



Protecting Blue Horizons

The owner of a tourism company

One possible scenario: Along the western coast of an island in a temperate sea, 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 (MPA) 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.

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, many human activities and all the phenomena linked to the climate change put a huge pressure on ecosystems.

Imagine being the owner of a tourism company, *The Blue Wonders*, working in this coastal region. In the summer period you organize **daily trips** with your own boats to allow **scuba divers** to experience the beauty of the sea. Your business is strongly linked to the health of the marine ecosystem.

Tourism within and beyond the planned borders of the MPA has largely expanded because of the beauty of the natural landscape and the development of hospitality and other service activities enhancing attractiveness of the region. However, the increasing number of tourists raises concerns about the impacts on the marine ecosystems, including from plastic pollution. Anchoring the boats, especially within the MPA is a threat for the nursery areas of many species.

You are aware of the issues linked to mass tourism, so your company promotes ‘**ecotourism**’, a less impactful alternative to traditional tourism. You actively aim to protect natural resources, especially biodiversity, to create an inspiring underwater experience and environmental awareness for tourists through enforcing guidelines for responsible behaviour. This type of tourism is considered a sustainable way to value natural capital and can have positive social and economic knock-on effects.

In order to limit as much as possible your impact, you have already diminished your daily trips, you have invested in alternative fuels to lower GHG emissions, and you have limited the numbers of tourists per dive. You cannot reduce the dive tours any further to remain viable. This has compelled you to significantly raise the prices for the experience, limiting the access to the MPA to a restricted number people. To meet boating demand, you seek some collaboration with fishers offering bathing boat trips; that could be a win-win solution for both.

Despite your efforts, both some artisanal fishers and the local conservation organization believe that your activity should be restricted in the planned Marine Protected Area because, if not well managed and programmed, scuba divers’ presence alters the behavior of fish and octopus during the breeding seasons which starts in May and ends in September. They also want to require a prohibition of anchoring except for a few mooring blocks to minimize disturbance within the MPA.

From your side you will try to find common ground with the fishers but keep the construction of the offshore marine wind farm out of the MPA. You want to prevent negative consequences for your activity because the turbines will affect the tourist experience in terms of noise and beauty of the landscape.