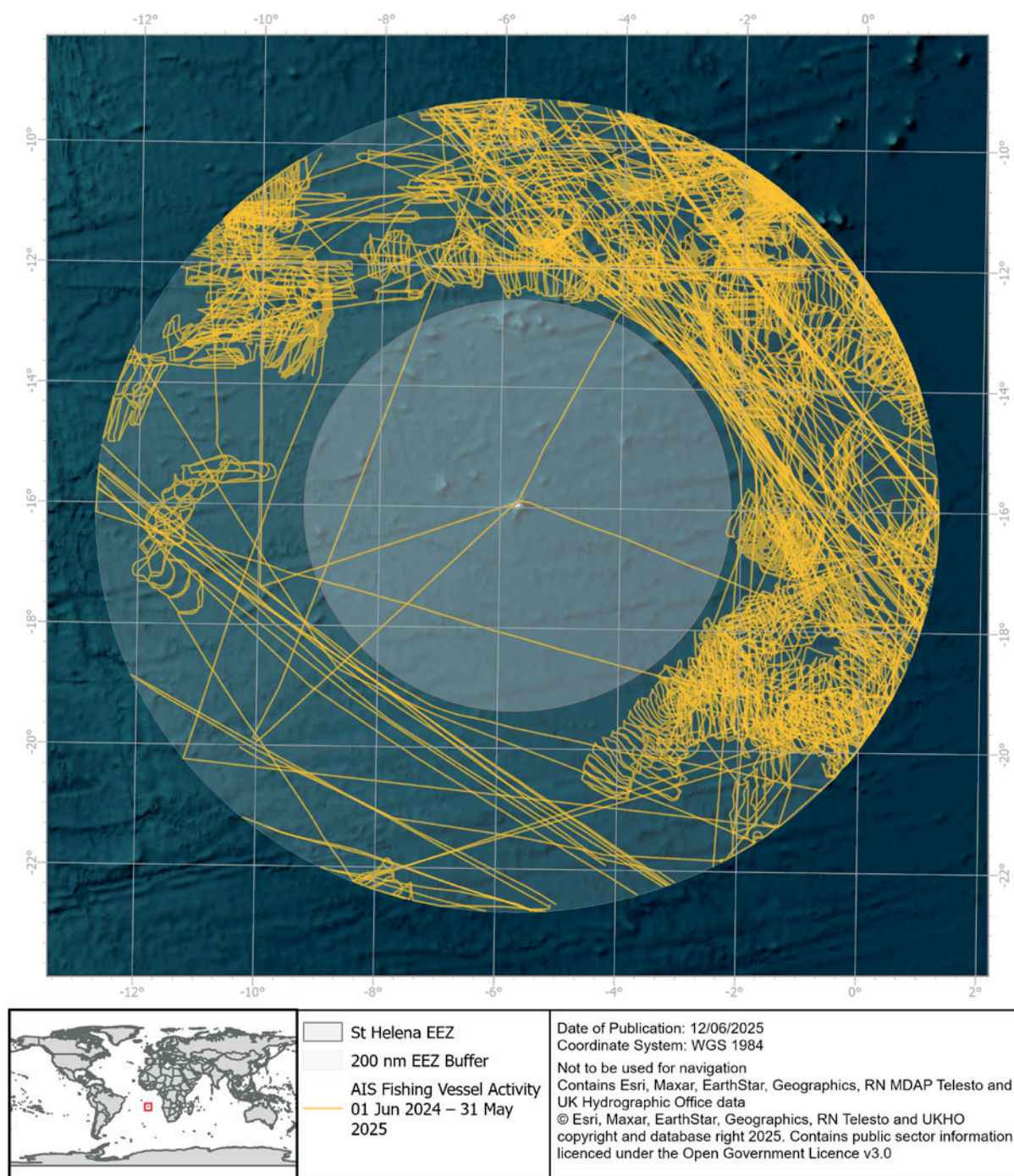


Figure 1: AIS fishing vessel activity from 01 Jun 2024 – 31 May 2025. Straight line activity within the MPA indicates transiting behaviour. The incursion incident can be seen in the east of the MPA.

Goal 3: St Helena's marine environment, its importance, and management methods are better understood by both the local and international community, with all provided the opportunity to input into securing its future

Objective 3.1:

Users of the marine environment and stakeholders are able to participate in management decisions and activities to protect and enhance the MPA

The MFCS has undertaken a number of different stakeholder engagement activities over the year. These aimed to raise awareness of the MPA and the management measures in place. The Fisheries Science Programme Coordinator facilitated training for interested fishers on how to measure lobster, checking if they are in berry and making sure that they are of the right size. This will enable them to actively participate in management of the lobster fishery, ensuring that it is sustainable. The MFCS team also delivered training for new marine tour operators outlining the regulations in place for responsible viewing and interacting with marine wildlife.

Objective 3.2:

An education and awareness campaign is in place to provide information about and promote St Helena's MPA to local and international audiences

Marine Awareness Week took place between 17th and 21st March 2025 with a focus on climate change and its effects on St Helena's MPA. Over 500 students visited the Museum of St Helena throughout the week. Dr Susana Lincoln from Cefas gave a presentation on the findings of a 4-year study on the impacts of climate change on key marine species in St Helena and MFCS gave out climate information cards to key stakeholders. The study found that whilst St Helena's waters may become more suitable for some fish species, many reef species are restricted to small habitat areas, so



Susana Lincoln presenting on the climate change work carried out around St Helena at Marine Awareness Week

are vulnerable to climate change impacts. MFCS also took students who did not have the opportunity last year, out on a boat trip. Ninety-eight primary students and 7 secondary students who had never been on a tourism style boat trip before were able to experience the MPA first-hand. During the week, MFCS also ran a window decorating competition for local businesses in Jamestown and a school poster competition. The entries to both competitions showcased amazing creativity and highlighted the critical issues of climate change and what everyone can do to help reduce our carbon footprint. In support of the Career Access St Helena Careers Fair Day, MFCS also provided visitors with an opportunity to learn more about different career pathways in marine conservation.



A presentation given at Marine Awareness Week to school children



Staff from MFCS, SHNT, Cefas, MMO, Ascension Island Conservation and Tristan da Cunha at IMCC7

MFCS has run a total of 48 social media campaigns over the year using the hashtag #smallislandBIGFUTURE. This year also saw the launch of the newsletter, the Quarterly Catch, with the first edition published in April 2025. MFCS plan to continue publishing these newsletters every three months, providing the ability to showcase the work MFCS have been doing within our MPA to both local and international audiences.

A small team from SHG, SHNT and the Blue Belt Programme attended the 7th International Marine Conservation Congress (IMCC7) in Cape Town, South Africa. More than 800 scientists and practitioners from across the globe attended the conference. The team gave five presentations:

- 'Converting evidence into management: from local data collection to regional fisheries advice'
- 'St Helena - strengthening governance to ensure a small island has a big future'
- 'A community discovering the value of the ocean and its people through a journey of discovery'
- 'Human dimensions of a large scale marine protected area in St Helena'
- 'Marine conservation on one of the world's most remote islands'

They also presented a poster, 'St Helena Island managing the effects of human impacts on our marine environment'. SHNT had an exhibition stand, raising awareness of all the work happening to effectively monitor and manage St Helena's MPA. The conference was a fantastic opportunity to showcase our work internationally and develop new collaborations.

With assistance from the Blue Belt Programme, MFCS have started a programme to monitor the social, cultural and economic importance of the MPA. A questionnaire was used to assess how the community values the marine environment and their understanding of the MPA. The study highlighted the importance of St Helena's marine environment to the community for food, recreation and wellbeing. It found that over 70% of people felt that the MPA had brought about a positive change - both for the community and the environment and a 35% increase in general knowledge of the MPA. This survey will be repeated in 2- to 3 years' time to monitor changes over time.



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