

PROTECTING MARINE AND COASTAL RESOURCES IN SEYCHELLES BALANCING DEVELOPMENT AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

The 26 of March, 2020, the Government of Seychelles announced the achievement of a milestone for the country: [the legal designation of 30% of Seychelles' ocean territory as a Marine Protected Area.](#)

The new Marine Area covering 410,000 square kilometers is now declared as protected under the National Parks and Nature Conservancy Act. Almost half of this area is declared *high biodiversity zone* where all extractive uses are either excluded or highly restricted. The rest are *medium biodiversity and sustainable use zones* where enterprises vital to Seychelles' economy will continue to operate, managed under new sustainability regulations.

This decision is part of a complex strategy adopted by the Seychelles Government to balance demands for development with the need to protect the environment. Biodiversity is one of the country's most important assets, supporting several major economic sectors as fisheries and tourism and the Government has established ambitious targets to protect its terrestrial area and marine environment.

The archipelago of Seychelles, home to 97,000 inhabitants, consists of about 115 islands, with its ocean territory spreading out across more than one million km² in the Western Indian Ocean. This archipelago is considered a global hotspot for biodiversity with the world's largest populations of several seabirds, a high diversity of cetaceans, and abundant marine life from many taxonomic groups including sea turtles, sharks, invertebrates and more than 1,000 fish species. 90% of the total land surface area of Seychelles is covered by forests.

The Seychelles' Protected Area includes the Aldabra Atoll, one of the largest atolls in the world with rich terrestrial and marine biodiversity which has been recognized as [UNESCO World Heritage marine site](#) in 1982. In 1983 the [Vallée de Mai Nature Reserve](#) has also been recognized as UNESCO world heritage site. Investing in sustainable development and protecting its extraordinary natural resources, in 2016 Seychelles reached the highest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in Africa.

In 2012, at the Rio Sustainable Development Conference, the Government made the commitment to protect 30% of its marine environment. In 2020 it has already tripled the Target 11 of the UN Convention of Biological Diversity with the achievement of 10% marine protection by 2020, and the Goal 14 of the UN Sustainable Development with 10% coastal and marine protection.

The new Marine Protected Area approved in 2020 form part of a whole [Marine Spatial Plan](#) implemented in 2014 by the Government of Seychelles in collaboration with [Nature Conservancy](#), the [Global](#)



[Environmental Facility GEF](#) and the United Nations Development Programme UNDP. The Plan (the second largest in the world), covers 1,374,000 km² of Seychelles' ocean and the 115 islands, addressing increased management of all marine resources and ecosystems. The Marine Spatial planning initiative is a public and participatory process focused on planning for the sustainable use of the Seychelles' marine space, adopting an integrated approach which brings together economy, environment and society. More than 200 consultations with Seychelles' citizens, scientists, and key businesses guided the process which allowed to define a [Seychelles Blue Economy Strategic Framework and Roadmap](#) approved by the Government of Seychelles in January 2018. [Implementation of the Seychelles' Marine Spatial Plan will begin in 2021.](#)

Sustainable management of marine protected areas undoubtedly requires significant financial resources. The ocean is changing as overfishing, pollution, climate change, and the cumulative impacts of human activity on land and sea are driving an alarming decline in its health. Through its national policies and the Marine Spatial Plan, the Government managed to build a *Seychelles Blue Economy Brand* allowing to identify new financing options to face these great challenges and take action for the prioritized agenda to 2030.

In February 2016, [in partnership with Nature Conservancy](#) a first innovative financing mechanism for a debt conversion has been implemented, to reduce the debt of the Seychelles and create financing for marine protected areas. This innovative funding mechanism has been extensively valued by the United Nations and other international organizations as an example for other countries wishing to invest in biodiversity resources. In 2018 the Republic of Seychelles with the support of the World Bank has also launched the world's first [sovereign blue bond](#), a financial instrument designed to finance sustainable marine and fisheries projects. The Seychelles blue bond is partially guaranteed by investors mobilized by the World Bank and further supported by a concessional loan from the [Global Environment Facility GEF](#).

One of the aspects related to the management of this vast ocean space and which has attracted international attention is connected with the reduction of plastic pollution. In 2019 the [Seychelles Islands Foundation \(SIF\)](#) an organization established in 1979 by the Government of Seychelles to manage and protect the UNESCO World Heritage Sites, implemented the [Aldabra Clean-Up Project](#) in collaboration with the [University of Oxford](#), to remove marine plastic waste from Aldabra's shores. During the clean-up 25.7 tons of plastic litter has been removed from Grande Terre, 60% of which consisted of fishing items such as nets and rope and 24% mostly consisted of plastic shoes. The project highlighted the large amount of plastic waste transported by sea currents on the coastal areas of Aldabra (estimated at 513 tons), and the important operational and financial resources needed to remove and properly manage this waste.

The experience of the Seychelles, which is part of the commitments undertaken by the international community for the protection of marine environment and biodiversity, is being extensively valued by different Agencies of the United Nations and other prestigious world environmental organizations. In 2019 the former Presidents of Seychelles, Danny Faure and James Michel have also been recognized as NatGeo Leaders, receiving the [Panetary and Leadership Award by the National Geographic Society](#).

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[Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan in seymisp.com](http://seymisp.com)

[Blue Economy Strategy and Road Map](#)

[Seychelles National Parks Authority website](#)

[News in seychellesnewsagency.com](http://seychellesnewsagency.com)

[Forest Genetic Resources Country Report Seychelles 2013](#)

[Nature Conservancy Seychelles](#)

[Article in Nature Conservancy website](#)

[Article in undp-biodiversity.exposure.co](http://undp-biodiversity.exposure.co)

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[Article in UNenvironment.org website](http://unenvironment.org)

[Marine Planning Initiatives in wedocs.unep.org](http://wedocs.unep.org)

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