



**St Helena  
Government**

# St Helena Marine Management Plan

Executive Summary  
September 2022



# ■ Introduction

The St Helena Marine Protected Area (MPA), covering the entire Exclusive Economic Zone (448,411km<sup>2</sup>), was designated in September 2016. The St Helena MPA is a 'Protected area with sustainable use of natural resources' MPA. This means that low-level human use is permitted, as long as it does not undermine the MPA's objectives.

The St Helena Marine Management Plan is the main tool to guide managers, people using the marine environment and other interested parties on how the MPA will be managed between 2022 and 2027. This Plan updates the previous Marine Management Plan published in 2016, taking new evidence into account and reflecting new priorities. We consulted with local and international stakeholders to get their views on MPA management to date. We also conducted a protected area management effectiveness evaluation. These highlighted the progress made so far and identified actions to improve management of the MPA over the next five years. This helped to inform development of this revised Marine Management Plan.

Part 1 of the Marine Management Plan includes detailed information about the St Helena MPA. Part 2 describes how the MPA will be managed over the next 5 years.

## Key values of the MPA

St Helena's marine environment is one of the island's most valuable assets. The marine environment of St Helena is valued for its:

- **Natural beauty, diverse and unique ecological environment and its associated flora and fauna which has global importance:** St Helena's remoteness and age has given rise to the development of a unique assemblage of species. For example, as of July 2022, there are 18 marine species that are endemic to St Helena and found nowhere else on Earth.
- **Cultural and historical influences:** The sea has influenced our culture and traditions and our coastal and port infrastructure. It also provides a vital lifeline to the island.
- **Economic benefits and opportunities derived from the natural environment underpinned by robust evidence and strong environmental consciousness:** The sea provides benefits such as commercial fisheries, tourism and recreation. These provide income and food, as well as opportunities for relaxation and links to cultural heritage.
- **Ability to provide health, wellbeing and spirituality benefits to all:** There is a deep and spiritual connection to the sea that cannot be valued by conventional means. Benefits include relaxation, enjoyment, restfulness, connection with nature and improved mental health.

## Threats to the MPA

**Habitat damage:** Habitat damage can be caused by activities in both the coastal zone and within the marine environment. Coastal developments are not considered within this Marine Management Plan as they are managed through the Land Planning and Development Control Ordinance, 2013. In the marine environment, boaters, snorkelers, and SCUBA divers that come into direct contact with marine ecosystems can potentially cause damage to sensitive marine species. These activities are currently managed through the 'Marine Tourism Policy for St Helena' and the associated marine environment accreditation scheme and environmental best practice guidelines. Marine development activities (including sand extraction, vessel moorings, submarine cables and artificial reefs) could also impact the seabed and associated marine habitats. These activities and potential future activities such as deep-sea mining are managed through the 'Policy for managing development activities within St Helena's marine environment'.

**Overfishing:** Fishing in St Helena is managed through the Fisheries Ordinance, 2021. This minimises the likelihood of overfishing occurring. Management measures include the need for a valid fishing licence and completion of logbooks. There are also species-specific measures such as: minimum landing sizes, closed seasons and Total Allowable Catch limits. Monitoring of the fisheries allows the status of the stock to be reviewed, ensuring fishing pressure is kept at a sustainable level.



**Bycatch:** Bycatch occurs when fishers catch non-target species and discard them alive or dead. St Helena has imposed “one-by-one” fishing methods in St Helena’s waters. These methods have very limited bycatch. They target schooling fish during feeding frenzies and remove the desired fish species one-by-one.

**Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing:**

Compliance with the St Helena MPA is good to date. A Compliance and Enforcement Strategy has been developed for St Helena and is being implemented by the marine enforcement team on island. This will ensure that we achieve full compliance with relevant legislation within the MPA.

**Disturbance to marine wildlife:** Activities such as snorkelling, sport fishing and SCUBA diving can disturb marine animals. Whale sharks, dolphins, whales, and birds are disturbed by boats and people approaching too close. This can cause stress and injury to animals and can reduce their breeding success. It can also cause animals to avoid the area. These activities are currently managed through the ‘Marine Tourism Policy for St Helena’ and the associated marine environment accreditation scheme and environmental best practice guidelines.

**Marine pollution:** Threats include pollution from visiting and transiting ships, including the risk of a major spill from large vessels. This threat is low due to low numbers of vessels in the MPA. St Helena Government is working with partners to meet its international obligations for preventing and responding to maritime pollution. Raw sewerage and wastewater discharges into James Bay also pose a pollution threat. Monthly water quality monitoring has been conducted to assess the level of this threat. Plastic pollution is one of the biggest problems affecting the world’s oceans generally. St Helena is exposed to this threat from both international and local sources. The St Helena National Trust has developed a comprehensive outreach programme to raise awareness of this issue and currently has a collaborative project to look at ways to reduce use of single use plastics on island.

**Marine invasive non-native species (INNS):** St Helena is at low risk for marine INNS due to its isolated geographical location. Six non-native species have been currently recorded within the St Helena MPA. Of these, only the sea-grapes pose a potential threat of impacting the marine environment. New species may be introduced on the hulls or in the ballast water of visiting vessels. The St Helena Government’s Biosecurity Protocol for the Marine Environment aims to minimise this risk.

**Climate change:** • Climate change is one of the biggest threats the environment faces during the next century. It is currently unclear what the impacts of climate change may be on habitats and species within the MPA. Changes in ocean currents in the future may affect fisheries and nature-based tourism. Changing temperatures may also enable the introduction of new marine INNS. Increased extreme weather events could impact the island’s economy and local communities. This could occur through impacts to shipping, increased land run-off into the sea, changing water temperatures and damage to coastal infrastructure. The ‘Climate Change Policy for St Helena’ aims to reduce the quantity of greenhouse gas emissions on island and carry out regular environmental monitoring.



## MPA Management principles

All current human activities within the MPA are managed within a comprehensive policy and legislative framework. This makes sure that these activities do not damage or disturb St Helena’s marine habitats and species.

- Only one-by-one fishing methods are permitted within the St Helena MPA (handlines, pole-and-line, pots, by hand, spear gun)
- Only marine tourism activities that are compatible with the goals and objectives of this St Helena Marine Management Plan are permitted within the MPA.
- Only proposals for marine developments that are compatible with the goals and objectives of this Marine Management Plan are supported within the MPA.

Management of the MPA is guided by the following management principles:

- **Precautionary principle:** Where evidence is inconclusive, St Helena Government will make reasonable efforts to fill evidence gaps. But we will also need to apply precaution within a risk-based approach.
- **Sustainable development approach:** Any activities within the St Helena MPA must have a minimal impact on the marine environment. They must also bring positive social and economic benefits to the island community.
- **Evidence-based:** All management decisions will be based on the best available information. As far as possible, any knowledge gaps will be addressed through research and monitoring.
- **Collaborative:** The support of the local community is vital for effective management of the MPA. Key stakeholders have been involved in the review and revision of the Marine Management Plan. The local community is being consulted on the draft Plan. It is crucial that this collaboration continues in the future.

## MPA Management Plan vision

The rich biodiversity and unique natural ecosystems of St Helena’s MPA are conserved, protected, and restored, with use of its natural resources managed in line with its IUCN Category VI sustainable use principles now and for future generations.



## MPA Management Goals and Objectives

In order to achieve this long-term vision, the goals and objectives of the St Helena MPA are:

- **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.
  - **Objective 1.2:** A monitoring strategy is in place to understand baselines and track changes to the marine environment.
  - **Objective 1.3:** Current and future threats to the marine environment are understood and risk assessed to enable a proactive approach to risk management.
- **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 of target species informed by scientific evidence and local knowledge.
  - **Objective 2.2:** Development activities in the marine environment are effectively managed to prevent, minimise and mitigate adverse impacts, whilst supporting sustainable economic development.
  - **Objective 2.3:** Marine tourism activities minimise impacts on the marine environment and species, including large charismatic marine species, whilst supporting economic development.
  - **Objective 2.4:** A suitable level of prevention preparedness and response to a marine pollution incident is developed, established and maintained.
  - **Objective 2.5:** Activities within the marine environment are regulated and enforced, with clear and transparent information provided to all users.

■ **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.
- **Objective 3.2:** An education and awareness campaign is in place to provide information about, and promotion of, St Helena's MPA to local and international audiences.

In order to achieve the MPA goals, a number of different management actions are proposed under each of the objectives.

## Monitoring and Review

Annual reviews will be conducted by staff within the ENRP Portfolio in collaboration with key stakeholders in St Helena. The Marine Management Plan will undergo a comprehensive review and evaluation every five years. This will be completed through a consultation process with stakeholders and other interested parties.



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