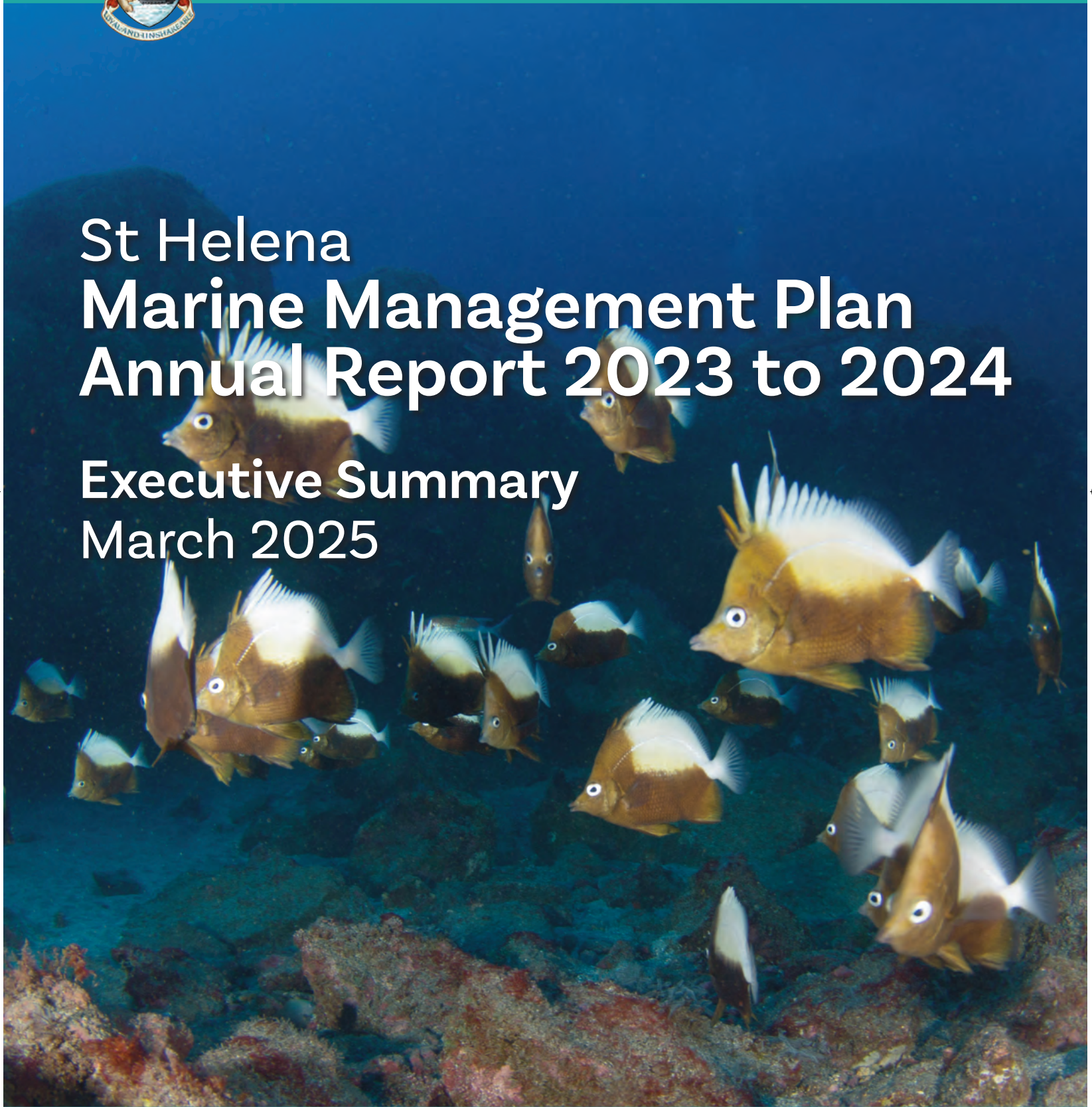




**St Helena  
Government**

# **St Helena Marine Management Plan Annual Report 2023 to 2024**

**Executive Summary  
March 2025**



# 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 2023 to 31st May 2024.

## Highlights

For such a small island with very limited resources, St. Helena has achieved a lot, and our efforts have been acknowledged locally and internationally. In November 2023, the marine conservation non-profit organisation Mission Blue named St Helena a 'Hope Spot'. This recognised the island's ongoing initiatives to manage and monitor its marine environment as well as to grow a sustainable ecotourism economy. St Helena also continues to collect important data on highly migratory species present within its waters including tunas. The data are used to support both local and international management of these important populations.

**Goal 1: The island's 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

St Helena conducted the first official protected area management effectiveness (PAME) assessment this year. This was completed by representatives of St Helena Government (SHG) and the St Helena National Trust (SHNT), assisted by the Blue Belt Programme. It reflected the status of management as of June 2023 and reviewed all work to date. The assessment highlighted what is working well but also identified what we can do to improve management of the MPA. We plan to repeat this assessment in 2 years' time to track progress over time.

Staffing levels are currently adequate to implement the MMP. Training was undertaken by eleven staff across SHG over the year. This included:

- exposure training for 2 Marine and Fisheries Conservation Section (MFCS) staff with the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) in the UK
- practical compliance and enforcement training for the Marine Compliance and Enforcement Section from the Marine Management Organisation (MMO)
- training in surveying techniques for marine invasive non-native species provided by Plymouth Marine Laboratory (PML) Applications.

The MFCS also received a range of equipment to enhance the laboratory facility and support scientific research activities.

With assistance from the Blue Belt Programme, St Helena assessed the long-term costs of implementing the MMP and identified funding gaps. The Environmental and Natural Resources Planning (ENRP) Portfolio is now working with project partners to assess options for filling these funding gaps. This will inform development of an MPA sustainable financing strategy.

### Objective 1.2:

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

The St Helena Monitoring and Research Plan was created, consulted on and adopted by the ENRP Portfolio in May 2023. It is an internal document that guides the research and monitoring needed to support achievement of the MPA objectives.

Since June 2023, the MFCS and SHNT have conducted 14 dedicated monitoring surveys. These have included:

- Baited Remote Underwater Video (BRUV) surveys
- Underwater visual census surveys
- Surveys of key fisheries species (grouper and tuna) and important marine species (whale sharks and seabirds)
- Oceanographic monitoring
- Beach surveys for plastic pollution.

These surveys help us to understand the current status of marine habitats and species within the MPA and identify any trends over time.



New CTD



**Objective 1.3:**

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

Cefas has been investigating the potential impacts of climate change on St Helena's marine environment. They reviewed current knowledge and assessed the future climate change risks to 23 priority marine species. MFCS has also enhanced the existing oceanographic monitoring programme to better assess climate change risks.

Specialists from PML Applications in the UK visited St Helena in December 2023 to support the establishment of a marine invasive non-native species monitoring programme. The MFCS has conducted two hull fouling surveys and deployed settlement plates to help understand the risk from visiting vessels.

**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 conducts scientific research on commercially and recreationally important fish species including yellowfin tuna, grouper and various redfish. This research aims to determine the status of stocks and understand the biology and ecology of these species. The research is conducted using tagging, biometric sampling, logbook monitoring and fisheries observer trips. The data is shared with Cefas who analyses the data and makes management recommendations for SHG to consider. SHG has used the results to inform the following fisheries management measures to allow stocks to recover:

- temporary suspension on catch and retention of red slipper lobster (stump)
- reduced Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for grouper
- minimum landing size for jacks and catch methods for marlin

The ENRP Portfolio also reviewed all fishing licence templates and conditions. Revised licences were issued in April 2024 to reflect updated conditions and ensure compliance with international fisheries obligations.

**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 ENRP Portfolio is currently revising the 'Policy for managing development activities within St Helena's marine environment'. This will inform drafting of new Regulations under the Environmental Protection Ordinance.

**Objective 2.3:**

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

The Marine Regulations (Tourism and Interaction with Marine Life), 2023 was gazetted on 9th October 2023. These new regulations aim to minimise disturbance to marine wildlife within the MPA. Fifteen marine tour operator personnel were trained as part of St Helena's Marine Tour Operator Environmental Accreditation Scheme in September 2023. All attained the required levels of competency to receive their accreditation certificate. Mechanisms for licensing have been set up, ready for their roll-out during the next tourist season.



Successful Marine Tour Operators at Plantation House

**Objective 2.4:**

A suitable level of prevention preparedness and response to a marine pollution incident is developed, established and maintained

Previous research on water quality around St Helena identified a need for management. This resulted in the development of the St Helena Marine Pollution Policy which the ENRP Advisory Board approved on 22nd November 2023.

St Helena has in place an Oil Pollution Response Plan and a Port Pollution Response Plan. Port Control have identified additional risk operations and have, to date, drafted a response plan for the bunkering of fuel. St Helena has equipment to contain oil spills and preserve wildlife and key personnel have been trained to respond in the event of a pollution incident.

**Objective 2.5:**

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

The Marine Compliance and Enforcement Strategy was internally reviewed in February 2024. A formal revision of the Strategy will now be undertaken. As part of the Blue Belt Programme, intel analysts from the MMO conduct near daily checks of vessels' Automatic Identification System (AIS) within and around the MPA. These showed 100% compliance with the MPA. Ten instances of suspicious activity were investigated. These investigations revealed no Illegal, Unreported or Unregulated (IUU) fishing had taken place within 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 ENRP Portfolio 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. They also gave stakeholders the opportunity to input into the decision-making process. Following on from a workshop in March 2023, MFCS is considering how best to take forwards recommendations to establish an MPA working group. This would allow interested stakeholders to more actively engage in the management of the MPA.



*MFCS staff at the Blue Belt Symposium in London*

**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

MFCS has run a total of six social media campaigns over the year using the hashtag #smallislandBIGFuture. MFCS created a series of videos focused on the Mission Blue Hot Spot designation. These highlighted local people talking about their hope for the Hope Spot. MFCS also ran a competition to name a new seamount that was discovered in 2022 by the RRS Discovery. The seamount was officially named "Young Seamount" honouring the late Captain Rodney Young, the first St Helenian captain of the RMS St Helena. Marine Awareness Week took place between 14th and 27th March 2024. This year, the MFCS hosted every school child in St Helena at sea to experience the wonders of St Helena's MPA themselves.

Three staff from the MFCS attended the Blue Belt Symposium in London in February. This provided an excellent opportunity to showcase the work St Helena is doing to protect and sustainably manage our marine environment.

The MFCS has started work to establish a long-term monitoring programme to assess the cultural, social and economic values of the MPA. Working with the Blue Belt Programme, a questionnaire was developed to better understand how the MPA is currently used, how important the marine environment is to the local community and what benefits the MPA provides.



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