

Protecting Blue Horizons

The Director of the future Marine Protected Area

One possible scenario: Along the western coast of an island in a temperate sea, a species rich ecosystem needs urgent protection. As a result, also the octopus population, a commercially important species for the local fishers can recover. Overfishing, particularly from destructive bottom trawling, pollution and invasive species, strain the ecosystems. In order to protect fish and octopus nursery areas and allow the juvenile individuals to grow, a Marine Protected Area is being planned.

NB Another scenario can be chosen for all to fit your context better, applicable to all. See fictional map or use a map of a coastal area close by to help visualise the conflict areas between different interests.

Imagine being the Director of this Marine Protected Area during the planning phase. MPAs are geographically distinct zones which aim at safeguarding the biodiversity through habitat protection, maintaining marine ecosystem healthy or restore them to a healthy state for the supply of ecosystem products and services. They are fundamental because they help to release the pressure on the habitats and on the species. Indeed, the human activities and all the phenomena linked to the climate change put a huge pressure on marine ecosystems.

The MPA director is a public administrator who plays a crucial role in overseeing and managing the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources within the designated area. Together with his/her staff, the director of the MPA deals with all the stakeholders. These are her/his key activities:

- **The management planning** which involves developing, implementing, and revising a management plan for the MPA in collaboration with all stakeholders and rights holders: scientists, government agencies, resource users and local communities. This plan outline goals, objectives, regulations, and strategies for conservation, monitoring, and enforcement.
- **Resource protection and surveillance**, so enforcing regulations and measures to protect marine habitats, biodiversity, and species within the MPA.
- **Mediation and stakeholder engagement** of fishing communities, conservation organizations, researchers, and the public, to promote understanding, cooperation, and participation in MPA management and conservation efforts. In this case, personal trust opens the doors for real collaboration.
- Coordinating **scientific research**, monitoring programs, and ecological assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of conservation measures, track changes in marine ecosystems, and inform adaptive management strategies.
- **Educating** and raising awareness among stakeholders and the public about the importance of marine conservation and the MPA. This may involve organizing events, educational programs, conferences. The involvement of the public to create understanding and social support is a fundamental aspect of your job.
- **Collaborating** with other MPAs, government agencies, NGOs, research institutions, and international bodies to share knowledge, data, experiences, and resources for effective marine conservation and management. It is fundamental to promote trust, synergy and collaboration.
- **Managing the administrative and financial aspects** of the MPA, including budgeting, staffing, reporting, and meeting legal requirements.

You, as the Director of the future MPA, play a leadership role in balancing conservation goals with sustainable use of resources, while promoting collaboration and participation of marine conservation of resources for present and future generations. You want people to understand that the MPA is an investment into good futures for all stakeholders. Normally, between 3 and 5 years are necessary to see the first results. During that time, costs and benefits need to be equitably shared to maintain social support for the MPA. The effectively managed MPA will have environmental, economic and social advantages.