



BLUE MARINE
FOUNDATION

ASCENSION CASE STUDIES

BLUEPrint for Marine Protected Areas:
A guide to establishing and managing MPAs



INFORMATION: MONITORING MPA SUCCESS

Ascension: Research Plan

In 2019, the Ascension Island government announced the designation of 100 per cent of its EEZ within an MPA. From 12 to 200 nautical miles is fully no-take and covered by the UK government's satellite monitoring programme, but from shore to 12 nautical miles needs careful management. At the end of 2020, the Ascension Island Government published their 'MPA Monitoring, Evaluation and Research Strategy' plan which is set to run between 2021-26, with a general review of the MPA's progress published annually too- the first of which was completed in June 2022. The intention of the research plan is to make it clear whether the MPA is achieving its objectives in terms of species and habitat conservation, as well as identifying gaps in existing research or knowledge and working to fill them.

The report shows the importance of re-assessing research needs while projects are ongoing, especially when dealing with long-term monitoring. Where budget or resources aren't sufficient for specific monitoring measures that are deemed critical to making effective management decisions or monitoring changes within the MPA, consideration can be given to bringing in external partners such as universities and PhD students to help with capacity. The Ascension Island Government are hopeful that their MPA research will identify areas which will become relevant internationally, not just for the island, so as to benefit global marine protection strategies.

From 12 to 200 nautical miles is fully no-take and covered by the UK government's satellite monitoring programme

Gathering baseline data (e.g. conductivity, temperature, depth recording) is essential for monitoring marine protected areas.



ECONOMICS/FINANCING: LONG-TERM FUNDING

Ascension: Endowment Fund

In January 2016, half of Ascension's waters were closed to fishing while the other half remained open to the largely Taiwanese long-lining fleet. Long-lining delivers a high proportion of bycatch, including many species of sharks, billfish and jacks as documented in reports from inspectors boarding vessels in Ascension waters. The fleet was also associated with poor human rights records, and Dr Judith Brown, then Director of Fisheries and Conservation for Ascension Island Government, and her fellow inspectors also found that there were poor safety standards including insufficient life jackets for the crew when she boarded a vessel fishing under licence in Ascension's waters.

People on Ascension were generally in favour of having a marine protected area in 100% of their waters, but were concerned on two counts: 1. That the cost of monitoring and enforcing the vast area (445,000 sq km) would fall to Ascension, and 2. That they would give up income from the sale of fishing licences. At its peak, this had been around £1m gross, but did not include any funding for the cost of a monitoring vessel. Post the 2016 closure, income from licences was averaging £80,000 a year.

Blue Marine, as part of the Great British Oceans coalition, secured a commitment from the UK government that research, monitoring and enforcement would be paid for as part of the 'Blue Belt' programme. However, there was still a deficit of

£80,000 a year, the income from licenses that had previously funded important community facilities.

Blue Marine set about calculating how to raise £80,000 in perpetuity. A sinking fund (where the capital value of the fund gradually sinks to zero) would not have been appropriate, because the people of Ascension were being asked to make a commitment to have an MPA in their waters in perpetuity. Any other funding mechanism, including bonds, would rely on there being income generated from the MPA, and given Ascension's remoteness, ecotourism was not an option. Therefore, an endowment fund, which would deliver a yield of around £80,000 a year was the only viable funding option in this instance. In order to generate £80,000 - £100,000 and assuming a conservative total return from a combination of bonds and equities of between four and five per cent a year, we needed to raise £2,000,000.



Green turtle on Ascension returns to the sea after nesting on one of the largest nesting beaches in the South Atlantic

Clare Brook, CEO of Blue Marine knew the importance of raising this fund to support the community and deliver the huge conservation benefit of the Ascension MPA and so she approached potential donors with the resources and passion to help make this a reality: 'Peter Lürssen, a German superyacht manufacturer and long-term supporter of Blue Marine, was keen to support the establishment of the Ascension MPA and asked me in Monaco how much it would cost to protect Ascension. I was able to give him the answer of £2m, and the next day, at one of the most thrilling breakfasts of my life, he confirmed that he was prepared to give us that sum.'

Establishing the endowment fund was a complicated process. Initially, Blue Marine looked at using an existing vehicle established by the RSPB. But this required the projects funded by the endowment fund to be very specifically environmental in their focus, whereas Blue Marine's whole purpose for finding this funding was to replicate, as far as possible, what Ascension had been earning from the sale of fishing licences. So instead, we set up a subcommittee of the Blue Marine board to manage the fund which we called the AIMPACT fund (Ascension Island Marine Protected Area Conservation Trust). We agreed that the income generated from the fund could be spent on projects chosen by the community as long as they fell into the criteria of community, heritage, environment and education. This means that people on island will be able to use the money for things as varied as repairing the steps up to the summit of Green Mountain or buying a new science classroom for the school, repairing the old turtle ponds and paying for a new sports field. The AIMPACT fund is being managed on a pro-bono basis by Lion Trust, representing a saving of around one per cent.



Funding raised by Blue Marine paid for the Turtle ponds to be repaired to provide a safe community swimming area for children

Apart from the complexity of establishing the endowment fund, other challenges have been the resources to actually deliver the projects given that everyone on Ascension is extremely busy so it takes longer to spend the AIMPACT donations on – say – building a new sports field as it needs to be conducted adjacent to normal work duties, alongside lengthy delivery times of equipment to the island. While in terms of running the fund, inflation has caused values of bonds and equities to plummet in 2022, so the fund value is currently below the original capital investment. However, once stock markets start to recover, so will the capital value of the fund.

The final lesson to learn is that philanthropists are keen to support major projects that represent huge areas on a map with important conservation benefits. The Ascension Island community had a big vision and Peter Lürssen recognised that and wanted to support it. The AIMPACT fund sends a message to anyone who wants to have an MPA in their waters that you can earn money from pure conservation.

Ascension: Securing UK Government funding

Blue Marine have worked closely with the Ascension Island community since 2015, and quickly understood that the Ascension Island Government did not have the funds to pay for many of the critical aspects of running an MPA effectively. To help Ascension have a world class MPA, Blue Marine, in conjunction with coalition partners, Great British Oceans (which included Greenpeace, Pew, RSPB and ZSL) raised awareness in the UK public about the richness of biodiversity in the UK Overseas Territories and the importance of protecting these areas, and that funding was desperately needed from the UK Government to assist with this. This led to a hugely successful #BacktheBlueBelt campaign. This campaign combined with political advocacy work with UK Ministers led to the UK government committing to paying for monitoring, research and enforcement of Ascension and other UK overseas territories through its 'Blue Belt' Programme. Between 2015 and 2021 Ascension MPA has received more than £1.5 million in support from the Blue Belt Programme, providing allowing the gathering of robust scientific data around Ascension and ensuring the MPA has been protected from illegal fishing through strict surveillance and enforcement.

Between 2015 and 2021 Ascension MPA has received more than £1.5 million in support from the Blue Belt Programme



From the top: Brown chromis and black triggerfish are abundant in the Ascension MPA; #BacktheBlueBelt campaigners.

PEOPLE: DELIVERING THE MESSAGE

Ascension: Gathering media assets

Ensuring continued awareness of the benefits of the Ascension MPA both for conservation and in terms of the establishment and continued support of the AIMPACT fund (see endowment fund section) for the Ascension community is important to maintain long-term support for the MPA. Highlighting the success of the MPA globally also ensures the Ascension community receive the acclaim for their vision in establishing the MPA but also demonstrates the benefits of MPAs to others, hopefully encouraging them to

do the same. Promotion of any MPA is reliant on good visual and interactive assets. Understanding this need, Blue Marine media team provided underwater cameras, GoPro videos and filming equipment to allow the conservation staff to have easy to use, good quality equipment to capture their important work within the MPA, along with the beautiful marine biodiversity in the surrounding ocean. Training was provided by Blue Marines media experts giving advice both in terms of settings to use and also including types of footage that work well to capture the public's imagination and interest.

Divers can see the beauty of the Ascension MPA like this rude pan shell. However for non-divers underwater photographs plays an important role in showing the variety and wonder of the marine world.



Ascension: Employment of a MPA Development and Engagement Officer

The importance of ensuring community engagement both locally and internationally, and understanding the time investment required to do this well, led AIGCFD to employ a full time MPA Development and Engagement Officer, through funding from Blue Marine. Establishing this role helps maintain continual public engagement and interest in the MPA. Having a dedicated staff member means that the format of any outreach can be specific to the target audience, and the individual can attend relevant media training, becoming an expert in use of camera and filming equipment (provided by Blue Marine). It also helps to ensure that any scientific information can be presented in a way that is accessible to all. This new position is diverse and includes tasks such as:

- Collating and organising a marine media bank will all current and historic assets – allows easy access when images needed for any education or outreach
- Developing social media schedule and producing a MPA Public Engagement Strategy – having a dedicated staff member quickly led to an increase in followers across social media platforms, as well as helping to keep the organisation up to date with current social media trends and important scientific findings

- On island outreach including conducting marine talks at local school, regular radio conservation-based sessions, competitions to engage the local community with the marine projects, and delivering a MPA Youth Committee and developing MPA-linked input into the school curriculum to forge closer links with the school
- Collecting and documenting the work of the conservation team and local wildlife (videos and photographs) as well as interviewing local residents to produce an Ascension Island Voices documentary.

A shoal of Guelly jack



