

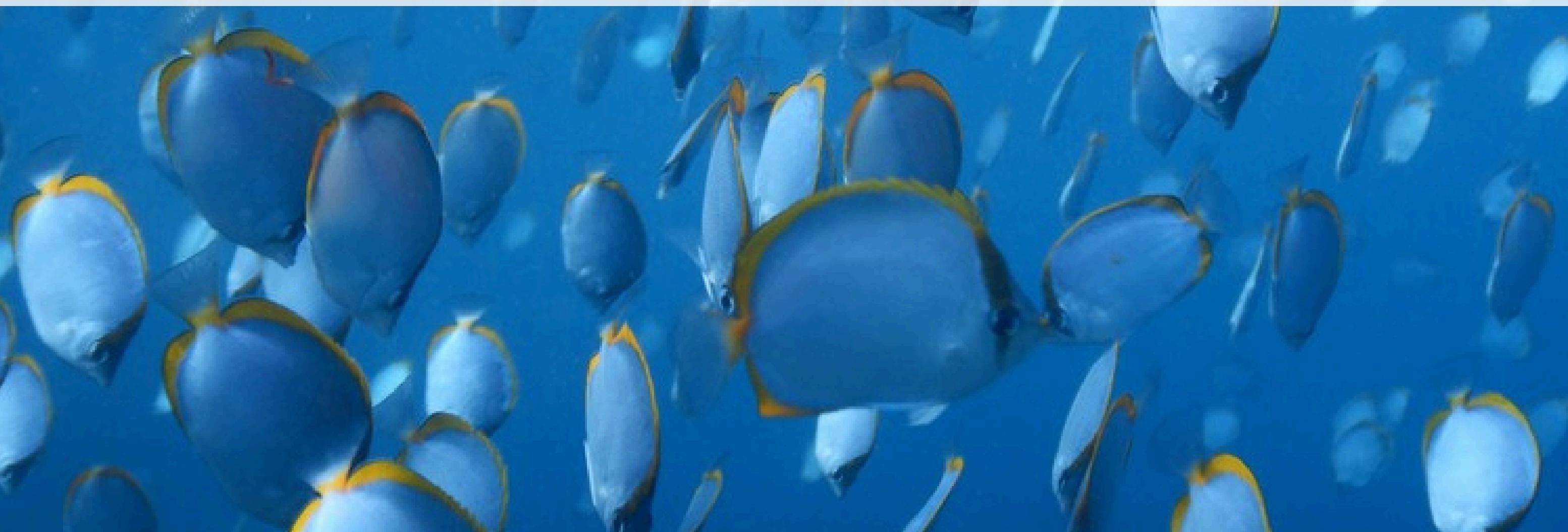


THE MARINE AND FISHERIES CONSERVATION SECTION

QUARTERLY CATCH

APRIL - JUNE 2025

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It's the second edition of the **QUARTERLY CATCH** for **APRIL TO JUNE 2025**!

Read below to find out what we have been up to this quarter.

The Marine and Fisheries Conservation Section (MFCS) team, in line with the vision of the Marine Management Plan 2023-27, aim to conserve, protect and restore the rich biodiversity and unique natural ecosystems of St Helena's Marine Protected Area (MPA) with use of its natural resources managed in accordance with its International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Category 6 sustainable use principles now and for future generations.

This quarter has been both exciting and productive at the Marine Centre, with several highlights from MFCS's active work areas:

With new staff members joining the team and several important marine surveys completed, including lobster monitoring, underwater visual surveys and zooplankton surveys which are progressing successfully. We continue to make significant progress in understanding and protecting St Helena's marine environment.

The team was also introduced to a new scientific monitoring technique, environmental DNA (eDNA), with training provided by the Ascension Island Government (AIG). MFCS also enjoyed facilitating training for a new marine tour operator in St Helena to ensure they become an environmentally accredited marine tour operator. Additionally, we are currently in the testing phase of our marine tour operator app, which is being developed to enhance marine tourism experiences.

We also had the opportunity to highlight our work to ANRD during their away day, which provided a valuable chance to strengthen connections between divisions. Our marine sighting boat trips from MAW25 also received lots of positive feedback from participants. Additionally, one of our new team members had the opportunity to participate in the 3rd United Nations Ocean Conference, gaining valuable exposure and helping to foster the growth of future conservation leaders from the island.

The publication of the first-ever annual report for St Helena's Marine Management Plan (2023-2027) marks a major milestone in the island's marine conservation journey. The report highlights the government's continued commitment to sustainable ocean management through science-driven policies, ongoing monitoring, capacity building, and active community involvement.

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NEW STAFF JOINS THE MFCS TEAM!

We're very excited to welcome our new Marine and Fisheries Conservation Officer, Adam Riggs, and Marine Fisheries and Conservation Assistant, Cerys Joshua!

Cerys was originally the marine apprentice here on the island before she left for Ascension, where she worked with the Marine Conservation Team to support Ascension Island's MPA and several Darwin Plus Projects. On Ascension, she contributed to shark research, aided plastic pollution mitigation, and supported seabird and marine biodiversity monitoring. Assisted with fish stock assessments and climate change studies, gained experience in otolith analysis, and enhanced her data analysis and zooplankton identification skills. And she has now returned to St Helena to share all of these skills with the SHG Marine Team.

Cerys said: *"So far, I've been enjoying the office–fieldwork balance and being out on the boat with grouper and ichthyoplankton work. I'm looking forward to continuing to learn new things in the marine field growing my marine career."*

Adam was first introduced to the island through the St Helena National Trust (SHNT), where he volunteered as part of his Environmental Science degree. During his time with SHNT, he was involved in a variety of conservation areas including terrestrial, marine, and both built and natural heritage conservation. After returning to the UK to complete his degree, Adam knew he wanted to come back to St Helena. When the Marine and Fisheries Conservation Officer role was advertised, he applied and was successful.

Adam shared: *"It's great to be back on the island and seeing friends. I'm looking forward to getting involved in all the monitoring and management work of St Helena's beautiful MPA."*

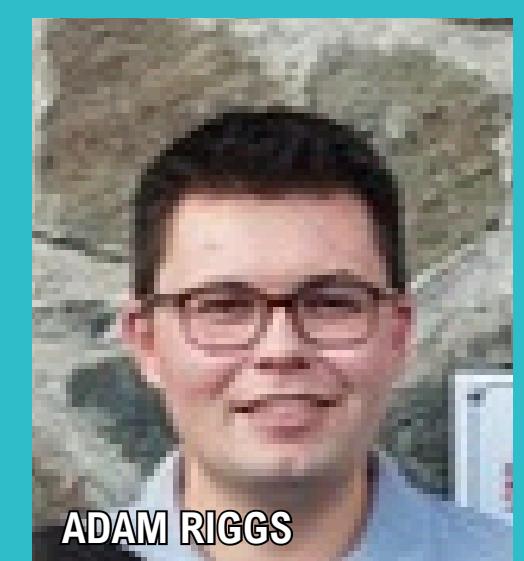


THE MARINE AND FISHERIES CONSERVATION TEAM

It's fantastic to have such a talented and fully staffed team. We're looking forward to working together to conserve and protect our amazing MPA.



CERYS JOSHUA



ADAM RIGGS

ZOOPLANKTON (FISH EGGS AND LARVAE) SURVEYS



TRANSFERRING SAMPLES INTO SAMPLE JARS

For this project, we are conducting zooplankton surveys every other week, which will continue for a full year. There are 18 stations in total, spread across both the leeward and windward sides of the island. So far, the team has had a brilliant start, with favourable weather enabling successful sample collection.

Using a plankton net tow, a method that involves towing a fine-mesh net through the water, the team collects samples of tiny marine animals, with a particular focus on fish eggs and larvae.

These samples continue to yield fascinating specimens that the team is eager to process and study. By identifying and analysing these early life stages, the project will help improve our understanding of fish populations and support sustainable fisheries management. Overall, it's been a strong and promising start to this year-long scientific effort!



COLLECTING SAMPLES FROM THE PLANKTON NET

LOBSTER MONITORING SURVEY SEASON COMPLETED

The lobster monitoring surveys, which began in November 2024, have now been completed. This long-term monitoring tracks the brown spiny lobster *Panulirus echinatus* ("crayfish") and endemic red slipper lobster *Scyllarides obtusus* ("stump") to support sustainable fisheries management.



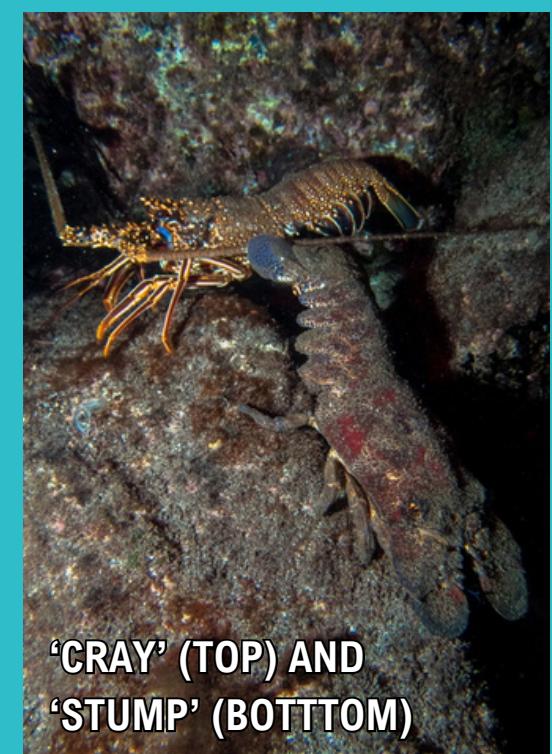
PULLING A LOBSTER POT UP FROM THE SEA FLOOR

They took place at multiple sites around the island and included underwater dive surveys and targeted capture-and-release using lobster pots - circular baited traps that safely catch lobsters. These efforts collected valuable biological data, with around 600 tags deployed on lobsters collected from the pots and encountered during dives.

We observed a steady increase in breeding activity, with an unexpected spike in March, usually the end of the breeding season. This peak was a surprise and could indicate a shift in breeding patterns, prompting a follow-up survey that extended the monitoring season. Although the follow-up survey showed the spike had not continued, it raised exciting questions for future monitoring.



NIGHT DIVE LOBSTER SURVEY



'CRAY' (TOP) AND
'STUMP' (BOTTOM)

UNDERWATER VISUAL CENSUS: APRIL SURVEY COMPLETE

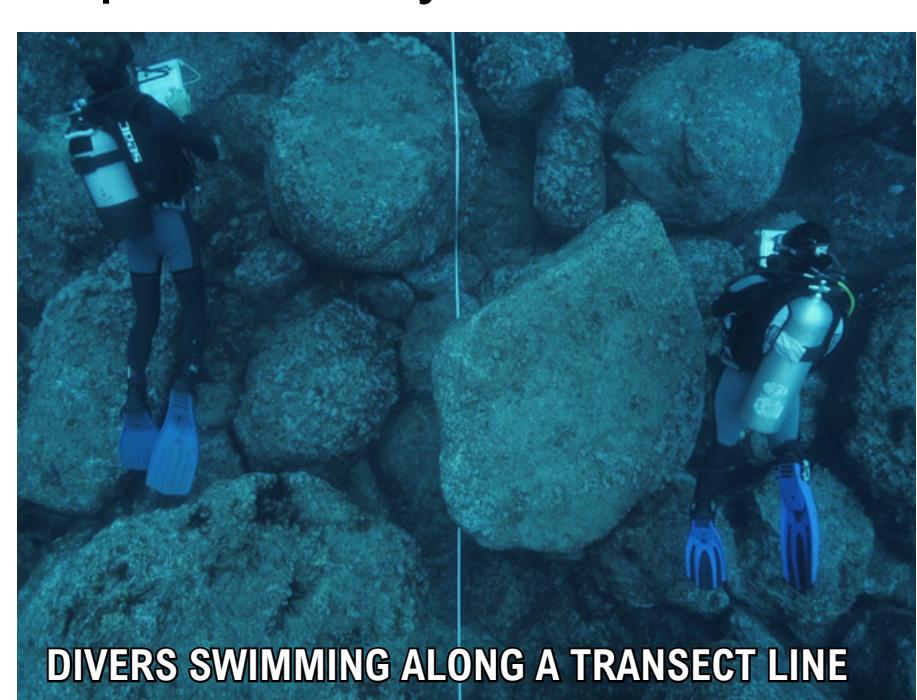


DIVERS TAKING QUADRAT PICTURES

We have also completed our UVC's for April of this year, a long-term monitoring program used to observe and count marine life in underwater environments. These surveys monitor trends in fish, invertebrate, and plant abundance.

To carry out this work, the MFCS dive team uses a technique called transect surveys, where divers swim along a fixed path and record the number and types of different species they see. Our team surveys 22 permanent transects across 12 sites around the island.

This project is an expansion of an earlier survey that began in 2002 and has been taking place since 2013, with dive surveys taking place every April and October. The data collected from UVCs helps inform conservation strategies, support fisheries management decisions, and provide a baseline for detecting long-term changes in marine ecosystems.



DIVERS SWIMMING ALONG A TRANSECT LINE



CURIOS DEVIL RAY WITH THE SURVEY TEAM

During our most recent survey, the team was pleasantly surprised by an unexpected visitor, a devil ray *Mobula tarapacana* that accompanied the divers for quite some time. It glided gracefully alongside the team, looping and flying through the water in what appeared to be a display of playful curiosity. This encounter was particularly special, as such inquisitive behavior is not typically observed in rays. Moments like these are a beautiful reminder of the richness of St Helena's waters and the value of protecting its unique and thriving MPA.

Strengthening Ties Through eDNA

In May this year, we were able to strengthen collaboration and share knowledge between MFCS and AIG through eDNA training, led by a member of AIG's marine conservation team.

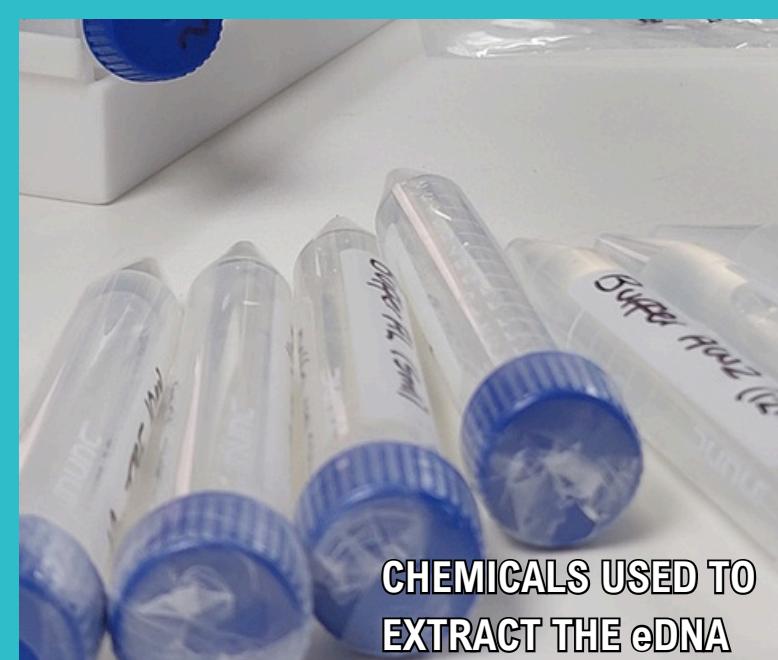
Environmental DNA, or eDNA, refers to genetic material that organisms leave behind in their environment, like tiny fingerprints. In this case, these "fingerprints" are found in the ocean around St Helena. By collecting and analysing water samples, scientists can detect which species are present without needing to see or capture them directly.



COLLECTING SAMPLES



FILTERING SAMPLES



CHEMICALS USED TO EXTRACT THE eDNA

Researchers extract eDNA from the samples using specialised methods, amplify it, and sequence the eDNA. By comparing these sequences to reference databases, they can identify the species the DNA belongs to.

This training introduced the MFCS team to new scientific techniques, expanding their research capabilities, which is especially valuable for detecting elusive, endemic, deep-sea, invasive, or microscopic species.

MARINE TOUR OPERATOR (MTO) TRAINING



FIRST MTO TRAINING CERTIFICATE PRESENTATION

To support the sustainable use of St Helena's MPA, it is essential that marine tour operators (MTOs) are fully aware of the rules and guidelines for interacting with local marine wildlife. Since 2014/2016, an environmental accreditation system has been in place, developed in collaboration with MTOs, to ensure operators follow best practices, with clear guidelines established to protect marine life during marine tourism activities.

In 2023, this framework was strengthened through the passing of the Marine Regulations (Tourism and Interaction with Marine Life) 2023, as part of the Environmental Protection Ordinance 2016, which now makes it a legal requirement for tour operators to undergo training and receive accreditation before applying for a marine tour license.



NEWLY ESTABLISHED MTO 'SEAHAWK ODESSY LTD' WITH THEIR MARINE ENVIRONMENT ACCREDITED TOUR OPERATOR CERTIFICATES

As part of ongoing efforts to modernise and enhance this process, funding has been secured from the Blue Belt Programme to develop a purpose-built mobile app for St Helena's marine tourism. This digital platform will enable MTOs to easily log tour details, report locations, and record both positive and negative wildlife interactions in real time.

Moving away from paper-based systems not only supports environmental sustainability but also aligns with the island's transition into the digital age, making full use of St Helena's newly improved internet infrastructure. The new app will improve efficiency for operators while helping MFCS monitor marine activities more effectively and protect the island's unique marine environment.

CERYS JOSHUA REPRESENTS ST HELENA AT UN OCEANS CONFERENCE 2025

As part of the 3rd United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3), held in Nice, France, from June 8-13, 2025, Marine and Fisheries Conservation Assistant Cerys Joshua was selected to represent St Helena as a youth delegate through the Green Overseas (GO) Programme. Funded by the EU and implemented by Expertise France, the GO Programme supports the sustainable and inclusive development of European and British overseas countries and territories. It brought together ten young delegates, including Cerys, to represent their islands on an international platform.

The conference provided Cerys with an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the marine challenges faced by various territories. It was also invaluable for connecting with fellow youth from these regions, learning about their communities, and identifying shared interests and goals for future ocean conservation.

Describing her experience, Cerys said:

“As someone at the beginning of my journey in marine conservation, I found the experience incredibly immersive.”



CERYS WITH OTHER YOUTH DELEGATES AT THE CONFERENCE



She tailored her schedule to focus on topics relevant to St Helena, attending sessions on sustainable fisheries, MPA management, and ocean data collection. These sessions offered insights into how conservation is approached globally and highlighted the scale of marine environmental challenges around the world.

“It is essential that young people have a voice in the decisions being made today. We are not just the future; we are active participants in shaping a more sustainable world. ...I hope my experience encourages others in our community, especially other young Saints, to take up opportunities like this. I am so proud to have represented St Helena and to have been part of a global dialogue focused on ocean sustainability and youth empowerment.”

CONNECTING DIVISIONS: MFCS HIGHLIGHTS WORK AT AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES DIVISION AWAY DAY



During the month of May, the MFCS team was asked to give an overview of the activities and responsibilities of the Marine Section for the Agriculture and Natural Resources Division (ANRD) Away Day. The aim of this day was to promote familiarisation of operations, highlight our contributions, and explain the significance of our work for the community between sections of the Environment and Natural Resources Planning portfolio (ENRP) as a whole.

We gave a short tour of our facilities, showcasing the various equipment utilised in our scientific work. As well as an overview and chat about MFCS work areas, including research and monitoring programs, fisheries management, and community engagement.

STUDENT FEEDBACK FROM MARINE SIGHTING BOAT TRIPS

As part of our Marine Awareness Week 2025 (MAW25), we invited feedback from the participating schools whose students attended the marine sighting boat trips. The results were eye-opening, with 98 primary students and 7 secondary students sharing that they had never been on a tourism-style boat trip before.



These numbers highlight just how impactful these experiences can be. Opening up new perspectives and fostering a deeper connection with the marine environment for many of our young islanders. Even more exciting, 65% of all students who attended said the trips helped them appreciate their marine environment a lot more, a fantastic result that shows the real value of this kind of hands-on experience.

ST HELENA MARINE MANAGEMENT PLAN ANNUAL REPORT PUBLISHED



The St Helena Government has proudly published the first annual report for the Marine Management Plan (MMP) 2023-27, a major milestone in the island's marine conservation journey. Launched in May 2023, the MMP sets an ambitious five-year vision to protect St Helena's unique marine environment while promoting responsible use, economic growth, and community involvement.

Covering June 2023 to May 2024, notable highlights from the reporting year include:

- *St Helena's recognition as a "Hope Spot" by Mission Blue for leadership in ocean protection and ecotourism;*
- *Expanded scientific monitoring of tuna, seamounts, and invasive species;*
- *New investments in equipment and staff training;*
- *Development of sustainable financing strategies;*
- *Ongoing community engagement through citizen science and education.*

To help measure how well the MPA is being looked after, a recognised international review tool was used and St Helena scored over 75%, confirming a solid foundation in planning, staffing, and community support. This inaugural report reaffirms the government's commitment to science-driven, collaborative marine management, ensuring a thriving ocean for generations to come.

Learn more and download the executive summary here:

<https://www.sainthelena.gov.sh/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/St-Helena-MMP-Annual-Report-2023-24-Executive-Summary.pdf>

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