

## Regional Outlook on Marine Protected Areas: Background, Purpose and Process

### ***The Background***

The Nairobi Convention through its GEF-funded project, '***Implementation of the Strategic Action Programme for the protection of the Western Indian Ocean from land-based sources and activities (WIO-SAP)***', which started in December 2016, is supporting Contracting Parties towards the delivery of the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in general and specifically Goal (SDG) 14 with special focus on Targets 14.2 and 14.5. Target 14.2 calls for the sustainable management and protection of marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration, to achieve healthy and productive oceans by 2020, while Target 14.5 states that by 2020, countries shall conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on best available scientific information.

The WIO-SAP Project addresses priority conservation issues within the WIO Region as agreed on by Contracting Parties through the following Components:

**Component A:** *Sustainable management of critical habitats* focuses on the protection, restoration and management of critical coastal habitats and ecosystems recognizing the enormous value of healthy critical coastal and marine habitats for the future well-being of people in the WIO region.

**Component B:** *Improved water quality* focuses on the need for the WIO Region's water quality to attain international standards by the year 2035.

**Component C:** *Sustainable management of river flows* aims at promoting wise management of river basins in the region through implementation of a suite of activities aimed at building the capacity for environmental flows assessment and application in river basins of the region.

**Component D:** *Governance and regional collaboration* focuses on strengthening governance and awareness in the WIO region with a view to facilitating sustainable management of critical coastal ecosystems and habitats.

The Regional Outlook on Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the WIO region is one of the main outputs of Component A, and together with the Regional Outlook on Critical Habitats is intended to inform policy-making with regard to enhanced coastal and marine conservation in the region. These two publications will feed into a third publication on recommendations for strengthening marine conservation in the WIO region, aimed at supporting contracting parties to meet their obligations, specifically under SDG Targets 14.2 and 14.5 and Aichi Target 11, and also under other SDGs.

All three publications are being developed in partnership with the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA), which with its strong connections across the scientific and MPA communities in the region is playing a vital co-ordination and commissioning role.

### ***The Purpose***

The specific purpose of the Regional Outlook on MPAs is to provide a baseline assessment of existing coastal and marine conservation efforts in the region. This involves not only a quantitative assessment of the areas and habitats currently under

protection, but also a qualitative assessment of the effectiveness of the protection measures in place across the region. Areas considered to be under sufficient levels of protection for inclusion in this assessment are those which have been formally proclaimed, under appropriate legislation as MPAs, and those under forms of protection which conform to the internationally recognised criteria for Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs).

This Outlook will contribute to a larger process involving the development of an Outlook on Critical Habitats in the region, and a final Outlook on recommendations for the available future strategic options, including other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) for countries to achieve the 10% target based on the identification of critical habitats that require protection. The Outlook captures the spatial extent and management effectiveness of current MPAs, makes recommendations for enhanced management and also documents proposed MPAs as countries make progress towards the 10/20 target. The link between the MPA Outlook and the related Critical Habitats Outlook is that many habitats are found within these MPAs, although some, in particular the deep-sea habitats are not well represented. Understanding the degree of coverage currently afforded the regions critical habitats will help inform the recommendations for future areas to be brought under protection through the establishment of more MPAs and OECMs.

### ***The Development Process***

The Outlook development process was initiated through a scoping workshop in Victoria, Mahé, Seychelles in June 2017. The objectives of this workshop were:

- to develop and agree on a process to conduct of an overview of existing regional MPAs as part of the implementation of the SDG Target 14.5; and
- to develop and agree on a process to undertake a regional critical habitats inventory in the context of biodiversity and existing and emerging economic activities.

With the intended outcomes of these processes to achieve:

- establishment of authoritative databases on the most critical habitats and the biodiversity most at risk;
- MPA coverage (size, maps, and the conservation value of the MPAs from a biodiversity and socio-ecological values)
- determination of the management effectiveness of MPA including adaptive management processes and requirements
- determination of participating countries' future options for achieving 10% MPA coverage (e) communication to countries on what they need to do to achieve the 10% target based on identification of critical habitats that require protection, and on the consequences of failing to meet the target, and
- a consistent monitoring and reporting framework at national and regional levels.

The process has involved the commissioning of an editor and of authors from each country to collate all available information on existing MPAs and areas under equivalent protection, and also on the rapidly emerging phenomenon of Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs), and their equivalents in different countries. The Outlook also has a strong focus on management effectiveness of MPAs to which a section is dedicated. All draft chapters are being subjected to both internal and external review and a validation process is underway with all countries concerned.

The design and layout processes are being led by a publication design specialist in collaboration with WIOMSA, the NBO Convention and the editor. The aim is to have a final on-line electronic version of the Outlook ready for launch at the ninth Conference of the Parties to the Nairobi Convention on 31 August 2018, with a print version scheduled for the end of October 2018.

While the 10/20 target is the initial focus of this initiative, the Regional Outlook on Marine Protected Areas will provide a sound foundation on which to build marine conservation across the WIO Region into the future.