

The Marine Mammal Management Toolkit: a tool for managers and policy makers

Press Release – 13th July 2021

Marine mammals play a crucial role in marine ecosystem function and climate change resilience by sequestering carbon through the consumption of energy rich plankton and fish. They provide valuable ecosystem services such as ecotourism. Conserving marine mammals provides significant economic, social and cultural benefits to coastal communities.

Historically marine mammals have been severely impacted through human activity with hunting in the 19th and 20th centuries nearly driving many species to extinction. While international efforts to ban such activities has seen some populations recover from these dangerously low levels (e.g., in 2021, increase of 36% of baleen whale species¹), this is not the case for all, with many populations remaining critically endangered. Whaling has been replaced by an abundance of anthropogenic hazards such as incidental by-catch, entanglement, ship strikes/collisions with ships, including in-direct habitat destruction, prey removal and noise pollution, as primary threats. To date, fishery by-catch continues to be a dominant conservation threat for many species.



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With the continued threats to marine mammals, compounded by the detrimental effects of Climate Change, there is a real need for effective conservation measures. The diversity of threats faced by marine mammals requires an equally diverse suite of conservation tools. One of the most common approaches is the use of Marine Protected Areas (MPA). MPAs may be designed to protect marine mammals directly by targeting threats or indirectly through management goals that may reduce impacts. However, in many cases, the success of an MPA is drastically hindered through a lack of

resources, capacity and/or knowledge to effectively implement management practices.

MM Twinning and Marine Mammal Management Toolkit

To tackle these threats, to fill knowledge gaps and to empower practitioners, managers and policy makers to effectively conserve marine mammals, the [Marine Mammal Twinning](#) has designed and created a toolkit for the inclusion of marine mammals into MPA, and other, management plans on an international scale. In addition, the [Marine Mammal Twinning](#) aims to build the technical capacities of MPA managers by sharing knowledge, expertise and good practises as well as creating a network of peers, that could provide assistance to other MPA managers on an *ad-hoc* basis.

The Marine Mammal Twinning is one of three twinings under the [European Union-funded Ocean Governance Project](#) and is currently supported by [13 partners](#) that span regional and international contexts as well as academia and marine mammal sanctuaries. These partners are vital in the generation of the [Marine Mammal Management Toolkit](#) to ensure that the resources are developed through consultative processes while supporting a wide-reaching network.

¹ [Second World Assessment Vol I – page 179](#)

In order to drive the strong management of marine mammals, the [Marine Mammal Management Toolkit](#) contains three key components: [factsheets](#); [Self-Assessment Tool \(SAT\)](#); and [good practices](#).

The Factsheets

There are [23 available factsheets](#) within the toolkit that span five critical themes that are often experienced by MPA managers, policy makers and practitioners: Management Frameworks; Addressing Activities and Threats; Research and Monitoring; Outreach and Engagement; and Management Effectiveness. Each factsheet has been meticulously designed to provide concise and valuable information that provides critical context, examples to common barriers, and guidance on solutions while signposting to the latest available resources. These factsheets are continually evolving along with the evolution of science concerning marine mammal conservation. This ensures that each factsheet incorporates international best practice, contextualising case studies and latest scientific information.

The Self-Assessment Tool (SAT)

Supported by the factsheets, the toolkit hosts a [Self-Assessment Tool \(SAT\)](#) that enables MPA managers, stakeholders and other relevant parties to assess the extent to which marine mammals are included in their respective management plans. The SAT is [currently] accessible as an interactive Excel file that guides the assessor through a range of questions that are intrinsically linked to the core themes of the factsheets.

“Marine mammals are integral ecosystem components of many MPAs around the world; therefore, they should not be overlooked and need to be incorporated into management planning,” said Benjamin Haskell, Deputy Superintendent, [Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary](#), Massachusetts, USA. “The self-assessment tool is easy to use and provides excellent guidance on what aspects to consider when protecting marine mammals.”

As assessors navigate through the SAT, each answer is graded and upon completion, a dashboard presents a range of results that unlocks the ability of managers to grade and monitor the MPA ranging from the respective scores in each core theme to a breakdown of the individual threats that are either being well-managed or require attention. The SAT has been designed to be a continuous process, facilitating the monitoring and evaluation over time of the MPA.

“I tested the marine mammal toolkit. It immediately showed the weaknesses of our management plan regarding the management of pressures on marine mammals,” said Fabien Boileau, Director of the [Iroise Marine National Park](#), France. “We will use the tool at every stage of the reflection process when drafting our next management plan from 2022”, Fabien said, highlighting the importance of continuous monitoring and evaluation of the Iroise Marine national Park.



Bottlenose Dolphins in Iroise Marine National Park, France. © Fabien Boileau | Office Français de la Biodiversité

Good Practices

The [Good Practices](#) have been designed to present key examples of good practices implemented throughout MPAs and the marine environment concerning marine mammal management, MPA design and impact mitigation and monitoring. Each good practice is available to download and applied *in-situ* or utilised as a resource in capacity building events or workshops. This area of the toolkit will benefit from a 'submission form' that will enable stakeholders and managers to submit their own good practices that have been implemented within their own MPAs.

Alongside the toolkit, the [Marine Mammal Twinning](#) platform hosts recent news or articles related to the management of marine mammals.

“As a community of practitioners, it is incumbent on all of us to share lessons learned with each other to save time and money, avoid repeating costly mistakes, and ultimately to better protect marine mammals.” - Benjamin Haskell, Deputy Superintendent, Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, Massachusetts, USA

To learn more about the Marine Mammal Twinning or to access the Marine Mammal Management Toolkit please visit www.marine-mammals.info. If you have valuable resources, suggestions for additional factsheets or would like to submit a good practice, please email ocean-governance@biodiv-conseil.fr. Queries to join the project as a partner will also be greatly welcomed along with feedback on the use of the SAT.

View an online version of the press release at <https://marine-mammals.info/marine-mammal-management-toolkit-launch-2021>

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General information

The Ocean Governance Project

[The Ocean Governance Project](#) was established to meet the European Union (EU) objectives set out in the EU Joint Communication on International Ocean Governance and the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy. Over a three-year period (January 2020-December 2022) it will contribute to delivering on EU global commitments under the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the Convention for Biological Diversity (CBD). The project builds on the experience of the Transatlantic MPA project funded by the EU (2016-19), which promoted a transatlantic partnership through developing partnerships and twinning activities between marine protected areas in the Atlantic basin.

The work being implemented under the Ocean Governance project has been broken down into four components:

1. Increased knowledge and practice of protecting and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems in three selected areas of marine protected areas in the South East Asian region
2. Improved management of marine protected areas around the Atlantic Ocean using the concept of shared environmental protection
3. Strengthened knowledge exchange between Atlantic and South East Asian marine and coastal regions
4. Improved basis for dialogue among marine and coastal stakeholders in the South East Asian region

The marine mammals twinning project comes under component 2, along with the other two twinings:

1. **Networks twinning:** Cooperation and common strategy between MPA networks of managers in the Atlantic region.
2. **Resilience twinning:** MPAs and coastal resilience, coping with rapid changes.

Although each of the twinings have their own individual goals and aims, the work is all done in close collaboration. For more information on the other twinings visit www.marine-mammals.info/the-twinning-projects/

Available for Interview/comments

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High-resolution Imagery

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