MSP POLICY



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Belize Fund For A Sustainable Future

BLUE BONDS

MSP POLICY

Consultancy to develop an updated Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) policy, plan, and to prepare draft amendments for the Belize Coastal Zone Management (CZM) act and regulations.

CLIENT:



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Foreword



Foreword

The ocean is at the heart of Belize's identity. It sustains our livelihoods, protects our coastlines, nurtures our biodiversity, and offers tremendous opportunities for economic growth and innovation. As Minister of Blue Economy and Marine Conservation, I am proud to present this Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) Policy—an important step forward in our collective commitment to safeguard the integrity of Belize's marine environment while fostering sustainable development for all Belizeans.

This policy is more than a document. It is a vision for the future of Belize's ocean space—one that balances conservation with opportunity, inclusion with innovation, and tradition with transformation. Through this framework, we aim to guide how we use, share, and protect our marine resources to ensure long-term resilience, equity, and prosperity.

Belize has already made history with the Belize Blue Bonds for Ocean Conservation and through our leadership in regional and international conservation efforts. The MSP Policy builds upon these achievements, offering a strategic and participatory approach to managing our ocean space. It empowers communities, strengthens governance, and integrates science into decision-making.

Importantly, this policy has been shaped by the voices of our people—fishers, tour guides, business leaders, scientists, youth, and Indigenous communities—who have all played a role in defining what sustainable ocean governance should look like in our country.

As we move forward to implement this policy, we do so with a shared sense of responsibility and ambition. Belize is ready to lead by example. We will continue to invest in innovation, build institutional capacity, and expand partnerships that support a thriving and climate-resilient blue economy.

Let this document be both a roadmap and a call to action. Together, we can ensure that our ocean remains healthy, productive, and accessible—not only for today, but for generations to come.

by Hon. Andre Perez
Minister of Blue Economy and Marine Conservation

Executive summary

This Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) Policy Framework has been developed to establish an enabling environment for effective and coordinated implementation of Belize's Marine Spatial Plan, formally known as the Belize Sustainable Ocean Plan (BSOP). Building on a series of national and international commitments—including Belize's Conservation Funding Agreement under the Blue Bonds Program—the policy framework aims to guide the sustainable management and protection of Belize's ocean space through a participatory, science-based, and adaptive approach.

The document is structured in four main sections:

SECTION I: Context and Rationale

This section describes Belize's marine environment as a globally significant ecological and economic asset, outlines key challenges such as enforcement gaps, fragmented governance, and environmental threats, and identifies opportunities for blue economy development and enhanced marine conservation. It also clarifies the legal and policy background that underpins the BSOP process.

SECTION II: Overview of International MSP Frameworks and Relevance to Belize

This section provides a synthesis of internationally recognized MSP principles and methodologies, particularly those established by UNESCO-IOC, which inform Belize's BSOP process. It also describes the alignment between Belize's national strategies and relevant international and regional agreements.

SECTION III: Belize's Progress in MSP Development

This section documents milestones already achieved, including the official launch of the BSOP, establishment of institutional structures, stakeholder engagement processes, technical assessments of data needs and existing conditions, and proposed zoning guidelines. A SWOT analysis summarizes internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats to successful implementation.

SECTION IV: Implementation Framework

As the core of this document, this section outlines the policy vision, guiding principles, strategic goals, and proposed actions to operationalize the BSOP by 2026. It describes the geographical scope, details a phased implementation plan, recommends measures to strengthen legal and institutional frameworks, proposes mechanisms for inclusive stakeholder participation and capacity building, and presents monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation strategies to ensure accountability and continuous improvement.

The framework emphasizes the importance of integrating ecological protection with sustainable economic development and social equity. Specific recommendations include developing a comprehensive spatial zoning framework, aligning MSP provisions with the forthcoming Coastal Zone Management Authority Bill, strengthening compliance and enforcement capacity, establishing an interoperable MSP Information System, and promoting adaptive co-management approaches for marine protected areas.

By consolidating lessons learned from past planning processes and global best practices, this MSP Policy Framework aims to provide clear, actionable guidance to support the development, implementation, and integration of BSOP within the broader marine policy landscape.

Acronyms

BBFP	Blue Bond and Finance Permanence Unit
ICZM	Integrated Coastal Zone Management
BBNJ	Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
BCCI	Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry
IOC-UNESCO	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO
BEL	Belize Electricity Limited
MBRS	Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System
BHSFU	Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit
MEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreement
BLA	Blue Loan Agreement
MPA	Marine Protected Area
BLAST	Belize Local Association of Stakeholders in Tourism
MSP	Marine Spatial Planning
BNE	Belize Natural Energy
NBIO	National Biodiversity Office
BNN	Belize Network of Non-Governmental Organizations
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
BPZ	Biodiversity Protection Zone
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
BSOP	Belize Sustainable Ocean Plan
PACT	Protected Areas Conservation Trust
BTB	Belize Tourism Board
PFP	Project Finance for Permanence
BTIA	Belize Tourism Industry Association
RBB	Resilient Bold Belize
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
RHI	Reef Health Index
CFA	Conservation Funding Agreement
SICA	Central American Integration System
CRFM	Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
CZMAI	Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute
TWG	Technical Working Group
DFC	U.S. International Development Finance Corporation
UB	University of Belize
EDF	Environmental Defense Fund
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
ERI	Environmental Research Institute
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
FPIC	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
UWI	University of the West Indies
GEF	Global Environment Facility
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society

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SECTION I:
WHY DOES BELIZE NEED AN MSP POLICY FRAMEWORK?



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1. INTRODUCTION

Belize stands at a pivotal moment in the sustainable management of its marine resources, recognizing the need to address complex challenges and seize significant opportunities through a Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) framework. MSP is a public process of analysing and allocating the spatial and temporal distribution of human activities in marine areas to achieve ecological, economic and social objectives that are usually specified through a political process (Ehler and Douvere, 2009).

As a country playing a critical role in regional ecological connectivity and the global blue economy, Belize faces issues related to governance, sustainable use, and environmental protection. The development of a Marine Spatial Plan is seen as a strategic tool to integrate diverse perspectives, align existing policies, and tackle emerging threats while promoting climate resilience and sustainable growth. To fully understand the context, challenges, and opportunities of this initiative, the following sections outline the key aspects that underpin the need and relevance of a robust MSP framework for Belize.

1.1 CONTEXT AND JUSTIFICATION

Belize's ocean space stands as a national, regional, and globally significant environmental asset, celebrated for hosting the Belize Barrier Reef—a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a part of the Mesoamerican Reef, the second largest barrier reef system in the world — alongside extensive mangroves and seagrass ecosystems. These habitats not only provide critical biodiversity hotspots but also deliver essential ecosystem services, including carbon sequestration, coastal protection, and fishery nurseries. As part of the broader Caribbean basin, Belize's marine resources play a pivotal role in regional ecological connectivity and resilience, reinforcing its status as a steward of shared ocean heritage (Caye Caulker Coastal Zone Management Guidelines, 2016).

Economically, Belize's ocean domain underpins the nation's burgeoning blue economy, which is integral to its GDP and employment. Belize's blue economy activities, such as tourism, fisheries, and coastal aquaculture, are tightly interwoven with conservation priorities. Ecotourism, for example, thrives on the pristine condition of marine habitats, while sustainable fisheries depend on the health of coral reef and mangrove



ecosystems. The Belize Sustainable Ocean Plan (BSOP) — the name chosen for Belize's Marine Spatial Plan — whose development is currently underway as a core deliverable under the Belize Blue Bonds Agreement signed in November 2021, seeks to balance economic, environmental, and social uses of Belize's ocean space to advance blue economy development. This includes aligning sustainable economic growth with biodiversity protection, inclusive

of an ambitious target to designate up to 30% of Belize's total ocean space as Biodiversity Protection Zones. This commitment reflects Belize's aspiration to be a global leader in sustainable ocean management, as part of the Belize Blue Bonds for Ocean Conservation debt conversion completed by the Government of Belize and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in November 2021, an overarching term that encompasses both the Blue Loan Agreement (BLA) and the Conservation Funding Agreement (CFA). In addition to expanding the percentage of its ocean biodiversity in protection, Belize committed to establishing an independent conservation fund to allocate the unlocked funding to in-country partners, and completing a transparent, participatory MSP process as part of the project. The BSOP process, therefore, serves as a key mechanism to fulfil Belize's commitments under the Blue Bonds agreements.

The alignment of the BSOP with the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Policy and other marine policies through this MSP policy framework represents a critical strategy for enhancing marine governance in Belize. Integrating these policies will address the interconnectedness of terrestrial and marine systems while fostering coherent policy actions across sectors. For example, the ICZM framework offers guidance on managing land-sea interactions, such as mitigating coastal runoff that affects reef health, while the BSOP will provide a structured vision for sustainable ocean and denote the permissible activities that may be lawfully carried out in any part of Belize's ocean space. Together, these policies form the foundation for spatially explicit governance that balances conservation imperatives with socio-economic development goals.

MSP emerges as an indispensable tool for advancing Belize's sustainable development and climate resilience objectives. By systematically allocating spatial and temporal uses of ocean zones, MSP reduces conflicts among diverse users, such as between artisanal fishers and commercial tourism operators. Moreover, MSP facilitates data-driven decision-making, enhancing Belize's capacity to respond to increasing demands for use of its ocean space as well as climate change-related challenges like rising sea levels and ocean acidification. Examples from nearby countries, such as Jamaica, Saint Lucia, and Barbados, highlight recent and ongoing initiatives in MSP aimed at balancing economic development and marine conservation. These efforts demonstrate a regional commitment to sustainable ocean management. Belize, however, has demonstrated significant leadership in advancing MSP, with key initiatives both preceding and following the signing of the Belize Blue Bonds Agreement in 2021. The ICZM Plan and cayes development policies have provided an excellent foundation for this spatially larger initiative, offering valuable lessons in integrated coastal management that inform the evolution of Belize's MSP framework. Belize's proactive engagement has positioned the country as a regional leader in sustainable ocean governance, particularly within the Caribbean and Central American regions. Belize shares similar aspirations and challenges, and its adoption of an MSP framework aligns with this broader regional movement toward integrated marine governance. Belize's adoption of an MSP framework can emulate these successes, ensuring that human activities within its blue space are sustainably managed, promoting both economic growth and the ecological integrity of its marine environment.

Belize's need for an MSP Policy Framework is evident. It will guide coordinated and consistent implementation of the BSOP, inclusive of current and future programs, projects, and activities by integrating ecological, economic, social, and governance considerations, offering a roadmap for harmonizing development and conservation. By drawing on global best practices and tailoring them to local contexts, this framework will empower Belize to effectively manage its ocean space, minimize user conflicts, and reinforce its position as a champion of sustainable ocean governance.

1.2 CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW OF RELEVANT THEMATIC DIMENSIONS

This section provides a thematic overview of the key ecological, economic, and governance dimensions that frame the development of Belize's MSP Policy. It offers a contextual diagnosis to support the rationale outlined in Section 1.1 and to guide the identification of challenges and opportunities in Section 1.3.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND PHYSICAL

Belize's marine environment is characterized by diverse and interconnected ecosystems, including the Belize Barrier Reef UNESCO World Heritage Site, extensive mangroves, and vital seagrass habitats. These areas not only provide coastal protection, carbon sequestration, and breeding grounds for marine life but also support numerous protected and endangered species, such as the West Indian manatee, hawksbill sea turtle, and Nassau grouper. However, these ecosystems face additional pressures from the proliferation of Sargassum, which significantly impacts reefs and cayes by smothering coral habitats, altering water quality, and threatening marine biodiversity. Combined with anthropogenic activities like fishing, coastal development, and pollution, and exacerbated by climate-induced stressors such as rising sea temperatures and acidification, these challenges underscore the urgent need for comprehensive MSP to safeguard Belize's natural heritage.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC

Blue economy, including tourism, fisheries, and transport, are critical to Belize's socio-economic fabric. Tourism, in particular, accounts for around 30% of GDP (WTTC, 2023), relying heavily on healthy marine ecosystems. However, disparities in resource access, economic vulnerabilities in coastal communities, and overdependence on declining fish stocks necessitate equitable and diversified approaches to marine resource management. Opportunities under social equity include promoting fair and equitable access to marine resources, ensuring that all communities, particularly marginalized groups, can benefit from the sustainable use of ocean space. Initiatives to support gender inclusivity and alternative livelihoods, such as community-led seaweed farming and eco-tourism ventures, offer pathways to reduce economic vulnerabilities and foster resilience. These efforts not only diversify income sources but also empower underrepresented groups, aligning with the broader goals of MSP to balance socio-economic development with environmental conservation.

GOVERNANCE AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Belize's legal and institutional frameworks provide a foundation for marine management but require strengthening to address current and emerging challenges. Stakeholders have highlighted that, although coordination mechanisms exist, they require further development to effectively integrate MSP principles across sectors. Governance challenges include overlapping institutional mandates and legislative fragmentation, which can lead to inefficiencies in the implementation of marine governance policies. Addressing these challenges may involve establishing a centralized MSP coordination mechanism to harmonize roles, streamline decision-making processes, and enhance cross-sectoral collaboration. By clearly defining responsibilities and reinforcing integrated governance approaches, Belize can foster more cohesive and effective management of its ocean space to support its MSP objectives.

OCEAN ZONING AND SPATIAL PLANNING

Effective zoning is central to MSP. Stakeholders emphasize the importance of addressing conflicting uses of marine resources and space, particularly between key sectors in Belize such as fisheries and tourism. These conflicts highlight the urgent need for spatial delineation to reduce tensions and promote equitable access to resources. However, the lack of a comprehensive zoning framework for blue economy development remains a significant gap, limiting Belize's ability to strategically allocate space for emerging sectors. Multi-use zones, where compatible activities can coexist, represent a critical opportunity to optimize marine resource utilization while fostering sustainable development and minimizing conflicts across sectors.

1.3 OVERVIEW OF KEY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The development and implementation of an MSP framework in Belize requires addressing persistent challenges while leveraging existing opportunities. Stakeholders have underscored the importance of recognizing these critical issues and potential benefits to guide decision-making and ensure the policy's success. The main **challenges** are related to:

. **Enforcement and compliance challenges:** Weak enforcement mechanisms, insufficient resources, and inadequate monitoring have emerged as primary barriers to effective marine governance. At the same time, compliance challenges also arise from limited access to clear and user-friendly information about zoning schemes and applicable regulations, making it difficult for ocean users to understand their responsibilities and determine what activities are allowed in different areas. These challenges compromise conservation efforts, create opportunities for unregulated activities such as illegal fishing and habitat degradation, and erode stakeholder trust—reducing public confidence and potentially diminishing support for future conservation and management initiatives.

. Illegal fishing activities and other illegal uses persist in certain areas due to limited patrolling capacity and enforcement challenges, compromising biodiversity and fisheries sustainability. These systemic issues highlight the need for strengthened monitoring mechanisms and coordinated enforcement efforts across Belize's ocean space.

Additionally, there are opportunities to improve compliance by empowering ocean users with better information resources, new tools for identifying zones and rules while on the water, and increased stakeholder engagement in their communities. Joint patrols conducted by the Belize Fisheries Department, Belize Coast Guard, Police Department, and various co-managers play a critical role in protecting marine resources. For example, in the Sapodilla Caye Marine Reserve, illegal fishing by Guatemalan fishers entering Belizean waters continues to pose significant challenges to fisheries management and safety risks for enforcement authorities.

. **Inefficient Coordination Among Authorities:** While various mechanisms and institutional arrangements for coordination exist, they remain insufficiently integrated, leading to persistent inefficiencies in decision-making and implementation. Stakeholders have noted that overlapping functions across agencies continue to hinder the effective execution of cohesive marine policies and actions.

. **Need for Updated Regulations**: Outdated regulatory frameworks fail to address emerging challenges, including climate adaptation, technological advancements, and evolving economic activities. This regulatory inertia limits the country's ability to respond proactively to dynamic marine management needs.

. **Sectoral Conflicts**: Competition between different ocean space users, such as tourism operators and fisheries in areas like Ambergris Caye, underscores the need for a clear and detailed spatial framework to mediate competing interests, allocate permissible activities, and guide sustainable blue economy development. Additionally, conflicts can also arise within the same sector.

For example, sailboat fishers and fishers using traps have experienced increased competition over spatial use in several areas, highlighting the importance of clear zoning and conflict resolution mechanisms. The current lack of a granular blueprint hinders conflict resolution and limits the ability of developers and investors to plan within a predictable and transparent marine governance framework.

. Ambergris Caye: Conflicts between tourism and fisheries are noted in the Caye Coastal Management Guidelines (2016).

. **Environmental Threats:** Climate change-induced phenomena, including rising sea levels, ocean acidification, and extreme weather events, pose significant risks to Belize's marine ecosystems. These environmental pressures threaten biodiversity and compromise the resilience of coastal communities. The coral bleaching observed in the Belize Barrier Reef is an example, threaten marine ecosystems and the livelihoods dependent on them.

Coral bleaching in the Belize Barrier Reef: Reported in studies on the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System (BBRRS), particularly in relation to climate change impacts.

The MSP framework provides Belize with a unique opportunity to harness its marine resources sustainably, ensuring long-term socio-economic and ecological benefits. Key **opportunities** identified include:

. **Equitable Access to Marine Resources**: Strengthening governance mechanisms to ensure fair and inclusive access to marine resources can enhance the livelihoods of communities dependent on marine ecosystems. This can benefit communities like those in Southern Belize, where artisanal fishers rely heavily on access to marine ecosystems for their livelihoods.

> Communities in Southern Belize: Highlighted in the Belize Blue Economy Development Policy Strategy and Implementation Plan (2022), emphasizing the importance of equitable access for livelihoods.

. **Sustainable Economic Development**: Belize's blue economy offers avenues for economic diversification through activities such as ecotourism, sustainable fisheries, coastal aquaculture, mariculture, marine transportation, shipping, and port operations. These initiatives can bolster economic resilience while preserving ecological integrity and also unlock potential for other sustainable blue economy development opportunities. The eight sectors prioritized under Belize's Blue Economy Development Policy, Strategy and Implementation Plan include tourism, fisheries, aquaculture and mariculture, marine transportation, shipping and port operations, marine renewable energy, marine biotechnology, and blue carbon initiatives. The BSOP process plays a critical role in supporting the sustainable development of these sectors through spatial organization and integrated management.

Achieving a balance between economic growth and environmental protection is a core principle guiding the BSOP process, as formally articulated in the vision statement presented in Section 4.1 of this document. Strategic zoning and adaptive management can facilitate this balance, optimizing resource use without compromising ecological health. The Placencia Peninsula demonstrates the potential of integrating sustainable tourism with conservation, providing a blueprint for fostering economic resilience while preserving ecological integrity. In addition, in areas like Lighthouse Reef Atoll, strategic zoning has the potential to balance ecotourism development with the preservation of fragile coral ecosystems.

> Placencia Peninsula: An example discussed in the BSOP and regional ecotourism reports as a model for integrating sustainability with economic growth.

> Lighthouse Reef Atoll: Guidance is provided in the Coastal Zone Management Guidelines for this region, demonstrating strategic zoning approaches.

. **Marine Biodiversity Conservation**: Advancing marine conservation efforts through the designation of Biodiversity Protection Zones and implementing nature-based solutions positions Belize as a global leader in ocean stewardship. Initiatives such as the Hol Chan Marine Reserve showcase Belize's leadership in establishing marine protected areas, highlighting the potential for expanding Biodiversity Protection Zones.

> Hol Chan Marine Reserve: Detailed in the Belize National Integrated CZM Strategy (2003) as a pioneering initiative for marine biodiversity protection.

. **Nature-Based Solutions and Multi-Use Ocean Management**: Integrating nature-based solutions to address environmental challenges and promoting multi-use zones can reduce conflicts and maximize the use of ocean spaces. Mangrove restoration projects in Belize City exemplify nature-based solutions that enhance coastal resilience while supporting biodiversity and local economies. On the other hand, multi-use between tourism and conservation, for example on the Placencia Peninsula, or the possibility of carrying out ecotourism activities.

> Mangrove restoration projects in Belize City: Highlighted in CZMAI's coastal restoration reports as a dual solution for resilience and biodiversity support.

. **Enhanced Participatory Governance**: MSP provides a highly participatory and stakeholder-driven platform for governance and decision-making regarding the use and management of Belize's ocean space. This inclusivity strengthens legitimacy, promotes equity, and fosters broader public support for marine policies.

. **Transparent and Evidence-Based Decision-Making**: The BSOP promotes decision-making processes grounded in transparent use of natural and social science information, supported by innovative planning tools and approaches. This ensures that spatial management strategies are based on best-available knowledge and adaptive to emerging conditions.

By integrating these challenges and opportunities into its MSP framework, Belize is well-positioned to create a sustainable and resilient marine governance model that addresses immediate needs while laying the groundwork for long-term prosperity.

1.4 SCOPE AND CONTENT

This Policy has been developed as an integrated framework that consolidates strategic guidance, practical implementation measures, and preparatory actions to enable Belize's MSP process. It provides a structured basis for aligning national policies, institutional mandates, and stakeholder engagement with the overarching objective of facilitating the implementation of the BSOP in the country by November 2026. In addition to defining guiding principles and priority objectives, the Policy includes a detailed SWOT analysis of Belize's marine governance context, proposed actions to operationalize each strategic goal, a phased implementation strategy, and monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation mechanisms. By combining strategic direction with concrete pathways for coordination, capacity-building, and progressive approaches to compliance and enforcement, this document establishes the enabling conditions necessary for the effective development, implementation, and integration of the BSOP within Belize's broader marine policy landscape.

1.5 MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THE POLICY FRAMEWORK

The objective of this MSP Policy Framework is to establish an enabling environment to support the effective implementation of the BSOP. Building upon internationally recognized MSP frameworks that guide the BSOP process, this Policy aims to articulate the institutional arrangements, governance mechanisms, capacity-building measures, and supporting actions needed to operationalize the BSOP in a coherent, inclusive, and science-based manner. By aligning national priorities with global best practices, the framework seeks to foster sustainable blue economic development, ecological protection, and equitable access to marine resources across Belize's ocean space.





SECTION II:
WHAT ARE BELIZE'S MARINE SPATIAL CHALLENGES?



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2.
INTERNATIONAL MSP FRAMEWORKS AND BELIZE CONTEXT

Section 2.1 discusses the characteristics and methodological flow of the MSP process currently underway in Belize, the BSOP process as it has followed the frameworks set forth by global best practice in the two editions of the guides for MSP, published by IOC-UNESCO (Ehler and Douvere, 2009 and UNESCO-IOC/European Commission, 2021). Section *2.2* provides a brief overview of the relationships that MSP may have with other legal frameworks and international agreements.

2.1 THE MSP PROCESS

MSP is a public process that analyses and allocates the spatial and temporal distribution of human activities in marine areas. It seeks to achieve ecological, economic, and social objectives—typically defined through a participatory political process—to ensure the sustainable use of marine resources while protecting ecosystems. MSP does not focus solely on conservation or economic development but aims to integrate multiple uses of ocean space to minimize conflicts, promote coexistence, and maximize benefits while ensuring ecosystem resilience (Ehler and Douvere, 2009; UNESCO-IOC/European Commission, 2021). While Belize's BSOP establishes specific conservation commitments, such as the designation of Biodiversity Protection Zones, it applies this integrated approach to balance ecological, economic, and social objectives within the national context.

The main pillars of the MSP process are:

. **Ecosystem-Based Approach**: MSP incorporates an integrated management strategy that considers cumulative impacts and interactions within ecosystems to maintain their health and resilience.

. **Integrated Governance**: It promotes coordination across institutions and levels of government, ensuring coherence of mandates, policies, and implementation frameworks.

. **Participatory and Inclusive**: Stakeholder involvement is central to MSP, fostering transparency, equity, and community ownership of the planning process.

. **Precautionary and Adaptive**: MSP embraces precautionary measures and adaptability, allowing plans to evolve with new information and shifting environmental or socio-economic conditions.

. **Multisectoral Coordination**: MSP integrates the needs and activities of multiple sectors, including fisheries, renewable energy, tourism, and conservation, to reduce conflicts and promote synergies.

. **Focus on Sustainability**: The process balances ecological protection, economic development, and social well-being to ensure the long-term viability of marine resources.

. **Climate Resilience**: Addressing climate change impacts is a core principle, incorporating strategies like nature-based solutions and spatial adaptation measures.

The world reference when it comes to MSP is the UNESCO guides (Ehler and Douvere, 2009; UNESCO-IOC/European Commission, 2021). This consolidated process is not a one-time effort but a dynamic, iterative process designed to adapt to changing conditions and new information. These phases are not strictly linear and each step is interconnected. Feedback loops and stakeholder engagement are integral throughout the process, ensuring flexibility and responsiveness. Fig. 1 illustrates this iterative cycle, highlighting how each phase builds upon and informs the others:

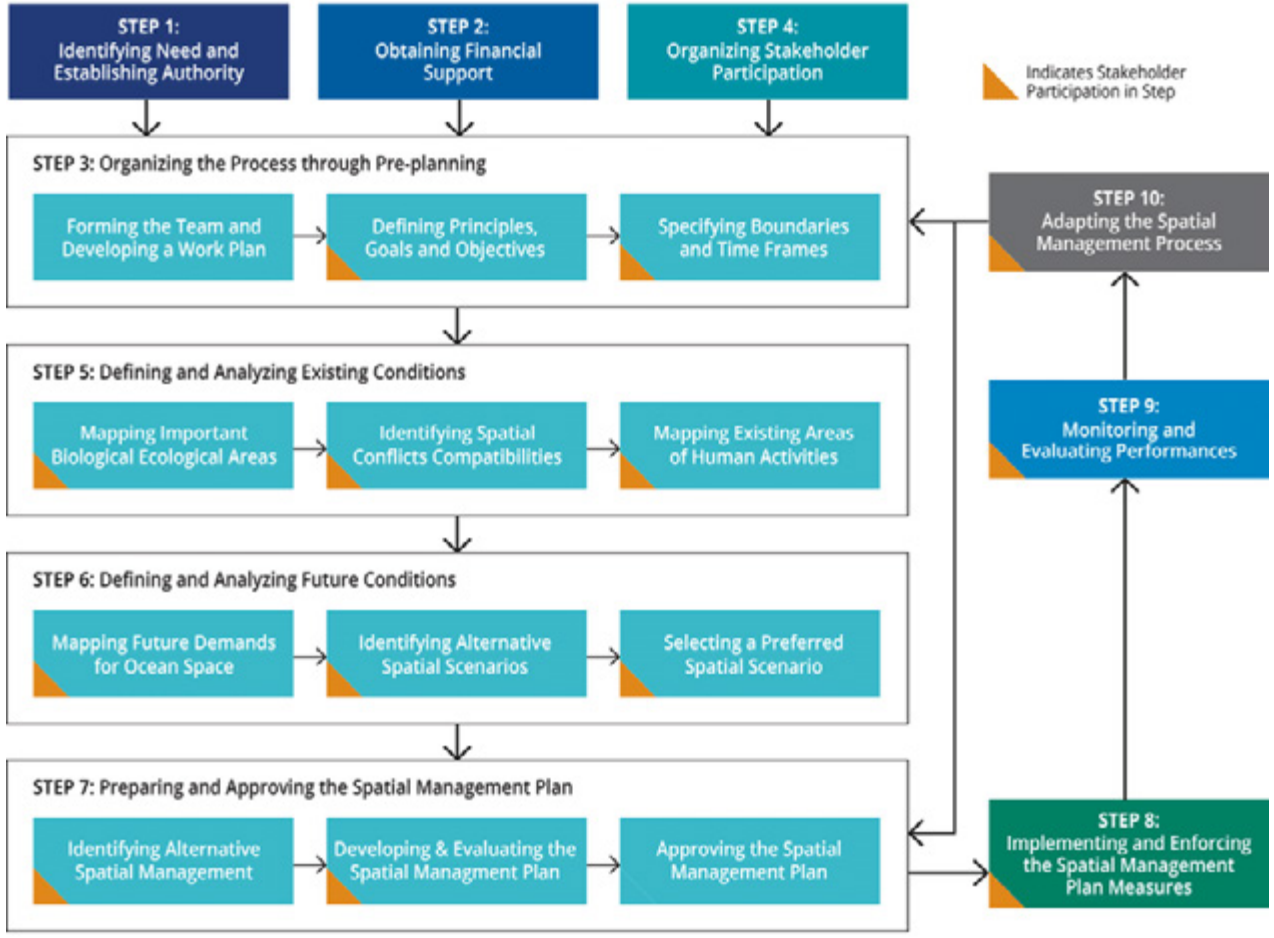


Figure 1. MSP step-by-step approach (Ehler and Douvere, 2009).

Setting the scene

(i) Create MSP working groups;
(ii) Identify: Legal and Institutional frameworks, Stakeholders and their planning needs, Budget and funding.

. **STEP 1. Identifying the Need and Establishing Authority:** Define the rationale for MSP by identifying key conflicts, challenges, or opportunities in marine areas. Establish the legal and institutional frameworks necessary for developing and implementing the plan.

. **STEP 2. Obtaining Financial Support:** Secure funding and financial resources to support the planning and implementation of MSP. This may include governmental budgets, grants, or innovative funding mechanisms.

Designing the planning process

(i) Establish MSP team;
(ii) Draft vision, goals and objectives;
(iii) Set geographic boundaries;
(iv) Develop stakeholder engagement strategy.

. **STEP 3. Organizing the Process Through Pre-Planning:** Create a multidisciplinary planning team, define the geographic boundaries and timeframe, establish guiding principles, and set overarching goals and objectives for the MSP process.

. **STEP 4. Organizing Stakeholder Participation:** Identify relevant stakeholders, determine when and how to involve them, and ensure their active participationthroughout the planning process. This step emphasizes inclusivity and transparency.

Assessments for planning

(i) Identify present environmental, economic and social-cultural conditions;
(ii) Analyse future trends, new demands and claims of ocean space, potential areas for biodiversity conservation and climate change;
(iii) Define alternative scenarios;
(iv) Develop a public information system.

. **STEP 5. Defining and Analysing Existing Conditions:** Collect and map data on the current ecological, social, and economic conditions of the marine area. This includes identifying existing uses, conflicts, and compatibilities among activities.

. **STEP 6. Defining and Analysing Future Conditions:** Project future trends, including emerging uses and climate change impacts. Develop scenarios to anticipate spatial and temporal needs and evaluate alternative future conditions.

The plan

(i) Develop the marine spatial plan: Content: Vision; Spatial allocation of uses; Management actions;
(ii) Approve marine spatial plan through consultations.

. **STEP 7. Preparing and Approving the Spatial Management Plan:** Design the spatial management plan, including zoning maps and regulations. Evaluate the plan's feasibility, and seek approval from relevant authorities to ensure its legal enforceability.

Enabling implementation of the plan

(i) Regular dialogue to support implementation;
(ii) Capacity development on the implementation;
(iii) Compliance and enforcement of marine spatial plan.

. **STEP 8. Implementing and Enforcing the Spatial Management Plan:** Put the plan into action by integrating it into existing governance structures, ensuring compliance, and establishing enforcement mechanisms for regulations and zoning provisions.

Monitoring, evaluation and adaptation of:

(i) The MSP process;
(ii) The stakeholder engagement;
(iii) The MSP results.

. **STEP 9. Monitoring and Evaluating Performance:** Develop a performance monitoring program using key indicators to assess the effectiveness of the plan. Regularly review and report progress to stakeholders and decision-makers.

. **STEP 10. Adapting the Marine Spatial Management Process:** Use the insights gained from monitoring and evaluation to adapt the plan to new conditions or knowledge. This ensures the process remains dynamic and responsive to changing needs.

Within this methodological framework, this policy is mainly **framed between STEP 1 and STEP 4**. The objective is to **strengthen the elements within these steps by building upon ongoing initiatives in Belize while advancing areas that have yet to be initiated**. Simultaneously, the policy aims to establish the **necessary conditions to progress to subsequent steps**, with a focus on developing guidelines and recommendations for the full MSP process, enabling the publication of the first plan in the context of BSOP.

2.2 RELATION WITH OTHER LEGAL FRAMEWORKS AND INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

Belize's MSP initiatives are intricately linked to various national legal frameworks and international agreements, including regional commitments. These connections will ensure that the BSOP aligns with global standards and regional cooperation efforts.

National Legal Frameworks:

. **Coastal Zone Management Act (CAP 329):** This Act establishes the CZMAI, providing the legal foundation for ICZM in Belize. It mandates the development of plans and policies for the sustainable use and management of coastal resources. In addition to its current functions, the Coastal Zone Management Act is expected to serve as the principal legal vehicle for the operationalization of MSP in Belize, with forthcoming amendments anticipated to formalize MSP authority within the national legal framework.

. **Environmental Protection Act (CAP 328):** This legislation outlines the framework for environmental conservation and management in Belize, including provisions for environmental impact assessments (EIAs) and pollution control, which are essential components of MSP.

. **National Protected Areas System Act (CAP 215):** This Act establishes the legal framework for the designation, management, and conservation of Belize's protected areas network. It is particularly relevant to the MSP process, as it provides the legislative foundation for the creation and management of Biodiversity Protection Zones, aligning with Belize's conservation commitments in the agreements under the Belize Blue Bonds for Ocean Conservation debt conversion.

. **Fisheries Resources Act & Regulations (Chap. 210):** This Act and its subsidiary regulations establish the legal framework for the sustainable management, conservation, and utilization of Belize's fisheries resources. It defines licensing procedures, enforcement provisions, and management measures critical to maintaining fisheries sustainability within the MSP process, and also provides the legal basis for the designation and management of Marine Reserves.

. Belize Blue Bonds for Ocean Conservation Debt Conversion: The debt conversion known as the Belize Blue Bonds for Ocean Conservation establishes a comprehensive framework of agreements, including the Blue Bonds Loan Act (No. 28 of 2021), the BLA, the CFA, and associated Statutory Instruments. Collectively, these instruments formalize Belize's financial commitments, conservation targets, and marine protection objectives that are integral to the development and implementation of the BSOP and conservation strategies (TNC, 2021).

International Agreements:

. **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS):** As a party to UNCLOS, Belize is committed to the sustainable use and conservation of marine resources within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and beyond. UNCLOS provides the legal basis for MSP by defining ocean zones and outlining rights and responsibilities of coastal states.

. **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD):** Under the CBD, Belize is obligated to develop strategies for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, including marine and coastal ecosystems. MSP serves as a tool to fulfil these commitments by promoting the protection of biodiversity through spatial management.

. **High Seas Treaty (BBNJ Agreement):** Belize signed the High Seas Treaty, a legally binding instrument under UNCLOS aimed at conserving and sustainably using marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, in September 2023 and ratified it in March 2024. Notably, Belize became the first CARICOM country to ratify the Agreement, reinforcing its leadership role in advancing global ocean governance. This treaty emphasizes the establishment of marine protected areas and EIAs, directly supporting Belize's MSP objectives and broader conservation commitments.

Regional Agreements:

. **Cartagena Convention:** As a signatory to the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment in the Wider Caribbean Region (Cartagena Convention), Belize commits to regional cooperation in the sustainable management of marine and coastal resources. The convention's protocols, including those on specially protected areas and wildlife, align with MSP goals.

. **Central American Integration System (SICA):** Through its membership in SICA, Belize engages in regional initiatives aimed at sustainable development and environmental conservation, including marine resource management, which complement national MSP efforts.

. **Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System (MBRS):**
Belize forms part of the regional conservation efforts for the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef, the second-largest barrier reef system in the world. Although the MBRS Project was concluded, Belize continues to contribute to regional monitoring and management initiatives, notably through its participation in the Reef Health Index (RHI) and Reef Scorecard, which promote ecosystem-based management, regional collaboration, and support for MSP objectives.

These legal frameworks and agreements provide a comprehensive foundation for Belize's MSP, ensuring that national efforts are harmonized with international and regional commitments to marine conservation and sustainable use.



3.
BELIZE'S PROGRESS IN THE MSP CONTEXT

In order to provide a clear path for the development of this Policy and to support the co-development of an implementation plan to guide and coordinate the effective adoption of the BSOP, this section identifies MSP-related initiatives in Belize. Complementary to Section 2, the existing MSP-related initiatives are identified and their status within the MSP process is reviewed. The aim is to point out how these initiatives have contributed to the process and point out their contribution and gaps through a SWOT analysis for the entire MSP process.

3.1 MSP-RELATED INITIATIVES

The ongoing development of Belize's MSP process has mapped out several MSP-related initiatives, reflecting the country's commitment to sustainable ocean governance. These initiatives encompass both national and regional scopes, with a strong emphasis on ICZM, biodiversity conservation, and the development of the blue economy.

Through the planning processes for the BSOP, which serves as Belize's Marine Spatial Plan, and the ICZM Plan, Belize has established a robust policy and institutional basis for advancing MSP. These initiatives have laid the groundwork for the implementation of legal and governance structures, stakeholder engagement strategies, and conservation planning. Notably, as of October 2024, informed by the BSOP process, 25.05% of Belize's ocean space has already been designated as Biodiversity Protection Zones. The BSOP process includes the goal of designating up to 30% of Belize's ocean area as Biodiversity Protection Zones, and the delimitation of the ocean space where permissible activities can be lawfully carried out, by November 2026. The development of the BSOP is supported by financial support from the Belize Fund in the framework of the Government Strategic Allocation (GSA) project titled "Establishing the enabling environment for the development of a Marine Spatial Plan through strengthened governance, improved management, and enhanced monitoring of Belize's coastal and marine resources" under the Belize Blue Bonds Program. Belize's proactive engagement with MSP, both prior to and following the signing of the Belize Blue Bonds Agreement in 2021, has positioned the country as a recognized regional leader in sustainable ocean governance within the Caribbean and Central American regions.

Belize's MSP initiatives exemplify a coordinated approach to addressing the complex interplay of ecological, economic, and social priorities. However, continued investment in the legal, scientific, and institutional dimensions of MSP will be necessary to fully realize its potential as a tool for sustainable development and resilience. Each initiative and its contribution to each step of the MSP process are outlined below. This diagnosis reflects Belize's progress towards a robust and efficient MSP while identifying specific gaps:

. **STEP 1. Identifying the Need and Establishing Authority**

. **Contributions in Belize:**

. Belize identified the need to strengthen MSP during the development of the Belize Blue Bonds for Ocean Conservation debt conversion agreements, which established formal commitments to designate marine protection zones and to develop the BSOP as a core requirement of the conservation obligations. The CZMAI was designated as the lead agency for the MSP process by the Government of Belize in 2022. The CZM Act, enacted in 1998, establishes CZMAI's authority to lead and coordinate ICZM in Belize.

. Belize has established key institutional frameworks through the CZMAI in the BSOP and legal instruments such as the Coastal Zone Management Act (CAP 329). CAP 329 establishes the regulatory framework for coastal management in Belize, including the creation of the CZMAI and guidelines for developing and implementing a national coastal zone management plan. On the other hand, the Environmental Protection Act (2020) regulates activities that impact the environment, including EIAs, pollution control, and conservation of natural resources, and is an essential component of MSP. Additionally, the Fisheries Resources Act (2020) provides the legal authority for the designation and management of Marine Reserves, which are a key element of Belize's marine conservation framework.

. In addition, a governance framework for the BSOP has been established, led by the CZMAI and involving key stakeholders, such as government agencies, NGOs, co-managers, and community representatives, through mechanisms such as the BSOP Steering Committee and Technical Working Groups. This institutional arrangement supports coordination across agencies and sectors, and provides a foundation for participatory and integrated plan implementation. A more detailed overview of this governance structure, along with a visual representation, is provided in *Section 7.2* of this document.

. **Overview:**

. This step is well developed in terms of institutional arrangements and planning structures—such as the designation of the CZMAI as the lead agency for Belize's MSP process, and the establishment of the BSOP Steering Committee. However, the legal mechanism for signing into law, gazetting and implementing the BSOP at the conclusion of the MSP process has not yet been fully articulated in national legislation. Incorporating MSP provisions into the Coastal Zone Management Act is currently underway and represents a key next step to ensure full legal authority for MSP implementation in Belize. While the current role of the CZMAI is that of a guiding and coordinating institution under the ICZM Plan—rather than an enforcement agency—future legislative amendments are expected to provide enforceability to spatial planning instruments such as the ICZM and the BSOP. Remaining coordination challenges include situations where multiple institutions contribute to related functions—such as permitting, environmental monitoring, or compliance—which require further streamlining to support coherent ocean governance.

. **Reference:**

. *BSOP Technical Resources*
. *CAP 329: Coastal Zone Management Act (2020)*
. *Interim National ICZM Plan (2020-2025)*

. **STEP 2. Obtaining Financial Support**

. **Contributions in Belize:**

. Belize has secured significant and innovative conservation financing through the Belize Blue Bonds for Ocean Conservation debt conversion, completed in November 2021. This transaction restructured a substantial portion of Belize's external debt and established long-term funding commitments for marine conservation, including the development and implementation of the BSOP. The associated CFA created the Belize Fund for a Sustainable Future, which allocates resources through the GSA mechanism to support MSP and related priorities. The Resilient Bold Belize (RBB) initiative, developed in parallel with the Blue Bonds financing arrangements, builds upon the conservation commitments established under the debt conversion and aims to secure additional funding for long-term marine and coastal conservation. For further details on the structure and terms of the debt conversion, see TNC (2021).

. **Overview:**

. Belize has established a robust foundation for sustainable conservation financing through instruments such as the Belize Blue Bonds program and the Belize Fund, which is designed to provide long-term—potentially perpetual—support for Belize's marine and coastal initiatives. In parallel, the RBB initiative, implemented under a Project

Finance for Permanence (PFP) model, seeks to expand and diversify financing streams for long-term conservation of Belize's marine and coastal areas. Continued progress is needed to enhance domestic financing mechanisms and strengthen strategic partnerships to reinforce and complement these initiatives.

. **Reference:**

. *Blue Bond: Reports in Belize Blue Economy Development Policy Strategy and Implementation Plan (2022)*
. *CZMAI reports on coastal funding*
. *Resilient Bold Belize (RBB): The Nature Conservancy. Belize Debt Conversion Case Study*

Designing the planning process

. **STEP 3. Organizing the Process Through Pre-Planning**

. **Contributions in Belize:**

. The Belize Blue Economy Policy has outlined draft vision, general goals, and specific objectives for the blue economy and conservation, establishing the basis for the marine planning process. CZMAI established the BSOP Steering Committee and technical working groups as the basis for a coordinated approach. The BSOP Steering Committee then developed the vision, goals and objectives for the BSOP, and guiding principles for decision-making.The BSOP planning area includes the internal waters, territorial sea, and EEZ, collectively referred to as the Belize Ocean. These boundaries are defined by UNCLOS (1982), and informed by the Belize ICZM Plan (2016), the Belize Maritime Economy Plan (2022), and related national frameworks. While general maritime jurisdictional extents have been identified, gaps remain in the formalisation of jurisdictions authorities for specific spatial delineations as they will pertain to the BSOP. These spatial boundaries are further illustrated in *Section 5.1 (Geographical Scope of Application)*.

. **Overview:**

. Several platforms and tools—such as the BSOP website, BSOP Stakeholder Engagement Dashboard, the Interactive Story Map, and the Belize SeaSketch project—are already in place to support participatory and technical planning progress and stakeholder engagement in the BSOP process. These resources form the foundation of an emerging monitoring framework. However, there remains an opportunity to further consolidate and formalize a comprehensive set of progress metrics, including indicators related to regulatory readiness, implementation benchmarks, and ecological outcomes.

. **Reference:**

. *BSOP Technical Resources*
. *BSOP website*
. *BSOP Stakeholder Engagement Dashboard*
. *Interactive Story Map*
. *Belize SeaSketch project*
. *BSOP Stakeholder Reports (BSOP Resources)*
. *Interim National ICZM Plan (2020-2025)*
. *ICZM Plan (2016)*
. *Belize Maritime Economy Plan (2022)*

. **STEP 4. Organizing Stakeholder Participation**

. **Contributions in Belize:**

. A series of structured stakeholder engagement activities have been carried out under the BSOP. These include national and regional workshops, the Ocean Use Survey, and targeted consultations with key stakeholder groups such as local communities, tourism operators, fishers, NGOs, and private sector actors. Additionally, the development of the BSOP Stakeholder Engagement Strategy has formalized the approach for continuous and inclusive participation throughout the MSP cycle. These efforts aim to ensure transparency, build ownership, and integrate diverse perspectives into MSP.

. **Overview:**

. Advanced, and should be updated as the process progresses and its actions are defined. Key stakeholders were identified early in the BSOP process, with good integration in the public consultation processes.

. **Reference:**

. *BSOP Technical Resources (2022)*
. *ICZM Plan (2016)*

. **STEP 5. Defining and Analysing Existing Conditions**

. **Contributions in Belize:**

. A strong foundation for defining and analysing existing conditions has been established through national and project-specific assessments. Key efforts include the ICZM Plan (2016) and the Belize Maritime Economy Plan (2022), which mapped ocean space uses and compiled ecological and socio-economic data.

. The 2024 Belize MSP Data Gaps and Needs Assessment identified priority data needs across ecological, socio-economic, cultural, and governance dimensions. The assessment emphasized the importance of spatial and temporal resolution, data interoperability, and centralized data management to support effective MSP.

. The 2024 Interim Existing Conditions Report compiled and analysed spatial and tabular data from multiple sectors, highlighting current conditions and patterns of use across Belize's marine space. The report identifies key habitat types, marine activities, and cumulative human pressures, contributing to the baseline for zoning and planning decisions.

. Mapping initiatives using the Belize SeaSketch project have been deployed to support spatial representation of current and potential marine uses, including fishing, tourism, conservation, maritime transport, and emerging sectors such as offshore aquaculture and renewable energy.

. In May 2024, a Multi-Stakeholder MSP Workshop convened by CZMAI generated a rapid assessment of current conditions and uses, developed preliminary future scenario narratives, and produced a draft compatibility matrix to inform zoning discussions and stakeholder engagement under the BSOP process.

. Innovative spatial planning tools such as Ocean Use Survey Heatmaps, Human Stressor Maps, and consolidated ecosystem data layers are informing multi-sectoral dialogue and participatory decision-making. These tools enhance the technical capacity of the MSP process and align with global best practices.

. **Overview:**

. Significant progress has been made in compiling and analysing Belize's ecological, socio-economic, and spatial baseline data. However, opportunities remain to further consolidate these datasets into a dynamic, centralized MSP information system. Advancing data standardization, metadata documentation, and cross-sector data sharing protocols will be essential for supporting adaptive management and future scenario planning under the MSP process.

. **Reference:**

. *ICZM Plan (2016)*
. *2024 Belize MSP Data Gaps and Needs Assessment*
. *2024 Interim Existing Conditions Report*
. *Belize Maritime Economy Plan (2022)*
. *Belize SeaSketch project*
. *BSOP Interactive Maps*

. **STEP 6. Defining and Analysing Future Conditions**

. **Contributions in Belize:**

. Efforts related to future trends, such as climate change adaptation, focussing on coastal actions were carried out in ICZM Plan 2016. Future use scenarios were partially explored. The BSOP mentions emerging sectors such as renewable energies and aquaculture. The Climate Resilient ICZM Performance Indicators (2020) include indicators for monitoring climate change and coastal vulnerability.

. The need for public information systems to support MSP has been mentioned in strategic reports and explored through CZMAI initiatives. However, there remains a lack of forward-looking spatial analyses—particularly concerning emerging ocean uses such as offshore renewable energy and aquaculture within Belize's EEZ. While platforms like SeaSketch and the BSOP Interactive Maps provide valuable baseline data, there is a need for more comprehensive suitability and scenario-based assessments to support long-term MSP decision-making.

. Initiatives to map current and potential areas are being carried out, for example through a project on the Belize SeaSketch project. A workshop was held in Belize in 2024 to initiate the process of analysing future conditions, including the identification of trends, opportunities, and risks to inform scenario-based planning. The 2024 Multi-Stakeholder MSP Workshop also included dedicated training on Marxan scenario modelling tools and facilitated the development of stakeholder recommendations for strengthening Belize's zoning framework under the BSOP process.

. **Overview:**

. Progress has been made in analysing future conditions, particularly regarding coastal vulnerability and climate change adaptation, as reflected in ICZM-related indicators and BSOP references. However, there remains a gap in forward-looking spatial assessments for emerging activities within Belize's EEZ, such as offshore renewable energy and aquaculture. Addressing this gap will require the development of scenario-based tools and suitability analyses that support informed planning and policy development for future blue economy opportunities.

. **Reference:**

. *BSOP Technical Resources*
. *Climate Resilient ICZM Indicators (2020)*
. *ICZM Plan (2016)*
. *Belize SeaSketch project*

The plan

STEP 7. Preparing and Approving the Spatial Management Plan

Contributions in Belize:

. While a comprehensive Marine Spatial Plan has not yet been finalized, existing national frameworks—such as the ICZM Plan, the Belize Maritime Economy Plan, and the Blue Economy Development Policy, Strategy and Implementation Plan—provide the foundational basis for spatial planning and zoning. The BSOP Steering Committee set the vision, goals, and objectives for the BSOP process. The final BSOP will include marine conservation outcomes for biodiversity protection and denote, in reasonable detail, the permissible activities that may be lawfully carried out in any part of Belize's Ocean. An Implementation Plan developed during the BSOP process will set the course of future actions related to ocean management. This requirement is established under Clause 1 and Milestone 6 of the CFA, which stipulate that the MSP must be legally enforceable, include an Implementation Plan, and be fully implemented by November 2026.

. Stakeholder consultation processes have been conducted in connection with the BSOP process and various localized planning efforts. However, a formal national consultation and approval process for an integrated spatial management plan under the BSOP has yet to be completed.

. **Overview:**

. The progress of this phase logically requires the consolidation of the previous stages. In this sense, the role of this policy is to generate a framework where individual initiatives can have an effect on the MSP process in general.

. **Reference:**

. *ICZM Plan (2016)*
. *BSOP Technical Working Groups (2023)*
. *Hol Chan Marine Reserve Management Plan (2020)*

Enabling implementation of the plan

. **STEP 8. Implementing and Enforcing the Spatial Management Plan**

. **Contributions in Belize:**

. While the BSOP is still under development, foundational experiences from related marine governance efforts—such as the ICZM Plan, the Blue Economy Policy, and co-managed marine protected areas—offer valuable insights for future implementation.

. Several institutional challenges have been observed in areas that would affect enforcement of the Marine Spatial Plan, including limited patrolling capacity, constrained resources for compliance monitoring, and fragmented enforcement responsibilities across agencies. These issues, documented in CZMAI technical reports and national consultations, underscore the need for a dedicated regulatory and operational framework to ensure the effectiveness of future implementation.

. While multi-stakeholder engagement forums and technical workshops have been organized by entities such as CZMAI, a formal mechanism to institutionalize ongoing dialogue for implementation of the Marine Spatial Plan remains to be established. Additionally, appropriate regulations will be required to ensure that the finalized Marine Spatial Plan is legally enforceability and is fully integrated into Belize's marine governance system.

. **Overview:**

. Although Belize is not yet in the implementation phase for the Marine Spatial Plan, several relevant initiatives—such as stakeholder engagement processes, local marine management efforts, and cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms—can inform the design of future implementation structures. These experiences provide a foundation for developing regulatory, operational, and participatory frameworks to support enforcement and governance once the plan is formally adopted.

. **Reference:**

. *Hol Chan Marine Reserve Management Plan (2020)*
. *CZMAI Enforcement Reports*
. *BSOP Stakeholder Engagement Reports*
. *Interim National ICZM Plan (2020-2025)*
. *Blue Economy Development Policy Strategy and Plan (2022)*

Monitoring, evaluation and adaptation

. **STEP 9. Monitoring and Evaluating Performance**

. **Contributions in Belize:**

. Belize has introduced monitoring frameworks through indicators, such as the Climate Resilient ICZM Indicators. Lessons learned from ICZM evaluations are being integrated into MSP efforts, but continuous adaptation mechanisms are still under development. Social performance indicators are expected to include measures of equitable access to marine resources, stakeholder participation, and socioeconomic benefits to coastal communities, with further definition underway. A grievance mechanism process and protocol to receive and address stakeholder complaints is also under development as part of the BSOP implementation framework.

. **Overview:**

. Needs development to align the efforts made to date with the MSP's process and objective.

. **Reference:**

. *Climate Resilient ICZM Performance Indicators (2020)*
. *BSOP Stakeholder Reports*
. *CZMAI (2021)*
. *Hol Chan Marine Reserve Management Plan (2020)*

. **STEP 10. Adapting the Marine Spatial Management Process**

. **Contributions in Belize:**

. The ICZM Plan has incorporated periodic evaluations and adaptation mechanisms. The transition to an MSP framework includes lessons learned to create a more dynamic and responsive system.

. **Overview:**

. Lessons learnt from other frameworks will help in this stage of the MSP for Belize.

. **Reference:**

. *ICZM Plan Final Evaluation Report (2020)*
. *CZMAI Interim Report (2022)*

Belize's journey toward MSP is anchored in a series of structured initiatives that span legal, institutional, financial, and participatory dimensions. Each of the STEPs outlined above reflects progress made in areas such as governance (STEP 1), financing (STEP 2), pre-planning (STEP 3), stakeholder engagement (STEP 4), and knowledge building through mapping and data analysis (STEPS 5 and 6). Strategic instruments like the BSOP and partnerships with national and international actors have enabled Belize to advance a participatory and evidence-based MSP approach. The designation of the CZMAI as the lead agency, the creation of multi-level stakeholder platforms, and the implementation of innovative financing mechanisms such as the Belize Blue Bonds for Ocean Conservation debt conversion highlight Belize's commitment to sustainable ocean governance. These coordinated efforts provide a robust foundation for the transition toward full MSP implementation and long-term ocean stewardship.

Belize has implemented key MSP-related initiatives that collectively contribute to advancing the MSP process, among the main ones are:

Belize Sustainable Ocean Plan (BSOP)

The BSOP provides a process, currently under development, for integrating conservation and economic objectives in MSP, including the future designation of up to 30% of the ocean space as Biodiversity Protection Zones. The Belize Blue Bonds for Ocean Conservation agreements contain legally-binding conservation commitments and draft milestones, including, but not limited to, the development, completion, approval, signing into law, gazetting and implementation of a plan. It emphasizes an inclusive, transparent, equitable, and science-based participatory process.

Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute (CZMAI)

Develops and implements the ICZM Plan, which addresses land-sea interactions and prioritizes sustainability in marine governance. CZMAI is also the lead agency for the BSOP.

Belize Blue Bonds for Ocean Conservation Debt Conversion

Unlocked financial resources to support marine conservation, enabling Belize to expand the percentage of its Ocean in Biodiversity Protection Zones, complete a legally enforceable MSP, and other conservation commitments.

Co-managed Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

Reflect successful governance models that incorporate zoning and enforcement practices. Hol Chan Marine Reserve is one of several MPAs in Belize with established management plans that contribute to area-based ocean governance and inform the MSP process.

Climate Resilient ICZM Performance Indicators

Provides tools for assessing ecological and socio-economic performance to guide MSP adaptation.

Events and activities co-related to the development of MSP in Belize have also contributed to the process in general. Some examples could be:

Official Launch of Belize's MSP Process

On October 19, 2022, the Government of Belize, in partnership with TNC, officially launched the MSP process. This event marked a significant milestone under the BLA and the CFA, emphasizing a public, inclusive, and participatory approach.

Ocean Use Survey and Multi-Stakeholder MSP Workshop

In May 2024, the CZMAI, in collaboration with TNC, hosted the first Multi-Stakeholder MSP Workshop and lunched the Ocean Use Survey. The workshop marked a significant milestone in Belize's MSP process, focusing on assessment for planning and fostering collaboration among various stakeholders. The survey provides a detailed understanding of how Belize's ocean spaces are utilized by various stakeholders, including fishers, tourism operators, and conservationists.

Replenishment Zones Program

Replenishment zones can help increase the size and density of fish, improve habitat and enhance fishing in the surrounding areas, making them an ally for the BSOP.

Ocean Accounting for Sustainable Development

Development of BSOP as part of its efforts to promote ocean accounting for sustainable development. This initiative aligns with the country's Maritime Economy Plan.

MSP Peer-to-Peer Knowledge Exchange

In December 2024, the Government of Belize participated in a MSP peer-to-peer knowledge exchange event with Barbados. This session facilitated the sharing of insights on governance structures and the alignment of Blue Bonds programs with national and international conservation targets.

Additional Ocean Use Surveys

In addition to the initial survey launched in May 2024, further BSOP Ocean Use Surveys were completed in 2024 and 2025 to collect updated data on marine activities, stakeholder preferences, and spatial conflicts across Belize's ocean space. These surveys provide critical inputs for refining the spatial management framework and developing scenarios.

April 2025 Multi-Stakeholder Workshop

In April 2025, the CZMAI convened an additional Multi-Stakeholder MSP Workshop to review preliminary planning outputs, validate future scenarios, and gather recommendations for strengthening zoning design and implementation strategies.

3.2 KEY SWOT FOR ADVANCING MSP

As Belize advances in the MSP process, a comprehensive understanding of its internal Strengths and Weaknesses, as well as the external Opportunities and Threats, becomes critical. The SWOT analysis provides a strategic overview of Belize's capacity to implement effective MSP, highlighting the foundational achievements, such as institutional frameworks and stakeholder engagement, alongside the challenges that require immediate attention. By leveraging its natural and institutional advantages while addressing existing gaps, Belize can position itself as a regional leader in sustainable ocean governance. The following analysis serves as a framework to align efforts, optimize resources, and overcome barriers in advancing MSP (see Fig. 2).

To fully realize the potential of its MSP process, Belize must address several critical gaps. These include the *(i)* development of detailed implementation frameworks, incorporating specific zoning regulations and enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance and effective management. *(ii)* Continuous stakeholder engagement and capacity-building programs are essential to foster inclusive participation and maintain momentum. Additionally, *(iii)* establishing comprehensive monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation strategies will be key to assessing progress and enabling data-driven decision-making. These actions are fundamental to creating a resilient and adaptive MSP framework that balances conservation with sustainable development.

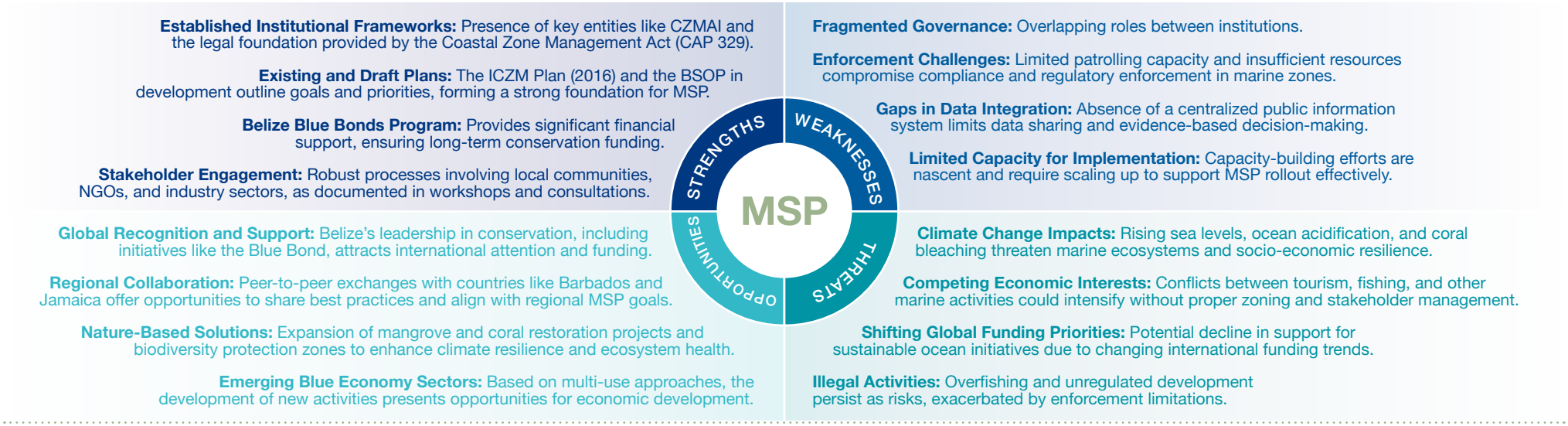


Figure 2. SWOT analysis of advances in the MSP process.

SECTION III:
WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS OF BELIZE'S MSP POLICY?



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WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS OF BELIZE'S MSP POLICY?

4.
VISION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The BSOP-related initiatives are guided by a clear and ambitious vision that seeks to balance ecological conservation, economic development, and social equity. This vision reflects the fundamental need for a healthy, resilient, and equitably shared ocean, ensuring that Belize's marine environment continues to sustain biodiversity, cultural heritage, and livelihoods. To translate this vision into action, the MSP process is grounded in a set of guiding principles that provide the conceptual and operational framework for decision-making. These principles, developed in the BSOP actions, have been interpreted here in line with global best practice and aligned with international MSP methodologies, such as the UNESCO MSP Guide (Ehler and Douvere, 2009) and the MSPRoadmap (UNESCO-IOC/European Commission, 2021). The following sections outline Belize's MSP vision and the fundamental principles that underpin its development, ensuring an inclusive, science-driven, adaptive, and ecosystem-based approach to marine governance.

4.1 VISION

A healthy, resilient, and equitably shared ocean that supports a thriving national economy and nurtures the culture and well-being of all Belizeans.

Vision, Goal and Objectives for the BSOP, Revised 2024.

4.2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Grounded in equity, sustainability, transparency, ecosystem-based management, and scientific rigor, the MSP Policy ensures an inclusive, adaptive approach that reflects stakeholder priorities and ecological imperatives. This section compiles the principles defined within the framework of the *Terms of reference BSOP technical working groups 2023, Annex iii - MSP guiding principles for decision making* and adds a narrative based on the main pillars of the MSP process (cf., *2.1. The MSP Process*), the inputs of the stakeholders obtained from the consultations via questionnaires and workshops and following the premises of the two editions of the UNESCO MSP manuals.

1. Inclusivity

The MSP process and the resulting plan will address the social, cultural, and economic needs of all stakeholders. Particular efforts will be made to include minority, marginalized, and underrepresented groups, and to ensure that stakeholder engagement venues, language, times, and processes are accessible to all stakeholders.

BSOP MSP Guiding Principles for Decision Making

This principle is in line with MSP best practices that emphasise stakeholder participation. Nevertheless, it could include explicit mention of the rights of Indigenous peoples (i.e., the Garinagu) and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK).

IH cantabria INSTITUTO DE HIDRÁULICA AMBIENTAL UNIVERSIDAD DE CANTABRIA

MSP POLICY
Consultancy to develop an updated ICZM policy, plan, and to prepare draft amendments for the Belize Coastal Zone Management act and regulations.

Belize Fund For A Sustainable Future

BLUE BONDS

2. Participation

Stakeholders will be invited to participate and contribute, through widespread consultations, in data gathering, planning, and making decisions about uses and zonation of Belize's ocean. Participation should allow for the integration of the expectations, needs and opportunities of various stakeholder groups into the MSP process and outputs. It should address potential conflicts through open dialogue to facilitate equitable and balanced solutions. The Governance Framework and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy reflects the opportunities for multistakeholder participation. The Steering Committee for the MSP process will comprise government and non-government representatives from key sectors that depend on and manage marine resources and will be supported by Technical Working Groups.

BSOP MSP Guiding Principles for Decision Making

This principle is consistent with international MSP guidance. MSP aims to establish multiple objectives; thus, social participation is a critical component in defining goals, gathering and discussing data, and integrating diverse stakeholder perspectives into marine space management.

Effective participation enables stakeholders to expand their knowledge, build confidence in the process, validate outcomes, and enhance their ability to contribute to the management of their respective sectors. Ultimately, the participatory process seeks to lay the foundation for monitoring and evaluating the marine spatial management plan, facilitating stakeholder adherence and compliance with proposed management measures.

In this regard, it is recommended to emphasize the need for capacity-building programs to empower local stakeholders to meaningfully engage in decision-making. Participation will be enhanced through capacity-building initiatives, ensuring that all stakeholders—particularly small-scale fishers, women, and youth—possess the knowledge and tools necessary for meaningful and informed engagement.

3. Transparency

The Belize MSP process will be open to public scrutiny. At the start of the MSP process, the vision, goals, objectives, and guiding principles will be widely disseminated to set expectations early in the process. Subsequently, information regarding activities underway, information products developed, decisions made, progress reports, and other relevant information will be promptly shared on multiple media channels in language and formats that are widely accessible and easily understood by the public.

BSOP MSP Guiding Principles for Decision Making

Belize has already established multiple data accessibility mechanisms, including the BSOP website, which features an Interactive Story Map, a Stakeholder Engagement Viewer, and SeaSketch Data Layers. These platforms ensure that data and updates are publicly available for viewing and download. Information is also disseminated through social media, radio, and television to reach diverse audiences. Further alignment with UNESCO's recommendations on open access data portals can continue to strengthen transparency and public engagement.

4. Ecosystem-based approach

The strategy for decision-making will ensure "the integrated management of land, water, and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way", which recognizes that humans, with their cultural diversity, are an integral component of ecosystems, and that ecosystem goods and services are integral for national development.

BSOP MSP Guiding Principles for Decision Making

Ecosystem-based management takes into account the functions, processes and ecosystem services of coastal and marine environments, understanding them as a set of ecosystems made up of ecological (natural), economic and social elements. This approach takes into account environmental characteristics, carrying capacity and ecosystem services. MSP incorporates an integrated management strategy that considers cumulative impacts and

interactions within ecosystems to maintain their health and resilience. To this end, methodologies for assessing cumulative impacts should be strengthened to take into account the multiple pressures on ecosystems.

5. Precautionary principle

The precautionary principle enables decision-makers to adopt precautionary measures when scientific evidence about an environmental or human health hazard is uncertain and the stakes are high. When there are threats of serious or irreversible harm to the environment or society, a precautionary approach will be applied to ensure that a lack of scientific certainty shall not be a reason to postpone decisions or actions that prevent or minimize such harm.

BSOP MSP Guiding Principles for Decision Making

6. Evidence-based planning

Decisions will be based on scientific information and global best practices. Where data are insufficient or current information is not available, reasonable efforts will be made to address data and information gaps by consulting the scientific literature, seeking expert scientific opinion and advice, consulting stakeholders, and/or direct field measurement or modelling.

BSOP MSP Guiding Principles for Decision Making

Related to this principle, the connection to cross-border data-sharing initiatives within the Caribbean region should be strengthened. It is also worth adding the development of effective science-policy interfaces to ensure that scientific research is translated into practical MSP measures and decision-making processes. This includes fostering collaboration between scientists, policymakers, and marine stakeholders to integrate the latest ecological, social, and economic research into spatial planning frameworks. By strengthening this connection, MSP can be guided by evidence-based insights, improving zoning decisions, adaptive management, and long-term sustainability of marine resources.

7. Climate smart

The MSP process will take into account the extreme vulnerability of Belize's coastal and marine areas to climate change, which may have dramatic negative impacts on coastal populations as well as coastal and marine ecosystems in the short-, medium-, and long- term.

BSOP MSP Guiding Principles for Decision Making

This principle should also incorporate nature-based solutions (NbS) for climate resilience, as recommended in global MSP frameworks. On the other hand, use future scenarios to ensure flexibility by considering both climate and economic projections to guide decisions. It is also worth mentioning the incorporation of scenarios for emerging activities such as aquaculture and sustainable transport and the expansion to the focus to include climate change mitigation strategies, such as blue carbon initiatives.

8. Equity

Decisions made during the MSP process, as well as in the conduct of the process itself, will aim to deliver fair and equal access to participatory processes, economic opportunities, and marine resources, and will make particular efforts to compensate for pre-existing inequalities.

BSOP MSP Guiding Principles for Decision Making

9. Balance

The MSP process will seek the optimal balance between social, cultural, economic, and ecological objectives to provide economic opportunities and preserve cultural and social values, while protecting and improving management of Belize's ocean and minimizing adverse impacts on the environment. Balance is achieved when the protection of marine ecosystems and demands for development are given due consideration in an open and strategic manner.

BSOP MSP Guiding Principles for Decision Making

Achieving balance in MSP requires not only integrating ecological, social, cultural, and economic objectives but also actively managing competing interests among marine users. In Belize, conflicts between, for example, fisheries and tourism highlight the need for transparent arbitration mechanisms and strategic zoning frameworks. A well-structured conflict resolution mechanism within MSP ensures that trade-offs between different sectors are mediated fairly and equitably, promoting solutions that maximize shared benefits. Additionally, multi-use zoning frameworks provide a structured approach to allocating ocean space in a way that accommodates multiple activities while preserving the integrity of marine ecosystems. These frameworks allow for coexistence between compatible activities, fostering synergies rather than competition.

In this sense, this principle could mention the definition of conflict resolution mechanisms, ensuring transparent arbitration between competing uses of the ocean. It could also consider mentioning the establishment of multi-use zoning frameworks, integrating conservation with sustainable economic activities. By embedding these strategies into the principle of Balance, it becomes a practical tool for sustainable ocean governance.

10. Integrated Governance *(proposed principle)*

Given that MSP needs to coordinate multiple sectors (fisheries, tourism, renewable energy, conservation) and different levels of government (national, regional, local), it would be ideal to create a new principle focussed on Integrated Governance.

The MSP framework will promote coordination across sectors (multisectoral approach), agencies, and levels of government, ensuring coherence and complementarity among different marine uses. MSP is inherently a multisectoral approach that seeks to align interests, reduce conflicts, and create synergies among different stakeholders, from fisheries and tourism to renewable energy and conservation.

MSP emerged as a multisectoral approach with an explicit spatial perspective, aiming to coordinate and facilitate negotiation among sectors and societal actors in order to solve current conflicts, as well as avoiding potential future ones (Ehler and Douvere, 2009). Indeed, successful MSP refers to bringing actors from different sectors and action arenas to exchange visions, interests, concerns and work together in an integrated way towards developing a holistic and widely acceptable plan (UNESCO-IOC/ European Commission, 2021).

11. Adaptive Management *(proposed principle)*

Given that UNESCO explicitly recommends adaptive management in MSP, and that this strategy is present in international best practice, it would make sense to create a new principle called Adaptive Management.

The MSP process must remain dynamic and capable of evolving as new scientific insights, stakeholder/society needs, and socio-environmental conditions emerge. An adaptive management approach ensures that lessons learned from implementation are continuously integrated into decision-making, allowing the plan to be refined and improved over time. By embracing flexibility and ongoing evaluation, MSP can respond effectively to uncertainties and new challenges.

12. Polluter Pays Principle *(proposed principle)*

The MSP process will apply the polluter pays principle, which holds that those responsible for causing environmental degradation should bear the costs of mitigation, remediation, and restoration. This approach reinforces accountability and incentivizes compliance with conservation and management measures, aligning with international best practices for sustainable marine governance.

4.3 THEMATIC AND CROSS-CUTTING PILLARS SUPPORTING MSP

Complementing a previous subsection, the development of the MSP process in Belize must also consider key cross-cutting and thematic pillars, as outlined in global MSP best practices. These pillars provide a strategic foundation for decision-making, ensuring that MSP implementation is knowledge-driven, participatory, and adaptive to socio-environmental changes.



Cross-cutting Pillars

. **Knowledge Generation:** Strengthening marine knowledge systems is fundamental for effective MSP. This includes integrating sector-specific data, scientific research, and TEK from local and Indigenous communities into spatial planning and decision-making.

. **Awareness and Capacity Building:** Public awareness and stakeholder engagement are crucial to fostering a shared understanding of the importance of marine governance and sustainable planning. Capacity-building initiatives should be designed to train government officials, community leaders, and civil society actors to effectively participate in MSP processes.

. **Cross-border and Transboundary Cooperation:** Given that marine ecosystems and resources often extend beyond national jurisdictions, MSP must consider cross-border (bilateral) and transboundary (regional) coordination. This ensures alignment with neighbouring countries and regional frameworks, fostering cooperative marine governance.

Thematic Pillars *(examples)*

. **Blue Economy:** Sustainable marine economic development should be a guiding priority for Belize. The blue growth ensures that economic activities in ocean areas are environmentally responsible, socially equitable, and economically viable, preserving ecosystem health for present and future generations.

. **Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience:** Climate change effects on marine ecosystems must be integrated into future MSP scenarios and decision-making. Rising sea levels, increasing ocean temperatures, and extreme weather events directly affect Belize's coastal communities, marine industries, and biodiversity, necessitating adaptive and forward-thinking planning.

. **Marine Protection and Restoration:** Healthy ecosystems are essential for biodiversity conservation and sustaining ecosystem services. MSP should identify and prioritize areas for marine protection and restoration, ensuring that at least 30% of Belize's ocean space is designated as Biodiversity Protection Zones, in alignment with national and global conservation targets.

5. IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK FOR BELIZE MSP

A well-defined policy framework is essential to ensure that Belize's MSP process is effectively implemented and aligned with national priorities, regional commitments, and international best practices. This section outlines the geographic scope of the BSOP, detailing the maritime zones under Belizean jurisdiction and their relevance to marine governance. It also highlights the integration of existing marine management frameworks, such as Managed Access Areas and Coastal Planning Regions, to ensure a holistic and coordinated approach. Furthermore, the overarching goals and strategic actions proposed in this policy framework are designed to strengthen governance, enhance marine conservation efforts, support sustainable blue economy development, and promote social equity in ocean resource management.

5.1 GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE OF APPLICATION

Global best practices indicate that MSP encompasses all maritime zones where a country holds sovereign rights and responsibilities. The MSP process in Belize is designed to span all maritime zones under the country's jurisdiction as defined by UNCLOS (1982). Therefore, the MSP for Belize is expected to include the Ocean Zone (Fig. 3):

. **Internal Waters:** Any areas of water that are on the landward side of the baseline (the low-water line along the coast as marked on charts officially recognized by the coastal State) of the territorial sea, as defined in the Maritime Areas Act, CAP 11 (Revised 2020).

. **Territorial Sea:** The area extending up to 12 nautical miles from the baseline, where Belize exercises full sovereignty over ocean space, resources, and activities.

. **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ):** The area beyond and adjacent to the seaward boundary of the Territorial Sea, extending up to 200 nautical miles, granting Belize sovereign rights for the exploration, conservation, and management of both living and non-living resources in the water column and seabed.

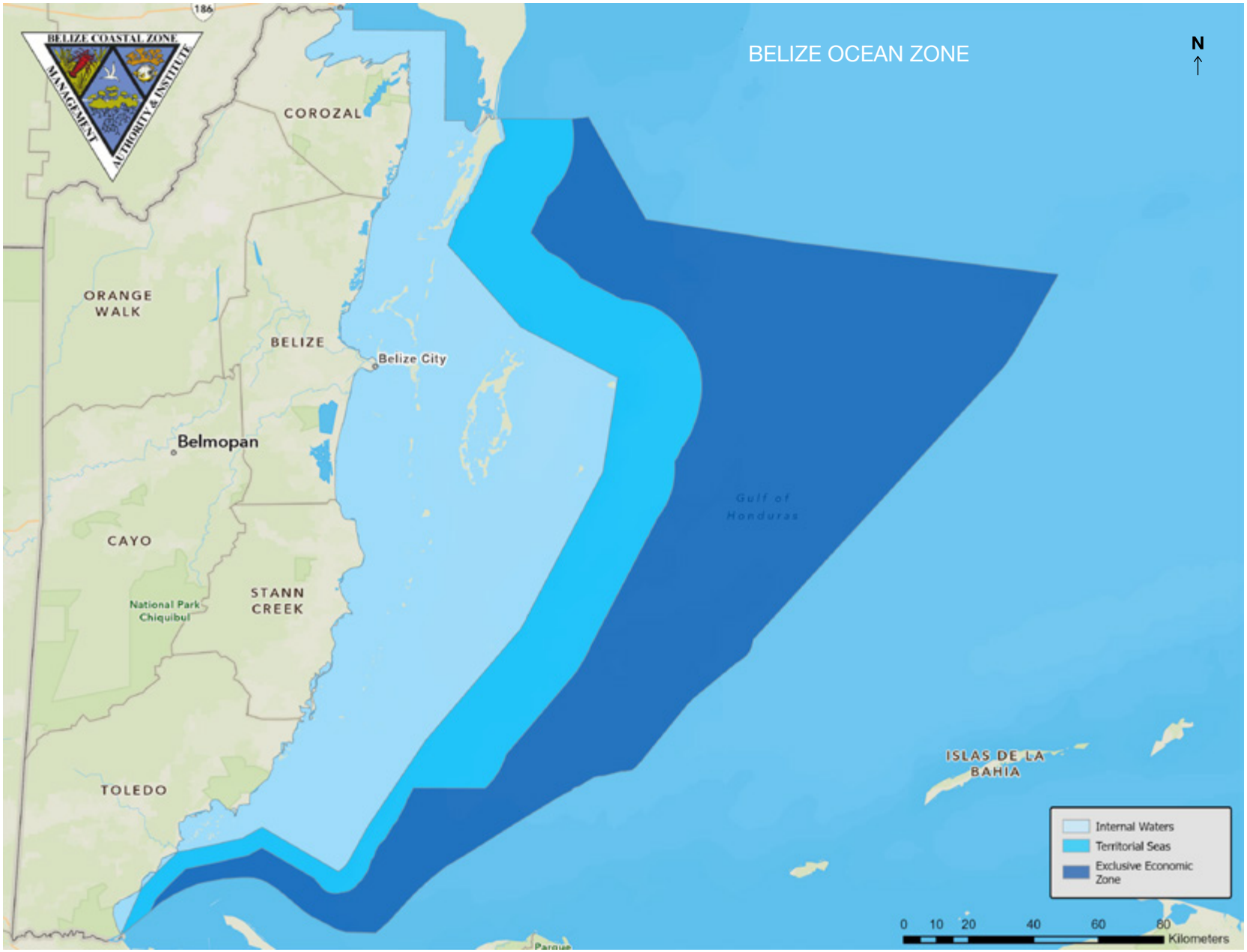


Figure 3. Internal Waters, Territorial Seas, and EEZ Source: CZMAI.

The rationale for defining the MSP's geographic extent follows the national conservation commitments and the best practices outlined in global MSP frameworks. Belize has pledged to designate up to 30% of its maritime areas as Biodiversity Protection Zones as part of Belize's Blue Bonds agreement. Achieving this ambitious goal requires an integrated planning approach that considers the full extent of Belize's marine jurisdiction to balance sustainable economic activities with environmental protection.

Furthermore, Belize's ICZM Plan (2016) highlights the importance of coastal and marine ecosystems for national economic development, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilience. By including all national ocean zones in the MSP framework, Belize ensures that marine governance decisions are comprehensive, strategically planned, and aligned with regional and international conservation efforts.

While the geographic scope of Belize's MSP is strictly limited to Maritime areas—including internal waters, the territorial sea, and the EEZ—the planning process acknowledges that many marine ecosystems and resources are transboundary in nature. As such, regional cooperation with neighbouring countries like Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras remains important to ensure coordinated management of shared ecological systems and alignment with broader conservation objectives. This ensures that Belize's MSP aligns with broader regional objectives for sustainable ocean governance and ecosystem-based management in the Caribbean. In addition, the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) is currently developing a regional MSP framework under the BE-CLME+ initiative, which seeks to integrate blue economy priorities across the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem. Belize is actively contributing to the development of the CRFM's regional MSP framework under the BE-CLME+ initiative. Through the participation of CZMAI in the Regional Steering Committee and Technical Advisory Committee, Belize is sharing insights and lessons learned from its national MSP process—the BSOP—to support the formulation of a coherent and ecosystem-based regional approach to marine governance.

Integration of Existing Marine Management and Conservation Frameworks

In addition to its jurisdictional boundaries, Belize's MSP must consider existing marine management and conservation frameworks, including Managed Access Areas (Fig. 4) and Coastal Planning Regions (Fig. 5), which play a vital role in sustainable resource use and spatial planning:

. **Managed Access Areas:** Belize has implemented a Managed Access Program that divides its territorial waters into specific areas where fishing activities are regulated to promote sustainable fisheries. These areas ensure that marine resources are equitably distributed while maintaining ecological balance. Integrating Managed Access Areas into MSP will help align fisheries management with broader MSP efforts, fostering a more cohesive governance approach.

. **Coastal Planning Regions:** Belize's ICZM Plan delineates Coastal Planning Regions to address region-specific coastal and marine challenges. These regions take into account ecological, socio-economic, and cultural characteristics, allowing for tailored management strategies that reflect local needs and environmental conditions. Recognizing these regions within the MSP will ensure that planning efforts align with Belize's coastal governance frameworks, supporting sustainable development and conservation initiatives.

. **Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Governance Framework:** Belize's national network of co-managed MPAs operates under a governance framework that includes spatial zoning, enforcement protocols, and community engagement mechanisms. These MPAs contribute directly to biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of marine resources. Their integration into MSP ensures alignment between site-based conservation strategies and broader MSP objectives.

. **National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP):** The NBSAP sets national priorities for biodiversity conservation, including marine and coastal ecosystems, and outlines actions to meet international commitments under the CBD. Incorporating its targets and strategies into the MSP process promotes policy coherence and reinforces Belize's leadership in marine biodiversity management.

Fishing areas

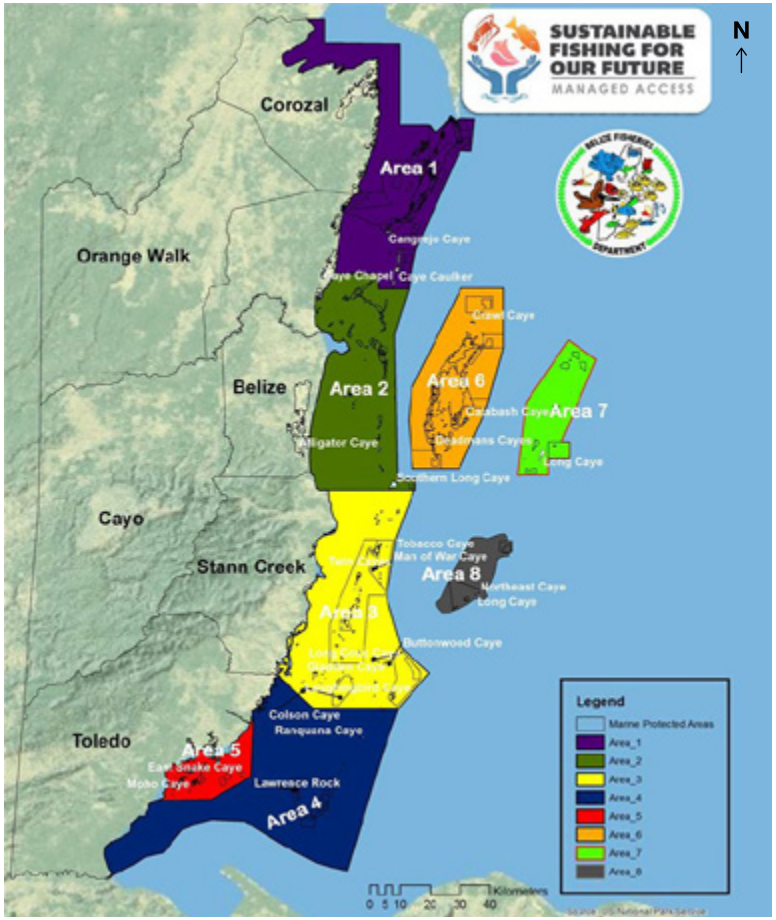


Figure 4. Managed Access Areas. Source: Belize Fisheries Department.

Coastal Planning Regions

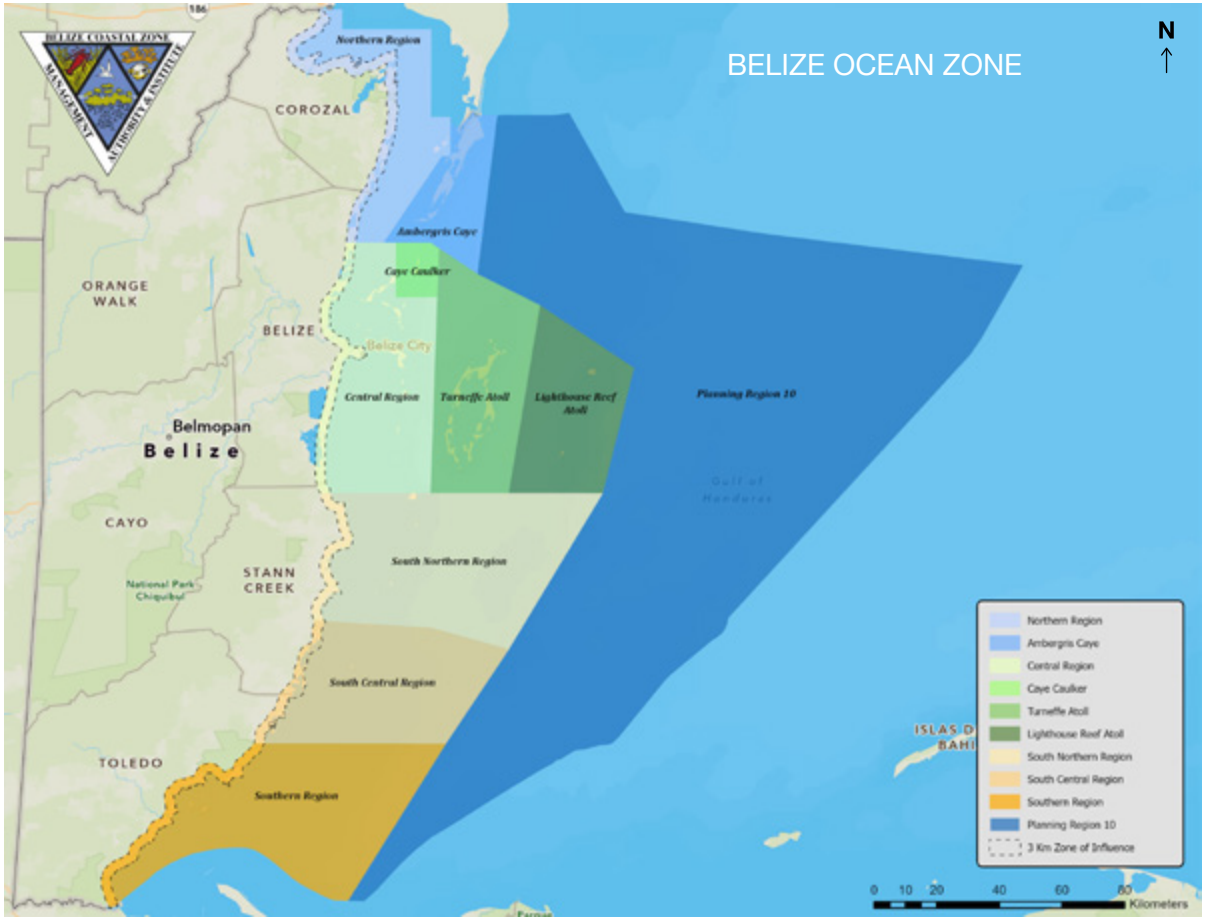


Figure 5. Coastal Planning Regions. Source: CZMAI.

5.2 OVERARCHING GOALS AND ACTIONS

Over Arching BSOP Goal:

To enact and publish legislation required to legally enforce the Marine Spatial Plan that guides sustainable development and designates up to 30% of Belize's ocean as Biodiversity Protection Zones.

Vision, Goal and Objectives for the BSOP, Revised 2024.



As part of the development of MSP Policy, a comprehensive review of the goals and specific objectives proposed under the BSOP was conducted. This review highlights key opportunities for strengthening Belize's MSP framework. By incorporating science-based governance, climate resilience strategies, blue economy innovations, and equity-based resource management, the MSP process will be more effective, inclusive, and globally aligned. The proposed **management strategies** and **actions** provide a structured approach to achieving these goals while ensuring long-term sustainability for Belize's ocean and coastal communities.

This assessment identifies whether the proposed actions are already being carried out or suggested in existing initiatives, while pointing out the actions that need further development and integration into the MSP process. This gap analysis provides a roadmap for focusing efforts on filling implementation gaps and ensuring the long-term success of national MSP initiatives. Practical examples from global case studies on proposed management strategies and actions provide a structured and actionable approach to achieving these goals.

BSOP GOAL 1. Process Governance Goal

To design and implement a science-based, data-driven, participatory, equitable, and inclusive MSP process which delivers on Belize's MSP-related commitments under the BLA and CFA, in conformance with the guiding principles for decision making.

. **Specific Objective 1:** Design and execute the process of developing a legally enforceable Marine Spatial Plan for Belize's Ocean by November 2026.

. **Specific Objective 2:** Develop and implement the necessary mechanisms, processes, and procedures to ensure that the MSP process is functional, effective, and in accordance with the governance framework.

. **Specific Objective 3:** Develop and implement a communication strategy and plan to foster public understanding and support throughout the MSP process.

Vision, Goal and Objectives for the BSOP, Revised 2024.

Proposed actions and management strategies:

1. **Develop and implement a legal implementation plan to establish a clear pathway for enacting MSP-related regulations** *(complements Specific Objective 1 and is currently being developed within the framework of the BSOP and integrated into the Coastal Zone Management Act. As part of this process, the forthcoming Coastal Zone Management Authority Bill (expected in 2025) is anticipated to include provisions that will formally establish the legal basis for MSP implementation. This approach is expected to integrate MSP into existing legislation).*

   Example of global practices: Portugal developed a comprehensive Marine Spatial Plan, integrating biodiversity conservation with blue economy growth. The process included developing a legal implementation plan to guide the adoption and enforcement of MSP. The legal framework comprises various laws and regulations that collectively support the plan's implementation. Belize can draw lessons from Portugal's approach by developing a structured legal pathway that outlines the legislative steps necessary for enacting MSP-related regulations. This would involve integrating MSP into existing legislation, such as the Coastal Zone Management Act (initiative under development), and potentially developing new laws to ensure effective implementation and enforcement (EU MSP Platform, 2022).

2. **Implement a comprehensive data-sharing platform** to ensure accessibility, interoperability, and integration of marine spatial data across institutions and stakeholders *(complements Specific Objective 2 and is under development through BSOP initiatives such as the Interactive Story Map, Belize SeaSketch Data Viewer, and Stakeholder Engagement Viewer).* This platform should incorporate key recommendations from the Data Needs Assessment Report (2024), including: (i) the development of an Interagency Information Management System or Data Hub managed by CZMAI and aligned with the Belize National Spatial Data Infrastructure (BNSDI); (ii) adoption of ISO protocols and standards, particularly ISO 19115, for metadata, data categories, and definitions; (iii) implementation of data-sharing protocols; and (iv) capacity building in spatial data management and analysis to support long-term MSP implementation and adaptive management. Consideration should also be given to establishing a formal Marine Spatial Data Infrastructure (MSDI) for Belize as a centralized framework to store and manage standardized primary datasets, which would serve as the backbone of the MSP Information System and support future updates of the BSOP.

3. **Develop a national MSP training program to build institutional capacity across government agencies** *(complements Specific Objective 2 and partially aligns with the regional project BE-CLME+ (Promoting National Blue Economy Priorities Through MSP in the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem Plus), which promotes the development of the blue economy in the Caribbean region through MSP and includes institutional capacity-building activities).*

   Example of global practices: The MSPglobal Initiative offers training courses on MSP concepts relevant for practitioners working within Large Marine Ecosystems and their coasts (OTGA, 2025). Collaborate with international organizations like MSPglobal to develop a national MSP training program tailored to Belize's context, enhancing institutional capacity across government agencies.

4. **Implement the Stakeholder Communication and Engagement Strategy to ensure continuous participation, transparency, and accountability in MSP processes** *(complements Specific Objective 3 and is already in execution under the BSOP framework through workshops and the Stakeholder Engagement Viewer).*

5. **Create a monitoring and evaluation framework with clear performance indicators to assess governance effectiveness** *(complements Specific Objective 2 and is already in execution through the finalized BSOP Monitoring and Evaluation Plan for the participatory planning process).* **This framework includes a system of indicators aligned with the BSOP Strategic Framework, establishing baselines, targets, reporting mechanisms, and data governance roles. As the MSP process progresses, a complementary M&E approach may be developed to support performance monitoring during the implementation phase.**

   Example of global practices: The United Kingdom Marine Management Organization has implemented monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess the effectiveness of marine plans (MMO, 2019). Belize can build on this example and develop a similar framework with clear performance indicators to assess the effectiveness of governance in the MSP process.

6. **Maintain the BSOP Steering Committee as a multi-sectoral consultative body to oversee stakeholder participation** *(complements Specific Objective 2 and is already in execution through the BSOP Steering Committee).*

7. **Align Belize's MSP process with regional and transboundary MSP initiatives for ecosystem-based management** *(complements Specific Objective 2 and is not yet fully integrated but aligns with the CRFM's general principles of regional co-operation and sustainable management of marine resources, CRFM (CRFM Strategic Plan 2022-2030).*

BSOP GOAL 2. Marine Conservation Goal

To legally protect up to 30% of Belize's Oceans as Biodiversity Protection Zones.

. **Specific Objective 1:** Design Biodiversity Protection Zones to protect priority habitats, areas, and species identified through the MSP process, integrating climate-resilient safeguards.

. **Specific Objective 2:** Strengthen the Marine Protected Area (MPA) network in conformance with national governance frameworks and ecological, economic, social, and cultural criteria set forth by the IUCN.

. **Specific Objective 3:** By November 3rd 2026, sign into law and Gazette Biodiversity Protection Zones covering up to 30% of Belize's Ocean space using a phased approach.

. **Specific Objective 4:** By November 3rd 2026, complete, enact and publish legislation(s) to legally enforce the Marine Spatial Plan.

. **Specific Objective 5:** By November 3rd 2029, develop legally enforceable Management Plans for Belize's Biodiversity Protection Zones as described in the MSP.

. **Specific Objective 6:** Within one year of Cabinet's endorsement, commence implementation of legally enforceable management plans for Belize's Biodiversity Protection Zones.

Vision, Goal and Objectives for the BSOP, Revised 2024.

Proposed actions and management strategies:

8. **Conduct a comprehensive socio-economic assessment to evaluate the potential impacts and opportunities associated with the designation of Biodiversity Protection Zones across key ocean sectors** *(complements Specific Objective 1 and is not yet in execution, although a consultancy is being drafted to carry out a socio-economic analysis - information obtained from a stakeholder in the policy consultation process).* **The assessment should examine established sectors such as fishing, tourism, and shipping, as well as emerging blue economy opportunities including offshore aquaculture, marine renewable energy, and blue carbon initiatives.**

   Example of global practices: Prior to establishing the Palau National Marine Sanctuary, extensive socio-economic studies were conducted to understand the potential impacts on local fisheries and tourism. These assessments aimed to ensure that the sanctuary's implementation would benefit both conservation efforts and the livelihoods of Palau's residents (PICRC, 2025). Belize could undertake similar comprehensive socio-economic assessments to evaluate how proposed Biodiversity Protection Zones might affect its fishing and tourism sectors. This approach would help in designing zones that maximize ecological benefits while minimizing economic disruptions.

9. **Strengthen existing adaptive co-management frameworks for MPAs to enhance participatory governance and resilience** *(complements Specific Objective 2 and is already in execution through established co-management agreements involving local communities, NGOs, and government institutions. This action aligns with stakeholder engagement activities under the BSOP and aims to build on Belize's existing leadership in collaborative MPA management).*

Example of global practices: The Philippines has implemented Community-Based Coastal Resource Management (CBCRM) programs that empower local fishing communities to co-manage coastal resources. This approach has led to improved resource sustainability and enhanced livelihoods for local fishers (Mulekom, 2008). Belize could develop adaptive co-management frameworks for its MPAs by actively involving local communities in decision-making processes. This collaboration would leverage local knowledge and foster stewardship, leading to more effective conservation outcomes. Evidence from the Philippines indicates that CBCRM programs have also contributed to improved compliance with marine regulations and more effective enforcement of fishing restrictions by strengthening local monitoring capacity and accountability. A similar approach could help address some of the enforcement challenges identified in Section 1.3 of this document.

10. **Establish and align long-term financing mechanisms to sustain MPAs and broader marine conservation objectives beyond initial government funding** *(complements Specific Objective 3 and is partially supported through Belize's Blue Bonds agreement and the Belize Fund for a Sustainable Future. Additional mechanisms such as carbon credits and the RBB initiative should be further explored to ensure sustainable funding streams for MSP implementation and biodiversity protection).*

11. **Implement marine habitat restoration programs, such as mangrove rehabilitation and coral reef restoration, within protected zones (***complements Specific Objective 1 and executed in different marine habitat restoration initiatives. For example: (i) The Belize Mangrove Alliance (BMA) has developed an action plan to support and strengthen collaboration across various thematic areas, including coastal management and mangrove restoration (WWF, 2022); (ii) The Belize Marine Conservation and Climate Adaptation Project has emphasized the importance of the Belize Barrier Reef and mangrove systems, supporting tourism and fishing industries while sheltering Belize's coast from environmental impacts; (iii) The Hol Chan Marine Reserve and the Bacalar Chico National Park and Marine Reserve are examples of protected areas where efforts have been made to preserve and restore coral reef ecosystems).*

12. **Develop a comprehensive spatial zoning framework to address the full range of marine uses and management needs in Belize, including but not limited to conservation zones, sustainable use areas, multi-use areas, and buffer zones** *(complements Specific Objective 1 and is not yet formalized in Belize).*

Example of global practices: Australia's Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority has established an integrated zoning framework that includes core conservation areas, buffer zones, and zones for sustainable activities such as eco-tourism and regulated fishing. Belize could expand its spatial zoning frameworks to define clear zones for multiple sectors, balancing conservation objectives with economic interests and sustainable development.

BSOP GOAL 3. Blue Economy Goal

To support the sustainable growth and development of Belize's blue economy in alignment with legislation, policy, and planning frameworks.

. **Specific Objective 1:** Identify and evaluate ocean spaces for their functional suitability to support projected sustainable expansion and management of traditional, existing, and emerging economic uses.

. **Specific Objective 2:** Map, measure, and monitor blue carbon ecosystems to meet conservation targets and leverage conservation financing opportunities.

Vision, Goal and Objectives for the BSOP, Revised 2024.

Proposed actions and management strategies:

13. **Operationalize the BSOP as the spatial planning instrument to guide sustainable blue economy development using a multi-use approach** *(complements Specific Objective 1 and is already in execution under the BSOP framework. The BSOP aims to allocate ocean space for established and emerging marine industries, reduce user conflicts, and support ecosystem-based management within a unified national planning framework).*

Example of global practices: Portugal has implemented a National Ocean Strategy to allocate space for various marine industries, such as offshore wind energy, aquaculture, and tourism. This planning aims to minimize conflicts between sectors and promote sustainable use of marine resources. Belize could develop a strategy to designate specific areas for sustainable marine industries, including multi-use specific areas. This proactive approach would help in reducing sectoral conflicts and ensuring that economic development aligns with environmental conservation.

14. **Expand blue carbon initiatives by mapping and assessing seagrass and mangrove ecosystems to support conservation financing opportunities and climate mitigation strategies** *(complements Specific Objective 2 and aligns with Belize's international climate commitments. While formal implementation is pending, national efforts are underway to establish an enabling framework through initiatives such as the draft Climate Change and Carbon Market Initiatives Bill, the National Seagrass Management Policy, and the work of the Blue Carbon Working Group).*

Example of global practices: Costa Rica has been active in mapping its mangrove ecosystems to quantify carbon sequestration, facilitating participation in carbon credit markets. This initiative provides financial incentives for the conservation and restoration of these vital ecosystems. Belize can explore conservation financing opportunities through blue carbon credits, supporting both climate mitigation and ecosystem preservation.

15. **Foster public-private partnerships to scale up sustainable blue economy initiatives** *(complements Specific Objective 1 and is partially in execution through various eco-tourism and fisheries initiatives)***.**

Example of global practices: The Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan has been developed through public-private partnerships, aiming to support the sustainable use of marine resources while promoting economic growth. Encourage collaboration between government agencies and private sector stakeholders to develop and implement sustainable blue economy initiatives, such as eco-friendly tourism and sustainable fisheries.

16. **Ensure industry compliance with environmental safeguards, linking economic development with conservation targets** *(complements Specific Objective 1 and is being contemplated in initiatives such as the Environmental Protection Act, which regulates environmental standards for industries, and the Sustainable Growth and Development Strategy, which emphasizes the integration of environmental sustainability into economic planning. In addition, the Blue Bonds Agreement directly links marine conservation commitments to economic development).*

BSOP GOAL 4. Equity Goal

To ensure fair and equitable access for all Belizeans to benefits derived from ocean resources and spaces, with respect for traditional social, environmental, cultural and economic uses.

. **Specific Objective 1:** Between August 2022 and November 2026, implement a stakeholder engagement plan ensuring that 75% of quarterly targets for engaging with key multi-sectoral interest groups are met.

. **Specific Objective 2:** Identify cultural, indigenous, social, and economic uses, through stakeholder engagement, to determine the allocation of ocean spaces to safeguard community traditions, livelihoods, and participation in emerging sustainable economic activities.

Vision, Goal and Objectives for the BSOP, Revised 2024.

Proposed actions and management strategies:

17. **Explore spatial planning strategies that complement existing marine access rights frameworks to promote equitable use of ocean space by traditional communities** *(complements Specific Objective 2 and is conceptually aligned with Belize's Managed Access Program, which ensures rights-based access for traditional fishers. Within the MSP process, spatial planning tools can support inclusive governance by identifying zones where equitable access can be maintained or enhanced across multiple user groups, in line with national blue economy and conservation priorities).*

Example of global practices: An additional example to the one developed in Belize is the Chile's Territorial Use Rights for Fishing (TURF) System. Chile has implemented a TURF system that grants exclusive fishing rights to local fishers over designated coastal areas. This approach has led to improved fishery management and enhanced economic benefits for traditional fishing communities (Moreno and Revenga, 2014).

18. **Develop coastal livelihood diversification programs that support alternative economic activities (e.g., seaweed farming, eco-tourism)** *(complements Specific Objective 2 and aligns with existing efforts under Belize's sustainable fisheries programs).*

Example of global practices: Indonesia has developed seaweed farming cooperatives that provide technical assistance and market access to small-scale farmers. This initiative has diversified coastal livelihoods and reduced pressure on overfished marine resources (TNC, 2024). Belize could implement programs to promote alternative livelihoods. By providing training and support, these programs would offer additional income sources for coastal communities, thereby enhancing economic resilience and reducing dependence on traditional fishing.

19. **Formalize a community-based ocean governance model, incorporating Indigenous and local leadership in decision-making** *(complements Specific Objective 2 and has efforts related to this action, such as: (i) Co-Management of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) (GEF, 2017); (ii) RBB Project (GEF, 2024))*.

20. **Ensure transparency in marine resource allocation, creating a fair licensing system for marine-based activities** *(complements Specific Objective 2 and is not yet in execution).*

21. **Provide technical training and capacity-building programs to empower marginalized groups in the marine sector** *(complements Specific Objective 2 and aligns with national workforce development efforts but is not yet fully incorporated into MSP governance).*

Example of global practices: South Africa has established training centres to build skills among artisanal fishers, introducing new technologies and providing funding opportunities to empower marginalized groups (Nthane, 2020; GEF, 2016). In Belize, technical training and capacity-building programs can be developed for marginalized groups in the marine sector, offering education on sustainable practices and access to resources to improve their livelihoods.

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6.
OCEAN ZONING AND SPATIAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK

The MSP process in Belize necessitates a well-defined zoning framework to allocate ocean spaces effectively while balancing ecological, economic, and social activities. This section outlines spatial zoning principles and future scenario planning to enhance adaptive management in response to climate change and emerging industries. By integrating conservation planning, economic development, and climate resilience strategies, Belize's MSP policy will foster a balanced and forward-looking approach to ocean space management. Future iterations of this framework will require continuous stakeholder engagement, data-driven decision-making, and legislative enhancements to ensure its effectiveness in an evolving marine environment.

6.1 SPATIAL ZONING AND USE PLANNING

A clear and science-based zoning approach is critical for ensuring sustainable marine resource use, reducing conflicts, and achieving conservation objectives. Belize's MSP zoning framework must integrate stakeholder input, ecological assessments, and global best practices to delineate zones that reflect national priorities and international commitments.

Key Zoning Categories:

Biodiversity Protection Zones

As part of Belize's commitment under the CFA of the Belize Blue Bonds Program to designate 30% of its ocean space for protection by 2026, two types of Biodiversity Protection Zones are being established under the MSP process:

. **High Protection BPZs**: Strictly non-extractive zones where activities are highly restricted. These areas may include Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), replenishment zones, and ecologically sensitive habitats such as coral reefs, seagrass meadows, and mangrove forests. Permitted uses may include scientific research and controlled ecotourism.

. **Medium Protection BPZs**: Zones that allow for sustainable extractive use, including regulated fishing and other low-impact economic activities, while still prioritizing conservation goals and ecological integrity.

The national target of up to 30% marine protection with at least 15% in High Protection for Biodiversity Zones and at least 15% in Medium Protection for Biodiversity Zones; or the percent stated in the MSP. This zoning framework is under development and will be refined through further technical consultations and the integration of stakeholder feedback. The definitions of "High Protection for Biodiversity Zones" and "Medium Protection for Biodiversity Zones" shall have the meaning assigned to them in Clause 7 (Definitions) of the CFA.

Sustainable Use and Development Zones (Established and Emerging Marine Industries; Single and Multi-Use Areas)

These zones integrate the principles of sustainability and economic development, aligning with Belize's Blue Economy Development Policy, Strategy and Implementation Plan and the National Maritime Economy Plan. They are designated for established and emerging marine

uses—including fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, renewable energy, and maritime transport—and are designed to promote spatial efficiency, minimize conflicts, and support ecosystem-based management.

Examples of activities in these zones include:

. **Single-use**: Designated areas for offshore aquaculture, offshore renewable energy (e.g., wind, solar), managed access fisheries, commercial navigation routes, and dredging operations under strict environmental guidelines.

. **Multi-use**: Zones where compatible activities are co-located—such as artisanal fishing with community-based tourism, or integrated platforms combining aquaculture, renewable energy, and research (cf., Schupp et al., 2019).

Planning tools and methodologies—such as the Multi-Use Assessment Framework (McCann et al., 2023, Gerven et al., 2025), methodologies for identifying the technical-operational potential of emerging multi-use activities can be identified through analytical frameworks (e.g., Weiss et al., 2018a, 2023), suitability indices for offshore activities (Weiss et al., 2018b, c), and climate-resilience assessment methods (Weiss et al., 2020)—should guide zoning design and feasibility studies for these uses.

Cultural and Indigenous Use Zones

These zones recognize marine areas that hold cultural, spiritual, and livelihood significance for Indigenous peoples and coastal communities. They may include traditional fishing grounds, heritage sites, ceremonial locations, and other culturally important ocean spaces.

. These zones contribute to inclusive and equitable MSP by ensuring that customary uses and cultural heritage are considered in decision-making processes.

. While they may overlap with other use zones (e.g., sustainable fishing or conservation areas), they retain a distinct identity grounded in cultural rights, historical ties, and social value.

. Their designation aligns with national commitments to cultural inclusion and international frameworks such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the CBD.

. Their development and delineation should be undertaken through participatory processes, ensuring a human rights-based approach and sustained dialogue with relevant communities.

Additional zoning typologies may be developed in future iterations of the MSP to address new sectoral needs, emerging activities, or evolving policy priorities, in coordination with national stakeholders and CZMAI.

Implementation Considerations:

. **Stakeholder-Driven Decision-Making**: Inclusive zoning workshops to engage fishers, tourism operators, industry, conservation groups, and local communities.

. **Evidence-Based Zoning Design**: The MSP zoning framework is informed by validated spatial datasets and technical assessments. Key sources include the BSOP Interactive Story Map, Belize SeaSketch project, and supporting ecological and socio-economic studies. These tools contribute to spatial decision-making by integrating ecological sensitivity, human use patterns, and planning priorities into zone delineation.

. **Adaptive and Dynamic Zoning Mechanisms**: Regular updates based on climate impacts, economic shifts, and emerging marine activities.

. **Cross-Border Coordination**: Recognition of marine uses that extend across Belize's Ocean Zone, ensuring cooperation with neighbouring countries.

. **User Rights and Responsibilities**: Clearly defined obligations, including EIAs and mitigation measures, for different ocean users.

. **Integrated Land-Sea Approach**: Recognizing the interconnectedness of riverine, coastal and marine ecosystems, ensuring activities on land do not negatively impact marine environments (i.e., in line with ICZM Policy and Plan).

6.2 FUTURES SCENARIOS

To enhance Belize's MSP adaptability, scenario-based planning is incorporated to anticipate environmental changes, socio-economic trends, and technological advancements. This approach ensures long-term sustainability and resilience by preparing for multiple potential futures.

Scenario-Based Approach

Belize's MSP scenario framework is grounded in the outcomes of the Multi-Stakeholder MSP Workshop held in May 2024. During this participatory session, stakeholders identified Climate Change Resilience and Improved Ocean Governance as the two primary drivers of change to guide future scenario planning.

The scenarios outlined below reflect variations and strategic combinations of these drivers, allowing Belize to anticipate and prepare for multiple plausible futures. This approach ensures that the MSP process remains participatory, adaptive, and aligned with national priorities for sustainability, resilience, and effective marine governance.

Resilient Ocean Governance (Combined Scenario)

This integrated scenario combines the two main drivers—Climate Change Resilience and Improved Ocean Governance—to explore how Belize can proactively manage marine space through adaptive, ecosystem-based strategies.

. Incorporates nature-based solutions such as mangrove restoration, seagrass protection, and coral reef conservation.

. Integrates disaster risk reduction and climate-smart infrastructure.

. Strengthens governance capacity with improved enforcement, inter-agency coordination, and transparent decision-making.

. Evaluates new funding mechanisms including blue carbon credits, PES schemes, and eco-tourism taxes.

. Expected outcomes: Enhanced resilience to climate impacts, more coherent institutional governance, and long-term sustainability of marine resources.

Business-as-Usual Scenario (Baseline Reference)

This scenario reflects a continuation of current policies and governance structures with limited adaptation to climate change or institutional reform.

. Maintains existing economic reliance on tourism, fisheries, and transport.

. No significant integration of climate-smart technologies or new financing mechanisms.

. Governance remains fragmented, with limited enforcement and stakeholder coordination.

. Risks: Increased vulnerability to environmental degradation, development conflicts, and loss of ecosystem services.

Climate-Driven Development Scenario

This scenario prioritizes Climate Change Resilience as the dominant driver guiding MSP and sectoral development.

. Focuses on ecosystem-based adaptation, disaster preparedness, and climate-financing instruments.

. Promotes innovation in climate-smart technologies and nature-based infrastructure.

. Blue economy development is shaped by long-term environmental thresholds and risk projections.

. Expected outcomes: Climate-aligned marine development pathways, with reduced exposure to natural hazards.

Governance-Led Blue Economy Scenario

This scenario emphasizes institutional strengthening and improved marine governance as the primary driver of future planning.

. Prioritizes regulatory reform, enforcement capacity, interagency coordination, and transparency.

. Supports investor confidence through clear spatial allocation and permitting frameworks.

. Advances stakeholder participation and equity in decision-making.

. Expected outcomes: Efficient, inclusive governance enabling sustainable economic growth across ocean sectors.

Scenario Integration into MSP Policy

The scenario-based planning approach informs Belize's MSP by providing a structured method for evaluating how different combinations of climate resilience and governance capacity can shape ocean use over time. Integration of the scenarios supports adaptive, evidence-based, and participatory decision-making.

Key integration strategies include:

- **Monitoring and Evaluation**: Establishing indicators to assess environmental, social, and governance performance under different future scenarios.

- **Periodic Reviews**: Conducting regular assessments of zoning effectiveness and adjusting strategies based on observed trends and stakeholder input.

- **Stakeholder Engagement**: Ensuring continuous participation of local communities, industries, and institutions in the validation and refinement of scenarios.

- **International Collaboration**: Aligning with regional and global marine planning processes (e.g., BE-CLME+, CRFM), and sharing lessons through international MSP platforms.

- **Flexibility and Adaptive Management**: Enabling the MSP to evolve over time by integrating emerging data, technologies, and societal priorities.

- **Data-Driven Decision Making**: Applying GIS mapping, spatial modelling, and forecasting tools to inform future planning scenarios.

- **Technology and Innovation**: Utilizing nature-based solutions, oceanographic monitoring, and climate-smart infrastructure to support ecosystem resilience and long-term sustainability.



SECTION IV:
HOW DO WE IMPLEMENT BELIZE'S MSP POLICY FRAMEWORK?



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7. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

A well-structured implementation strategy is essential to operationalize the MSP implementation in Belize, ensuring that the outlined goals and actions transition effectively from planning to execution. The implementation process follows a phased approach, integrating institutional capacity-building, pilot initiatives, and full-scale legislative enforcement. This strategy aligns with the CFA Commitments, the BSOP governance framework—within which the Steering Committee plays a central role—and the overarching objectives of the BSOP.

The Implementation Strategy for Belize's MSP Policy ensures a structured and phased transition from policy development to full-scale execution. By reinforcing institutional capacity, piloting strategic initiatives, and securing long-term financial sustainability, Belize will establish a robust and adaptive MSP framework, aligning conservation goals with sustainable economic growth and social equity. The success of this strategy will be driven by strong governance, multi-stakeholder engagement, and a science-based decision-making process.

7.1 PHASED IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

To ensure a systematic and coordinated rollout, the MSP Implementation Strategy is divided into three progressive phases, directly integrating the proposed actions and management strategies outlined in *Section 5.2 Overarching Goals and Actions*. Each phase builds upon prior achievements, strengthening governance, stakeholder engagement, and sustainable marine resource management.

The indicative timeframes assigned to each action reflect the current status of the BSOP process and the Belize Blue Bonds Agreement. Several foundational activities were initiated in 2023–2024 and are now transitioning into formal implementation stages. The timelines presented for 2024–2026 are aligned with ongoing national efforts, technical consultations, and funding cycles, and are intended to support coordinated, accountable, and adaptive execution of the MSP Policy.

Initial Phase

Strengthening Institutional Capacity and Legislative Alignment

Action	Indicative Timeframe	Lead / Supporting Institutions
Develop a legal implementation plan to establish MSP-related legal authority and regulations (**Goal 1, Action 1**)	Q2 2024 – Q1 2025	CZMAI (Lead), Attorney General's Ministry, Ministry of Blue Economy
Formalize the existing MSP governance structure under the leadership of CZMAI, ensuring continuity of the Steering Committee and Technical Working Groups, and clearly outlining the advisory and sectoral roles of supporting institutions such as the Fisheries Department and the Ministry of Blue Economy (**Goal 1, Action 6**)	Q2 2024 – Q4 2025	CZMAI (Lead), Fisheries Department, Ministry of Blue Economy
Develop national MSP training programs to build institutional capacity across government agencies (**Goal 1, Action 3**)	Q3 2024 – Q2 2025	CZMAI (Lead), Ministry of Public Service, University of Belize (UB)
Implement a stakeholder engagement strategy to ensure continuous participation and transparency (**Goal 1, Action 4**)	Q2 2024 – ongoing	CZMAI (Lead), BNN, Local Stakeholder Platforms
Establish conflict-resolution mechanisms to manage zoning disputes and cross-sectoral governance challenges (**Goal 4, Action 3**)	Q1 2025 – Q2 2026	CZMAI (Lead), Legal Affairs, Sectoral Ministries
Initiate the development of a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, defining key performance indicators for MSP implementation (**Goal 1, Action 5**)	Q2 2024 – Q4 2024	CZMAI (Lead), Blue Bonds & Finance Permanence Unit
Implement a data-sharing platform for MSP efforts, ensuring accessibility for all stakeholders (**Goal 1, Action 2**)	Q3 2024 – Q4 2025	CZMAI (Lead), DOE, UB/ERI, SeaSketch Team
Conduct comprehensive socio-economic assessments to evaluate the possible impact of Biodiversity Protection Zones on fishing and tourism (**Goal 2, Action 1**)	Q3 2024 – Q2 2025	CZMAI (Lead), Ministry of Blue Economy, NGOs (e.g., TNC, WWF)

Intermediate Phase

Pilot Zoning Initiatives and Expand Stakeholder Collaboration

Action	Indicative Timeframe	Lead / Supporting Institutions
Launch pilot zoning initiatives in selected ocean areas to test the application of proposed MSP zoning categories—particularly Biodiversity Protection Zones and Sustainable Use Zones. These pilots will assess enforceability, refine spatial designations, and inform the development of management plans and regulatory mechanisms prior to full-scale implementation. Led by CZMAI, in collaboration with sectoral agencies and co-management partners (**Goal 2, Action 2**)	Q1 2025 – Q4 2025	CZMAI (Lead), Fisheries Department, DOE
Implement marine habitat restoration programs, including mangrove rehabilitation and coral reef restoration within protected areas (**Goal 2, Action 4**)	Q2 2025 – Q4 2026	CZMAI (Lead), Forest Department, NGOs (e.g., WCS, Fragments of Hope)
Expand blue carbon initiatives through mapping and conservation financing opportunities, ensuring integration with Belize's climate finance commitments (**Goal 3, Action 2**)	Q1 2025 – Q3 2026	Ministry of Sustainable Development (Lead), CZMAI, Blue Carbon Working Group
Strengthen multi-sectoral collaboration, integrating fisheries, tourism, and maritime transport sectors in co-management initiatives (**Goal 3, Action 3**)	Q2 2025 – Q4 2026	CZMAI (Lead), Ministry of Blue Economy, BTB, Port Authority
Advance the implementation of the BSOP as the national spatial planning instrument guiding sustainable blue economy development and the designation of Biodiversity Protection Zones. This includes ensuring spatial efficiency, economic diversification, and ecological integrity within a unified MSP framework (**Goal 3, Action 1**)	Q1 2025 – Q4 2026	CZMAI (Lead), Ministry of Blue Economy, UB/ ERI
Establish a framework for regional cooperation, ensuring Belize's MSP aligns with transboundary marine governance mechanisms, fostering cooperation with the CRFM and BE-CLME+ (**Goal 1, Action 7 - initial engagement and framework establishment**)	Q3 2025 – Q4 2026	CZMAI (Lead), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, CRFM
Refine spatial zoning frameworks by exploring the designation of transitional-use areas adjacent to High Protection BPZs. These zones would permit regulated, lower-intensity uses to minimize edge effects, enhance ecological connectivity, and support a balanced interface between strict conservation and sustainable use (**Goal 2, Action 5**)	Q2 2025 – Q2 2026	CZMAI (Lead), DOE, Fisheries Department

Advanced Phase

Institutionalizing Adaptive Governance and Full-Scale MSP Integration

Action	Indicative Timeframe	Lead / Supporting Institutions
Fully institutionalize MSP within Belize's governance framework, ensuring alignment with blue economy strategies and national legislation (**Goal 1, Action 7 - full implementation**)	Q1 2026 – Q4 2026 (and ongoing)	CZMAI (Lead), Ministry of Blue Economy, Attorney General's Ministry
Operationalize a robust Monitoring and Evaluation system, with clear performance indicators to track policy effectiveness and enable adaptive governance (**Goal 1, Action 5 - full-scale deployment**)	Q1 2026 – Q4 2026	CZMAI (Lead), Blue Bonds & Finance Permanence Unit
Ensure long-term financial sustainability through diversified funding mechanisms, including blue bonds, conservation financing, and private sector investments (**Goal 3, Action 4**)	Q1 2026 – Q4 2027	CZMAI (Lead), Ministry of Finance, Investment, Economic Transformation, Civil Aviation and e-Governance, Belize Fund for a Sustainable Future, Private Sector
Expand equitable marine tenure programs to secure fair access rights for traditional and Indigenous communities (**Goal 4, Action 1 - full integration into governance structures**)	Q2 2026 – Q4 2027	Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs (Lead), CZMAI, Fisheries Department
Develop and integrate Community-Based Ocean Governance models, ensuring participatory decision-making and adaptive resource management (**Goal 4, Action 1 - institutionalized governance model**)	Q2 2026 – Q4 2027	CZMAI (Lead), Community organizations, NGOs, Ministry of Rural Transformation
Establish long-term financing mechanisms, such as Blue Bonds and carbon credits, to sustain MPAs beyond initial government funding (**Goal 2, Action 3**)	Q1 2026 – Q4 2027	CZMAI (Lead), Ministry of Blue Economy, Belize Fund for a Sustainable Future
Ensure transparency in marine resource allocation, creating a fair licensing system for marine-based activities (**Goal 4, Action 4**)	Q2 2026 – Q4 2027	CZMAI (Lead), DOE, Attorney General's Ministry
Provide technical training and capacity-building programs to empower marginalized groups in the marine sector (**Goal 4, Action 5**)	Q1 2026 – Q4 2027	Ministry of Blue Economy (Lead), CZMAI, Ministry of Human Development, NGOs, Training Institutes

7.2 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The effective implementation of Belize's Marine Spatial Plan requires the coordinated engagement of multiple institutions across sectors and levels of government. This section outlines the roles and responsibilities of the principal actors within the MSP governance framework, including regulatory bodies, sectoral ministries, coordination entities, and technical partners.

The structure presented here is based on current governance arrangements under the BSOP, coordinated by the CZMAI. It reflects the roles of regulatory bodies, sectoral ministries, and technical partners as defined through the MSP Steering Committee and Technical Working Groups. This framework ensures institutional alignment, role clarity, and coordination for effective implementation of the MSP.

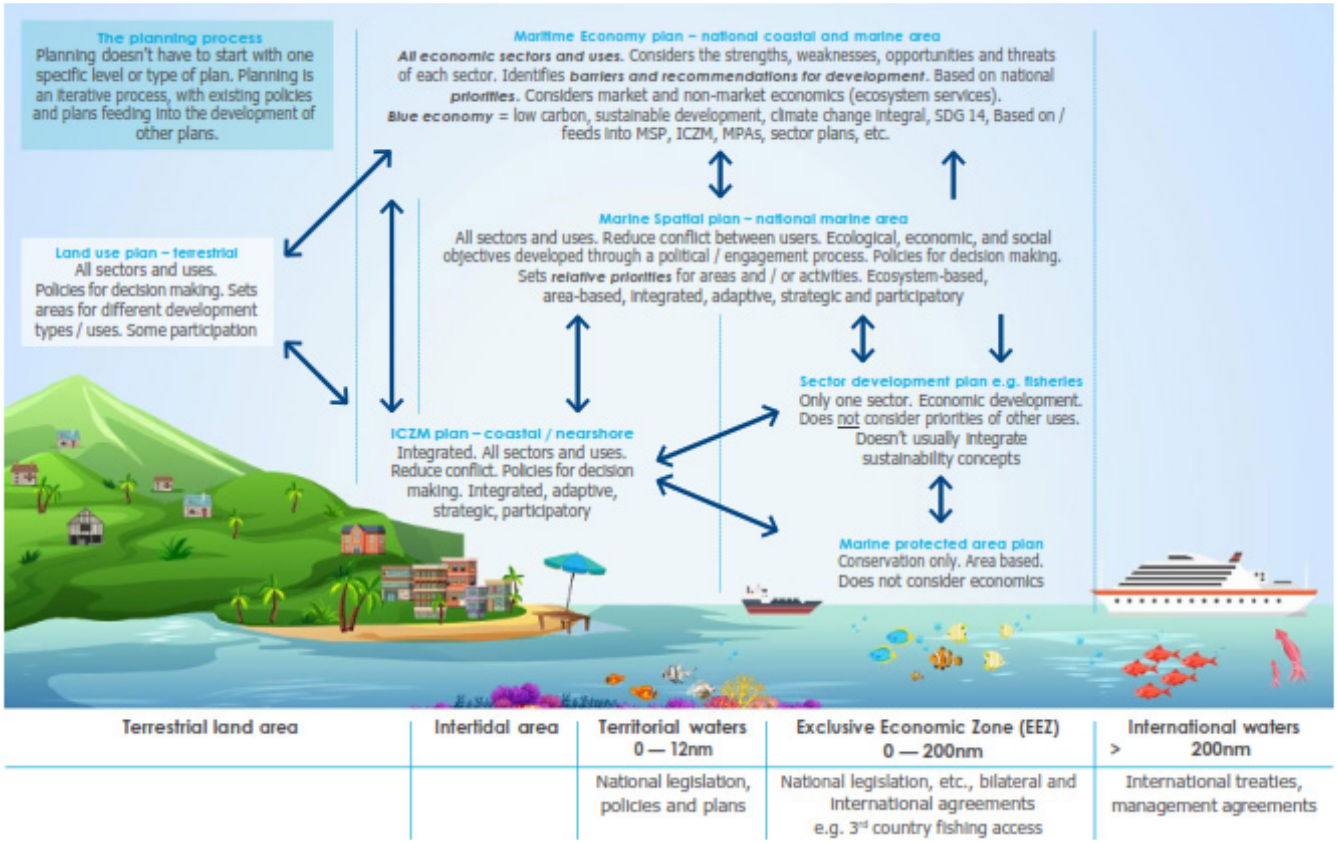


Figure 6. Proposed spatial delineation of Belize's coastal and maritime zones, including the coastal zone, zone of influence, and EEZ, and their respective planning instruments (ICZM, MSP). Source: CZMAI (2024).

. The CZMAI serves as the central coordinating entity for MSP governance in Belize, as outlined in the BSOP framework. CZMAI's responsibilities include:

. Leading and coordinating the development and implementation of the MSP.

. Integrating MSP within Belize's broader ICZM framework.

> Ensuring coherence between MSP and Belize's ICZM framework is essential, particularly in areas of jurisdictional overlap. The ICZM framework is expected to inform and complement the BSOP process—especially within the coastal zone and zone of influence—while the BSOP includes and extends beyond these areas into Belize's EEZ. This coordination is critical in light of the proposed spatial delineation that distinguishes between the coastal zone, zone of influence, and EEZ, as illustrated in Fig. 6. Alignment between the ICZMP and the BSOP will help ensure policy coherence, minimize duplication, and support integrated marine and coastal governance.

. Overseeing stakeholder engagement, data management, and compliance mechanisms within MSP implementation.

. Aligning MSP enforcement and adaptive management strategies with national and regional conservation policies.

. Collaborating with national and international agencies for data integration and policy alignment.

MSP Governance Framework

The governance framework for the Belize MSP Process has been developed to facilitate a two-way flow of information between the groups tasked with coordinating technical, policy, and legislative inputs into the MSP process (i.e., BSOP Core Team and BSOP Steering Committee) and those expected to provide inputs to inform the formulation of the BSOP (i.e., Technical Working Groups and Public Stakeholders). Information and input derived from the Technical Working Groups and the general public will be used to inform all outputs generated throughout the process. Once prepared, outputs will then be sent to the CEO Executive Committee for final approval and onward submission of progress reports required under the BLA and CFA.

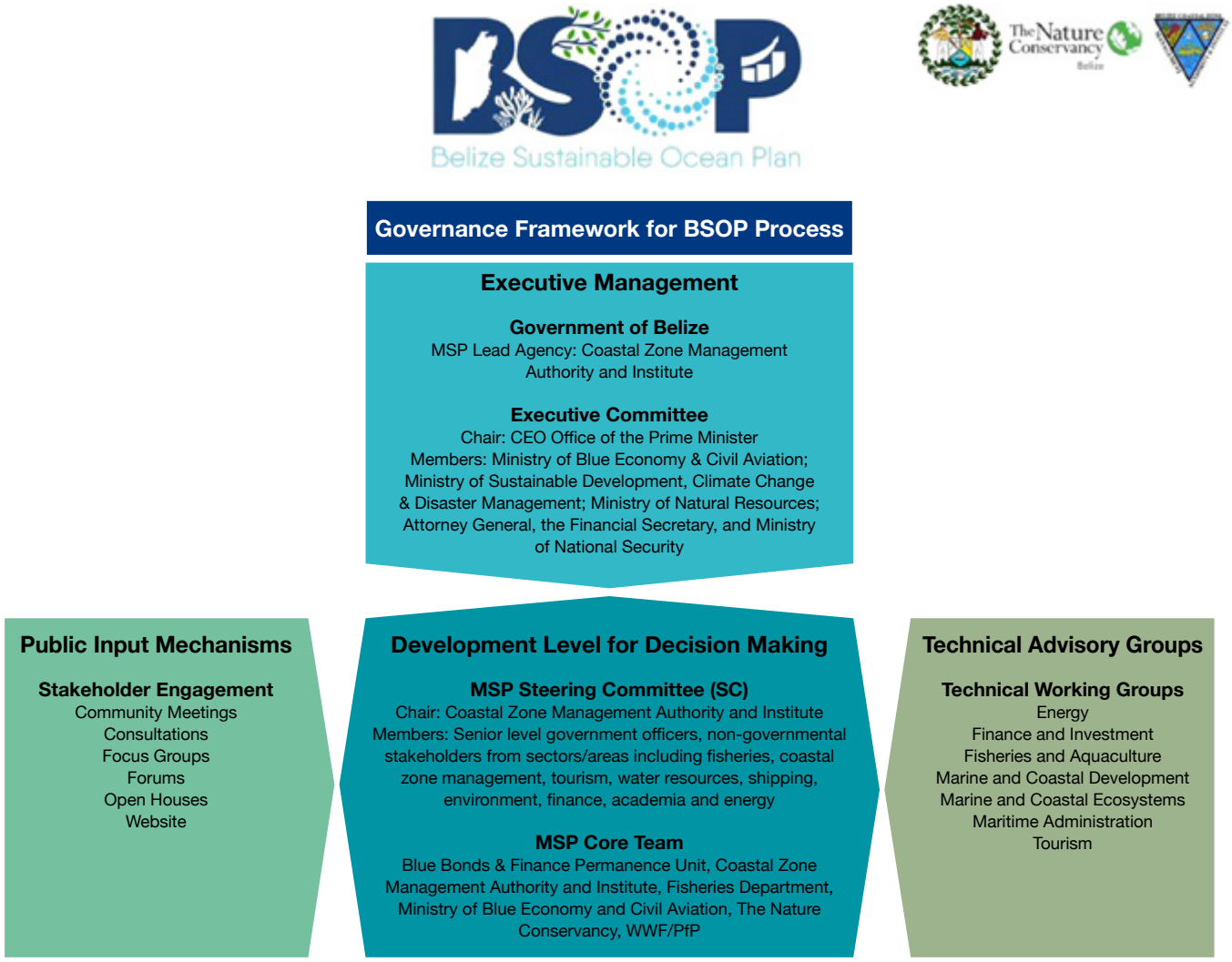


Figure 7. Governance Framework for the Belize MSP Process. This diagram illustrates the five major groups playing key roles in the development of the BSOP: the CEO Executive Committee, BSOP Steering Committee, BSOP Core Team, Technical Working Groups, and Public Stakeholders. The framework is designed to ensure a participatory and integrated approach to MSP. Source: CZMAI.

CEO Executive Committee

The CEO Executive Committee is responsible for high-level decision-making based on information provided by the MSP Steering Committee, Technical Working Groups, and public workshops. This ministerial and CEO-level group includes:

. Chair: Chief Executive Officer, Office of the Prime Minister

. Members:

- Ministry of Blue Economy and Marine Conservation
- Ministry of Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Solid Waste Management
- Ministry of Natural Resources, Petroleum and Mining
- Attorney General's Ministry
- Financial Secretary
- Ministry of National Defence and Border Security

BSOP Steering Committee

The BSOP Steering Committee provides leadership and oversight of outputs and the timeline to complete the MSP. Its functions include reviewing outputs, providing technical, policy, and legislative input, and working to find agreement on these outputs from all relevant sectors engaged in the MSP Process. The Steering Committee provides their recommendations on outputs via the Blue Bonds and Finance Permanence (BBFP) Unit for approval by the Executive Committee before outputs are presented to MSP Stakeholder Workshops and for general public engagement.

. Chair: Chief Executive Officer, Coastal Zone Management Authority & Institute

. Co-Chair: Vice President, University of Belize

. Secretary: MSP Process Lead, Coastal Zone Management Authority & Institute

. Recording Secretary: MSP Coordinator, Coastal Zone Management Authority & Institute

. Members include representatives from:

- Ministry of Blue Economy and Marine Conservation
- Ministry of Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Solid Waste Management
- Ministry of Tourism and Diaspora Relations
- Ministry of Finance, Investment, Economic Transformation, Civil Aviation and e-Governance
- Ministry of Natural Resources, Petroleum and Mining
- Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute
- Blue Bond & Finance Permanence Unit, Office of the Prime Minister
- The Nature Conservancy
- Belize Network of Non-Governmental Organizations (BNN)
- Belize Port Authority
- Energy Unit, Ministry of Public Utilities, Energy and Logistics
- University of Belize (UB)
- Belize National Coast Guard
- Belize Fisheries Department
- Belize Forest Department
- Department of Environment
- Chairs of 4 Technical Working Groups: Finance and Investment; Fisheries (inclusive of Aquaculture); Marine and Coastal Ecosystems; and Tourism

BSOP Core Team

The BSOP Core Team utilizes information to generate spatial and non-spatial outputs to inform the BSOP. The Core Team facilitates an interactive process to allow stakeholders to have several opportunities to provide input.

. Chair: Chief Executive Officer, Coastal Zone Management Authority & Institute

. Secretary: MSP Process Lead, Coastal Zone Management Authority & Institute

. Recording Secretary: MSP Coordinator, Coastal Zone Management Authority & Institute

. Members include representatives from:

- Blue Bond & Finance Permanence Unit
- Coastal Zone Management Authority & Institute
- Belize Fisheries Department
- Ministry of Blue Economy and Marine Conservation
- The Nature Conservancy
- World Wildlife Fund

Technical Working Groups (TWGs)

The Technical Working Groups (TWGs) provide technical and sectoral information, local knowledge, and topic expertise to inform the development of planning tools and draft outputs during the MSP process. This includes the provision of all relevant data, knowledge, and information that can be used to ensure that relevant ecological and socio-economic matters for each sector are appropriately addressed within the BSOP.

As per the governance framework for the development of the BSOP, the following seven (7) Technical Working Groups have been established:

1. Energy

. Energy Unit, Ministry of Public Utilities, Energy and Logistics
. Belize Electricity Limited (BEL)
. PUMA Energy
. Belize Natural Energy (BNE)

2. Finance and Investment

. Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) Chair
. Climate Finance Unit
. Ministry of Finance, Investment, Economic Transformation, Civil Aviation and e-Governance
. Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT)
. Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)
. Belize Fund for a Sustainable Future
. Environmental Defence Fund (EDF)

3. Fisheries inclusive of Aquaculture

. Northern Fishermen Cooperative Society Ltd.
. Belize Fishermen Cooperative Association
. The Nature Conservancy – Fisheries Improvement Program as a NGO
. Aquaculture Unit, Ministry of Agriculture
. Caribbean Network for Fisherfolk Organization
. Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism
. Belize Federation of Fishers
. The Belize Fisheries Department
. Turneffe Atoll Sustainability Association
. Marine and Coastal Development
. Mining Unit, Ministry of Natural Resources Petroleum & Mining
. Physical Planning Section, Ministry of Natural Resources Petroleum & Mining
. Department of Environment
. Belize Network of NGOs (BNN)
. Institute of Archaeology (NICH) Belize
. Ministry of Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Solid Waste Management
. Association of Real Estate Brokers of Belize

6. Marine and Coastal Ecosystems

. Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) (TWG Chair)
. National Biodiversity Office (NBIO)
. Belize Forest Department
. University of Belize / ERI
. Belize Fisheries Department
. Hol Chan Marine Reserve
. Crocodile Research Coalition
. Clearwater Marine Aquarium Belize
. The University of the West Indies Open Campus Belize (UWI)
. Fragments of Hope

5. Maritime Administration

. Belize Coast Guard
. Harvest Caye
. The Belize High Seas Fisheries Unit (BHSFU)
. San Pedro Belize Express Water Taxi Limited
. Port Coral
. Port of Belize
. Belize Port Authority

7. Tourism

. Belize Local Association of Stakeholders in Tourism (BLAST)
. Belize Tourism Industry Association (BTIA) *Chair
. Belize Tourism Board (BTB) (inactive)
. Fort Street Tourism Village
. Belize Island Holding Limited
. CZMAI Sports Fishing Unit
. Ministry of Tourism & Diaspora Relations

***Note:** Membership list is being updated with new nominations.*

Public Stakeholders

Public stakeholders, including local communities, civil society organizations, and the general public, play a crucial role in the MSP process. Their participation ensures that the BSOP reflects the needs and aspirations of all users of the ocean space. Engagement is facilitated through public consultations, community meetings, and participatory mapping activities.

Note: *The institutions presented in this section reflect key members of the MSP Steering Committee and Technical Working Groups, as established under the BSOP. Their roles are based on their current mandates and contributions to the development and implementation of the MSP Policy.* This governance framework was endorsed as part of the BSOP process and aligns with the institutional arrangements outlined in the CFA.

7.3 FUNDING AND FINANCIAL MECHANISMS

A diversified and sustainable funding strategy is necessary for long-term MSP implementation and enforcement. The funding model should link financial resources to each phase of implementation, ensuring continuity and operational efficiency while aligning with BSOP funding mechanisms to avoid duplication and enhance financial coordination.

Primary Funding Sources:

. **National Budget Allocations** Government commitment to financing core MSP activities.

. **Blue Bonds, Conservation Fund, and the RBB initiative** Leveraging Belize's Blue Bonds agreement, long-term conservation fund (e.g., the Belize Fund for a Sustainable Future), and emerging PfP models such as RBB to finance marine conservation, MSP enforcement, monitoring, and institutional capacity-building.

. **International Grants and Partnerships** Securing funding from donor agencies (e.g., GEF, UNDP, World Bank, TNC), in alignment with BSOP's funding priorities.

. **Private Sector and Blue Economy Investments** Establishing mechanisms for sustainable business contributions to marine governance.

. **Carbon and Biodiversity Offsets** Exploring blue carbon financing opportunities through seagrass and mangrove conservation initiatives.

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The financial sustainability of the BSOP should be reinforced through a dedicated MSP Implementation Fund, ensuring resources are allocated to monitoring, enforcement, and adaptation processes. Additionally, fiscal incentives for sustainable marine activities (e.g., eco-tourism, renewable energy, and sustainable fisheries) must be integrated into Belize's Blue Economy Framework, reinforcing the MSP's alignment with national and regional financial commitments.

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8.
MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND ADAPTATION

Effective MSP requires a structured monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation (MEA) framework to assess progress, ensure policy responsiveness, and facilitate continuous improvement. This section outlines key mechanisms to measure implementation success, review performance, and align Belize's MSP with evolving national and global priorities. A monitoring and evaluation framework should be developed to serve as the fundamental basis for tracking performance and adapting the MSP process over time.

8.1 MONITORING SYSTEM

A robust monitoring system is critical for tracking biodiversity conservation, socio-economic benefits, and governance effectiveness within Belize's MSP framework. Clear timelines should be established for data collection, reporting, and performance assessments to ensure accountability and transparency. This system should integrate Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to evaluate:



Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health:

. Coverage and effectiveness of Biodiversity Protection Zones.
. Marine habitat condition (e.g., coral reefs, seagrass, mangroves).
. Species population trends for key marine species.

Socio-Economic Outcomes:

. Economic benefits generated from Blue Economy sectors.
. Livelihood impacts on fishing, tourism, and local communities.
. Equitable access to marine resources.

Governance and Compliance:

. Enforcement of MSP regulations.
. Stakeholder participation and co-management effectiveness.
. Regional cooperation and transboundary governance initiatives.

8.2 REVIEW AND ADJUSTMENT MECHANISMS

The adaptive management approach ensures that if performance indicators show a decline over consecutive monitoring cycles, corrective actions—such as revised zoning regulations or enhanced enforcement measures—will be implemented to maintain policy effectiveness. To ensure Belize's MSP remains adaptive and resilient, periodic reviews and adjustment cycles will be implemented. This will allow MSP policies and zoning frameworks to evolve in response to new scientific data, socio-economic trends, and environmental changes.

The iterative review process will include:

. **Multi-Stakeholder Review Panels**: Bringing together government agencies, academia, private sector, and local communities for comprehensive evaluations.

. **Automated Early Warning System**: Utilizing real-time environmental data to trigger proactive responses to ecosystem degradation.

. **Regional and International Coordination**: Ensuring that MSP revisions align with Caribbean and global marine spatial governance frameworks and relevant international best practices.

Key Review Practices:

. **Iterative Review Cycles**: Conduct comprehensive evaluations every 5 years, with a mid-cycle (2.5-year) assessment to identify necessary adjustments.

. **Multi-Stakeholder Review Panels**: Engage government agencies, academia, private sector, and local communities in policy reviews.

. **Science-Based Policy Updates**: Incorporate findings from marine research, remote sensing, and socio-economic studies to refine planning decisions.

. **Regional and International Coordination**: Ensure that MSP revisions align with Caribbean and global marine spatial governance frameworks.

Flexibility and Adaptation:

. The MSP framework will adopt an adaptive management approach, allowing zoning, governance structures, and conservation measures to be adjusted based on emerging challenges and stakeholder feedback.

. Integration of climate change impact assessments into periodic reviews will ensure Belize's MSP remains future-proof.

8.3 ALIGNMENT WITH NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

To enhance the effectiveness and credibility of BSOP, alignment with national priorities and international best practices will be ensured.

National Commitments and Integration:

. Harmonization with the ICZM Plan and Blue Economy policies.

. Cross-sectoral policy coherence with fisheries, tourism, and maritime transport strategies.

International Commitments:

. Alignment with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

. Compliance with obligations under UNCLOS, CBD, and the Cartagena Convention.

. Participation in regional MSP initiatives, including CRFM's transboundary marine resource management frameworks.

. Leveraging global MSP networks, such as the MSP Roadmap (IOC-UNESCO), to align Belize's practices with evolving international standards.

8.4 COMMUNICATION, CAPACITY BUILDING, AND ENFORCEMENT

Effective implementation requires clear communication, capacity building, and enforcement measures.

Communication and Dissemination:

The policy and its updates will be disseminated through public information campaigns, stakeholder workshops, and digital platforms to ensure broad understanding and engagement across government agencies, local communities, and the private sector.

Training and Capacity Building:

Targeted training programs will be conducted to build institutional and stakeholder capacity to implement, monitor, and comply with MSP provisions. Training will focus on spatial planning tools, compliance requirements, and adaptive management practices.

Role in Governance Framework:

The MSP Policy provides the overarching framework guiding marine governance, coordination, and decision-making across sectors and jurisdictions in Belize's maritime areas. It defines institutional responsibilities and ensures coherence with related legislation, such as the Coastal Zone Management Act and the Fisheries Resources Act.

Compliance and Sanctions:

Failure to comply with the MSP Policy and its regulations may result in administrative or legal sanctions, as specified in relevant laws and regulations. Sanctions will be proportionate, transparent, and enforceable to maintain accountability and uphold the integrity of the MSP process.

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10. ANNEXES

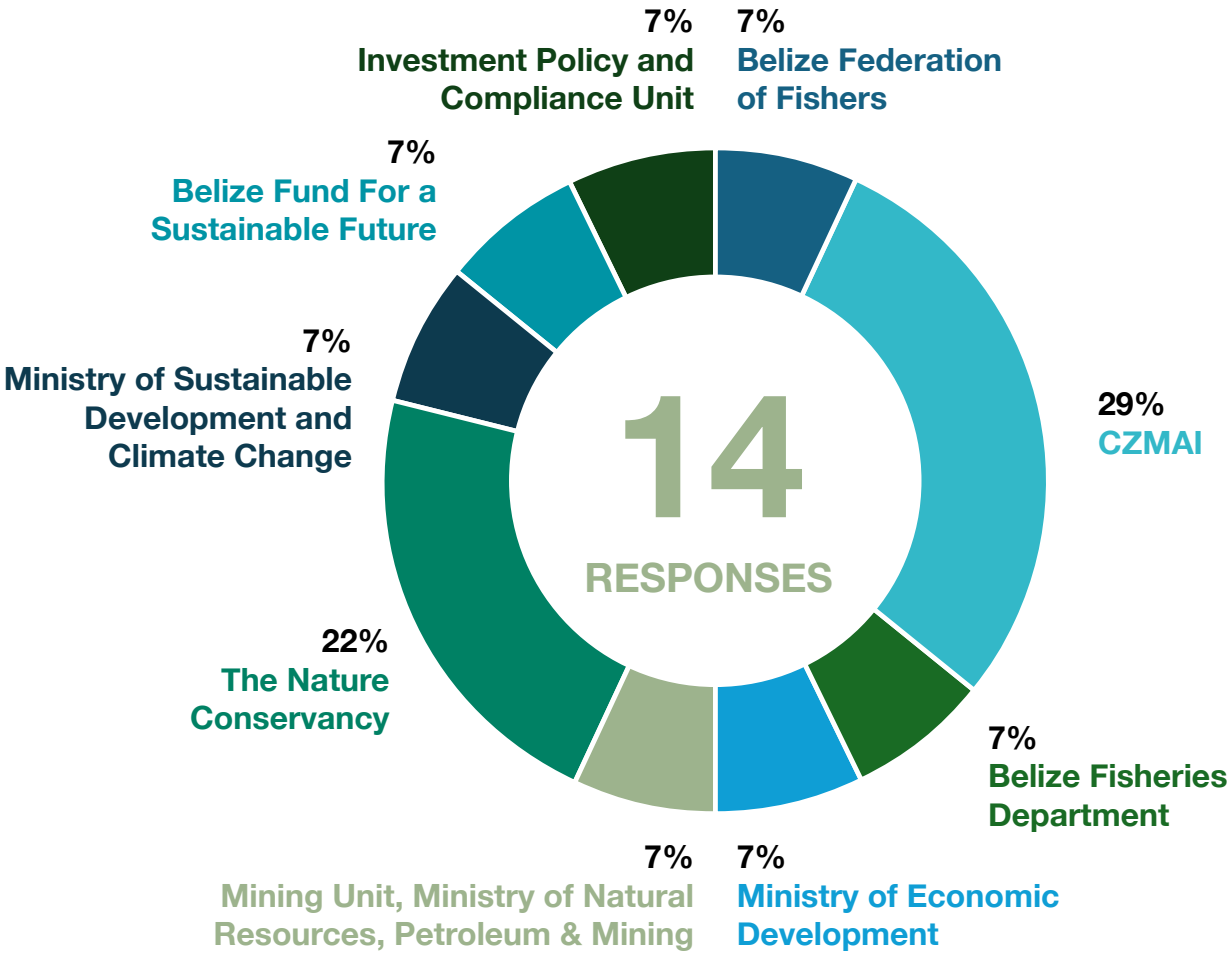
Annex 1: First Stakeholder Consultation: Initial MSP Policy Questionnaire

This first round of stakeholder consultation was carried out through an online questionnaire launched in late 2024 to gather preliminary insights for drafting Belize's MSP Policy. The survey targeted key actors from government institutions, NGOs, and other marine sectors and received 14 responses.

The questionnaire addressed foundational aspects of the policy such as vision, principles, climate threats, marine spatial zoning, governance gaps, and policy outcomes. Respondents highlighted sustainability, equitable access, and ocean governance as guiding principles. Coral reefs and mangroves were overwhelmingly cited as priority features for marine planning. A strong preference was expressed for designating marine spatial zones and including climate adaptation strategies.

The findings informed the general structure and emphasis of the MSP Policy, including the prioritization of stakeholder engagement, spatial use allocation, and integration with national development and conservation goals.

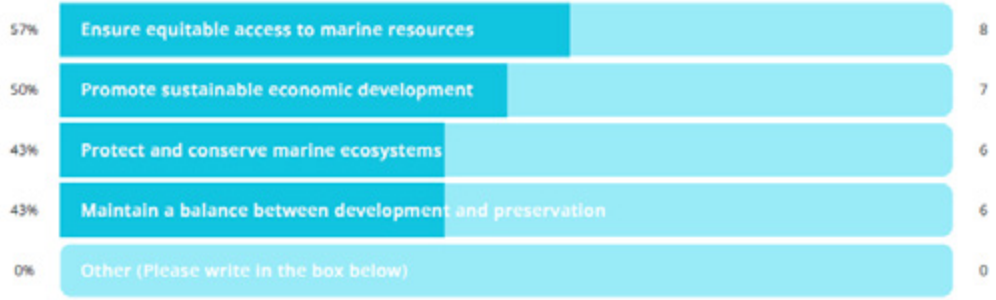
Participation of institutions



Does your institution have regulatory and enforcement functions over the uses or activities in the maritime zone? (14)



Vision and Principles for the Use of Marine Space What is your long-term vision for the use and conservation of Belize's marine areas? (14)



Vision and Principles for the Use of Marine Space Which principles should guide the planning, use and management of marine spaces? (14)

Sustainability



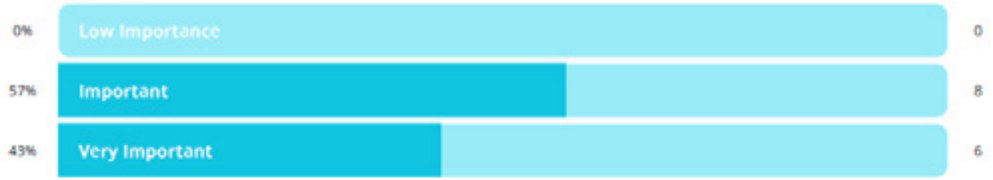
Ocean Governance



Equity (Fairness and equality in access to the resources and benefits derived from MSP)



Multi-use



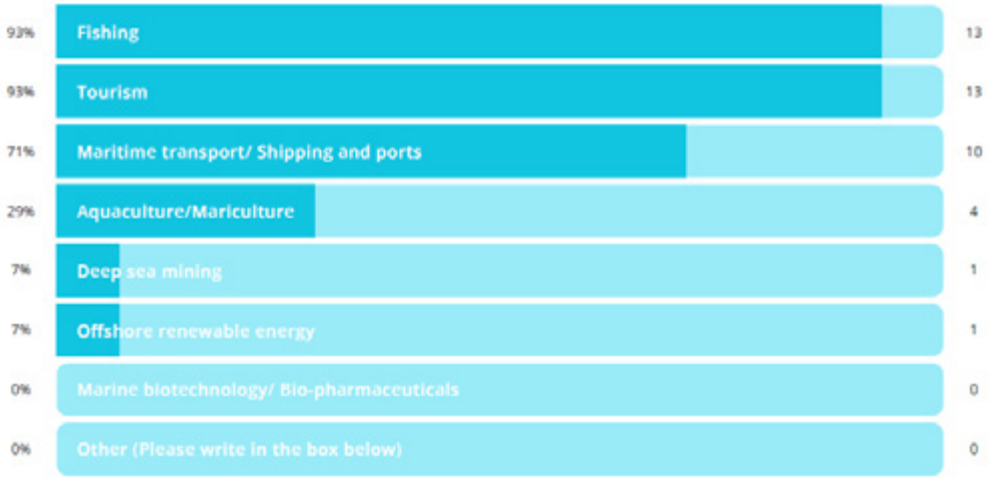
Transparency



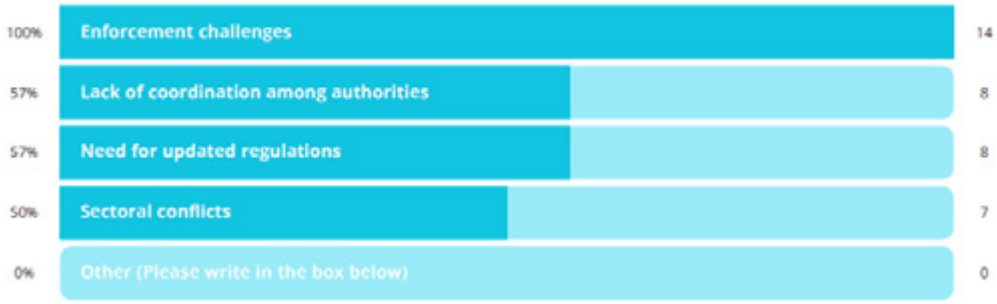
Economic Development



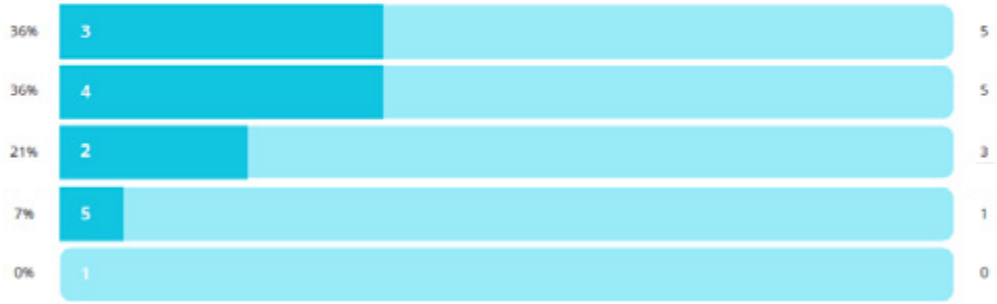
Spatial Use Planning and Marine Zoning Which economic activities, whether current/traditional or emerging,' do you consider most relevant in marine spaces? (14)



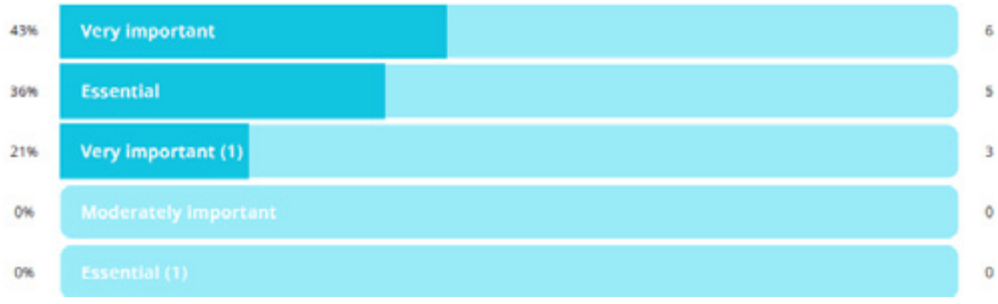
Regulatory and Governance Structure What are the main challenges in marine space governance? (14)



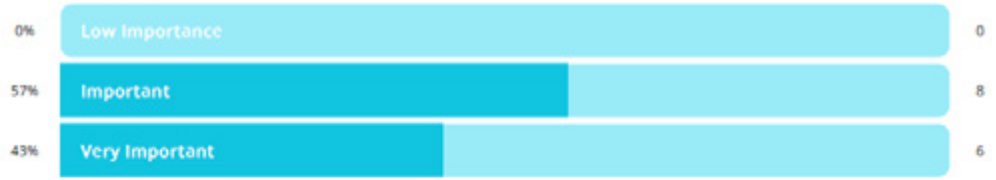
Regulatory and Governance Structure How well do you think existing national-level plans (e.g., ICZM, Sectoral Plans, Maritime Economy Plan) align to support an MSP policy? (14)



Spatial Use Planning and Marine Zoning How important do you consider the establishment of designated marine spatial zones for different uses? (14)



Multi-use



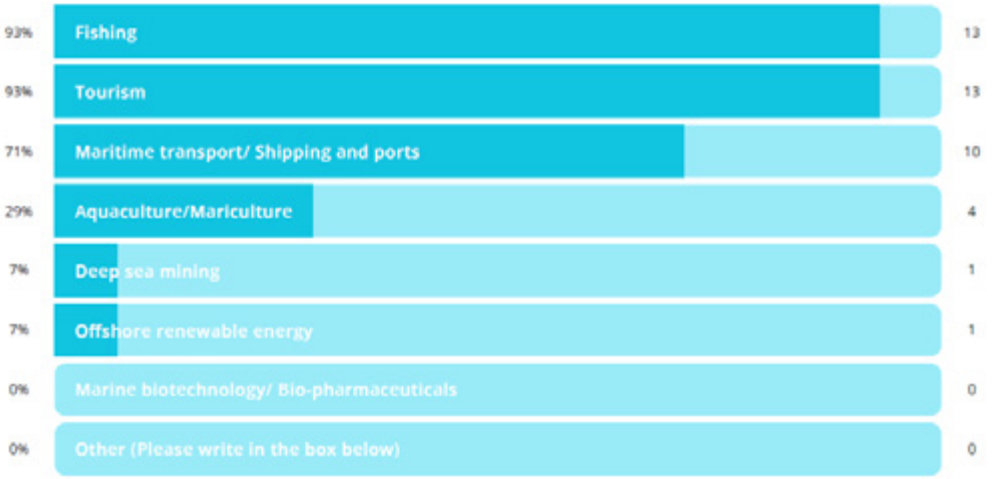
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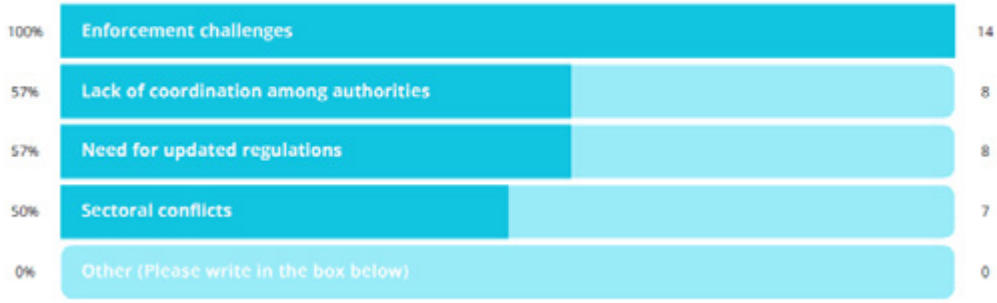
Economic Development



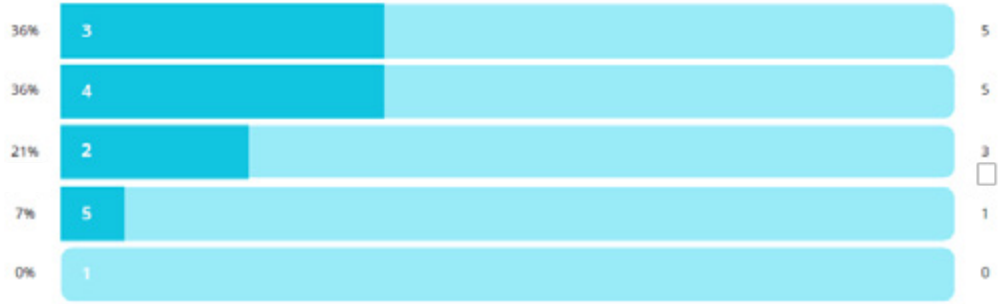
Spatial Use Planning and Marine Zoning Which economic activities, whether current/traditional or emerging,' do you consider most relevant in marine spaces? (14)



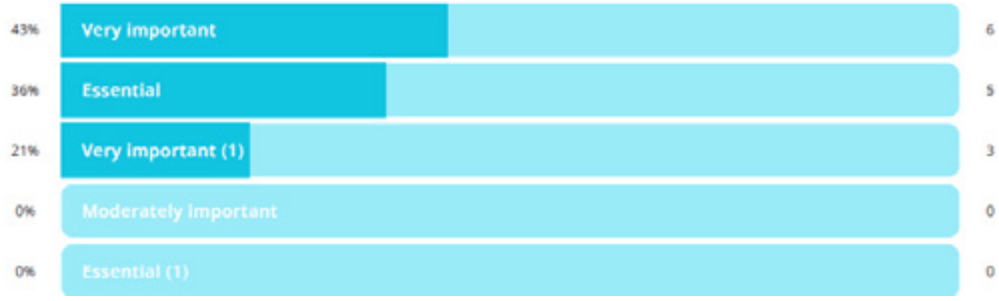
Regulatory and Governance Structure What are the main challenges in marine space governance? (14)



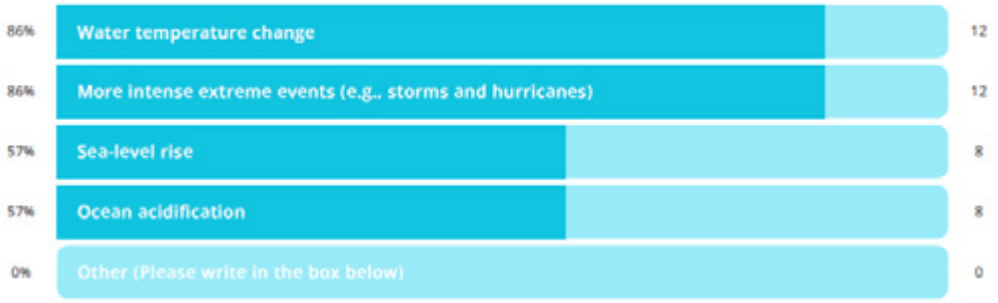
Regulatory and Governance Structure How well do you think existing national-level plans (e.g., ICZM, Sectoral Plans, Maritime Economy Plan) align to support an MSP policy? (14)



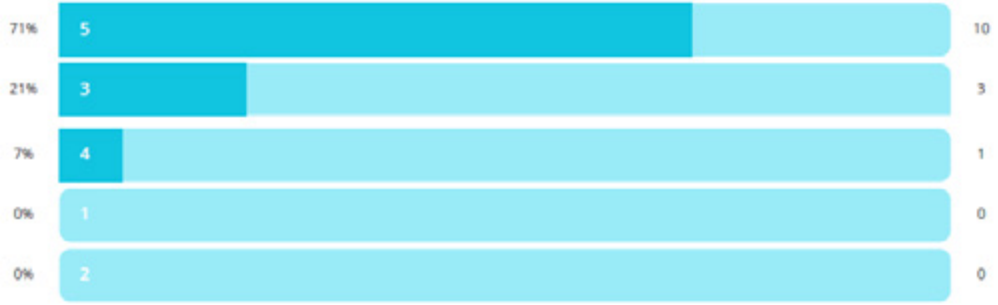
Spatial Use Planning and Marine Zoning How important do you consider the establishment of designated marine spatial zones for different uses? (14)



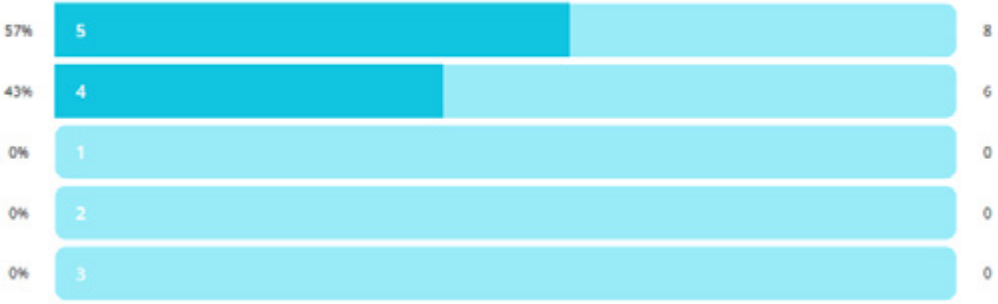
Future Scenarios and Climate Change Adaptation What are the primary climate threats to Belize's marine ecosystems? (14)



Future Scenarios and Climate Change Adaptation How do you rate the importance of climate adaptation strategies in MSP? (14)



Policy Outcomes and Objectives To what extent should the MSP policy prioritize and address stakeholder participation for its effective implementation? (14)



Policy Outcomes and Objectives How would implementing an MSP policy assist with meeting the objectives of the BSOP? (14)

Increase biodiversity and conservation



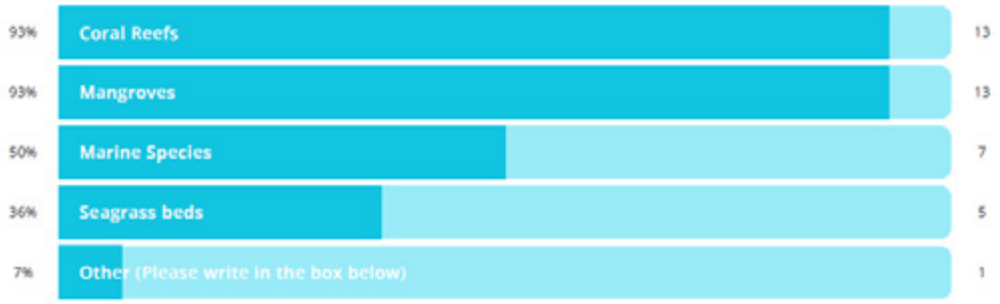
Reduce use conflicts



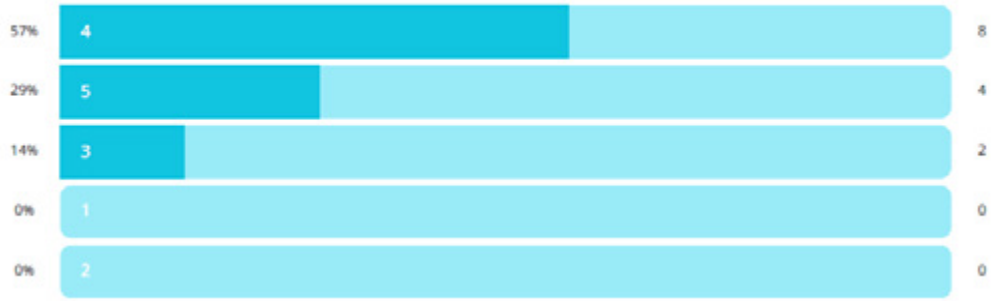
Advance sustainable blue economy growth and development:



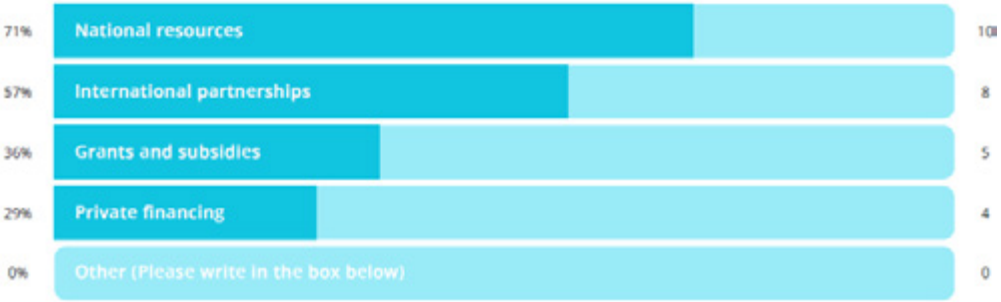
Policy Outcomes and Objectives Which of the following marine ecosystem features do you consider as priorities in marine planning? (14)



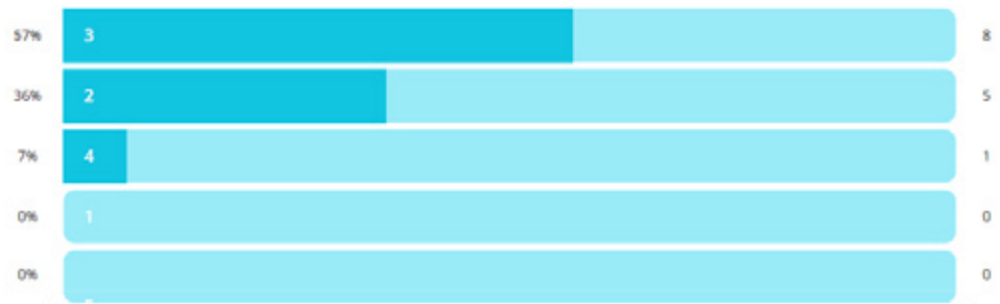
Policy Outcomes and Objectives Rank how important fair access is overall vs. current planning efforts (14)



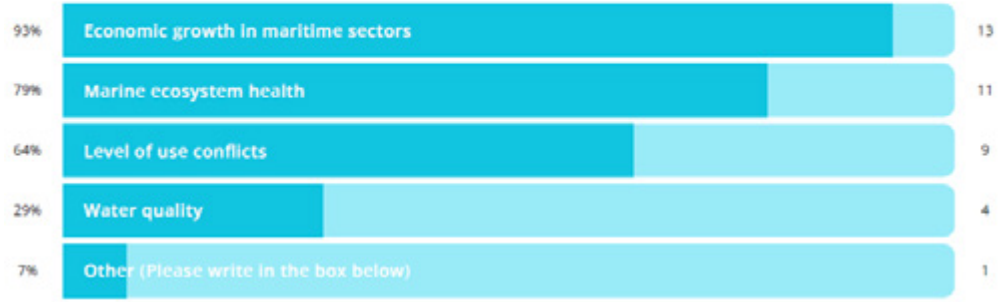
Coordination and Implementation What funding sources can support MSP? (14)



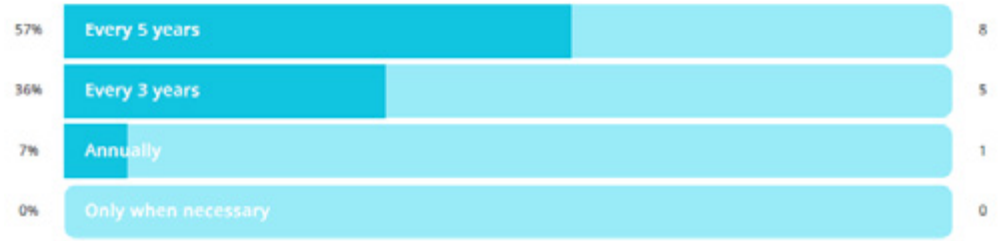
Coordination and Implementation How effective are current coordination mechanisms between agencies and sectors? (14)



Monitoring and Evaluation Which indicators do you consider most relevant for monitoring MSP progress? (14)



Monitoring and Evaluation What is the ideal frequency for reviewing and adapting the MSP policy? (14)



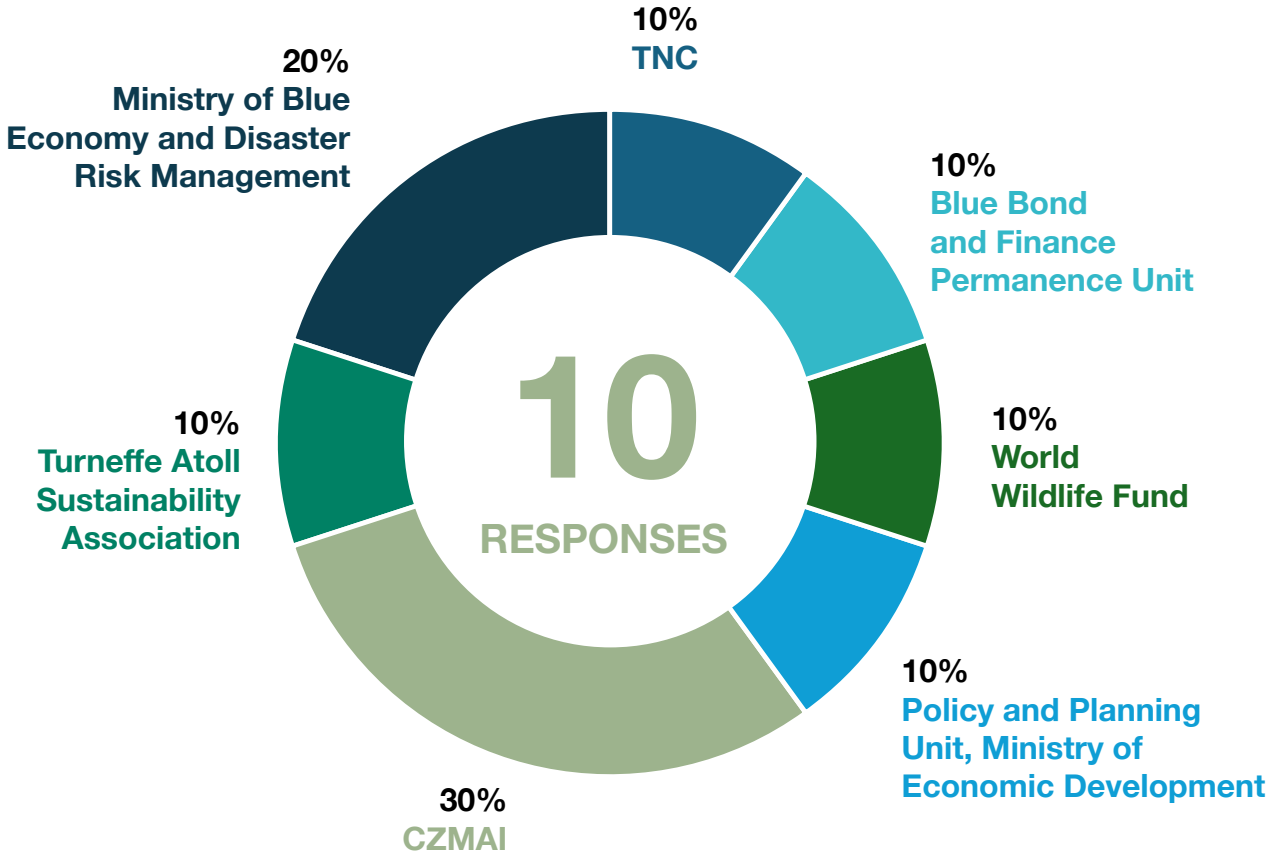
Annex 2: Second Stakeholder Consultation: Feedback on MSP Policy Outline

The second stakeholder consultation focused on evaluating the draft outline of Belize's MSP Policy and was conducted via an online survey. A total of 10 responses were received, with the majority of stakeholders representing public institutions, NGOs, and technical working groups involved in MSP implementation.

Respondents were asked to assess the relevance of each proposed section in the policy outline. Overall, the feedback was highly favourable, with almost unanimous agreement on the importance of the sections listed. Some comments suggested refining the sections on key principles and environmental analysis, and proposed the inclusion of a dispute resolution mechanism and real-world MSP examples.

This feedback was used to adjust the structure and content of the MSP Policy and strengthen its clarity, stakeholder relevance, and implementation orientation.

Participation of institutions



Context and Justification Global and regional importance of Belize's marine space. Ocean-Dependent Economic Activities. Alignment with the ICZM Policy/Plan and BSOP initiatives. Rationale for MSP as a tool for sustainable development and resilience. < (10)



Overview of Key Challenges and Opportunities Practical problems highlighted by stakeholders. e.g.: Enforcement, regulations, coordination and sectoral conflicts challenges. Strengths highlighted by stakeholders e.g.: Blue economy, Multi-use, Technological and nature-based solutions and climate resilience. (10)



Main objective of the Policy Framework To foster a comprehensive, inclusive, and science-based MSP framework that balances ecological protection, sustainable economic development, and equitable access to marine resources, ensuring the long-term resilience and prosperity of Belize's marine ecosystems and communities. < (10)



Definition of MSP and Key Principles (10)



Relation with other Legal Framework and International Agreements (10)



Environmental and Physical Analysis e.g.: Priority ecosystems: coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds. e.g.: Climate threats: water temperature rise, extreme weather events, sea-level rise, and ocean acidification. < (10)



Socio-Economic Analysis Key marine-based economic activities: e.g.: tourism, fishing, maritime transport. Social equity (vulnerabilities and opportunities). < (10)



Governance and Legal Framework Overview of existing policies (ICZM Policy, BSOP, national and sectoral plans). Gaps and overlaps. Governance challenges: lack of coordination, outdated regulations, and enforcement issues. Institutional Roles and Responsibilities. < (10)



Marine Zoning and Spatial Planning Conflicts. e.g.: fishing vs. tourism, shipping vs. conservation Opportunities. e.g.: Multi-use with tourism and Conservation. (10)



Vision BSOP Vision: A healthy, resilient, and equitably shared ocean that supports a thriving national economy and nurtures the culture and well-being of all Belizeans. Stakeholder insights from the consultations (i.e., Questionnaire and Workshop). < (10)



Guiding Principles e.g., Equity, Sustainability, Ocean Governance, Transparency, Economic Development (Insights from the questionnaire). < (10)



Geographical Scope of Application (10)



Overarching Goals and Actions BSOP Over Arching Goal: To enact and publish legislation required to legally enforce the Marine Spatial Plan that guides sustainable development and designates up to 30% of Belize's ocean as Biodiversity Protection Zones. BSOP 1: Process Governance Goal (3 specific objectives). BSOP 2: Marine Conservation Goal (6 specific objectives). BSOP 3: Blue Economy Goal (2 specific objectives). BSOP 4: Equity Goal (2 specific objectives). Stakeholder insights from the consultations (i.e., Questionnaire and Workshop): Any other goals? < (10)



Spatial Zoning and Use Planning Guidelines for defining multi-use areas, conservation zones, and restricted-use zones. Recommendations. < (10)



Futures scenarios Climate, economic, and governance future scenarios: e.g.: climate change effects and emerging sectors in the national context. Adaptation-Focused Scenario. e.g.: Emerging technologies (e.g., climate-smart technologies) and nature based-solutions. Recommendations. < (10)



Phased Implementation Plan Action plans < (10)



Roles and Responsibilities Institutions responsible for MSP governance and enforcement. Stakeholder engagement mechanisms for implementation. < (10)



Funding and Financial Mechanisms Funding sources and technical resources. < (10)



Monitoring system e.g.: Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). < (10)



Review and Adjustment Mechanisms Evaluation practices. Frequency of policy and future plan reviews. Flexibility to adapt based on new data and changing conditions. < (10)



Alignment with National and International Frameworks (10)



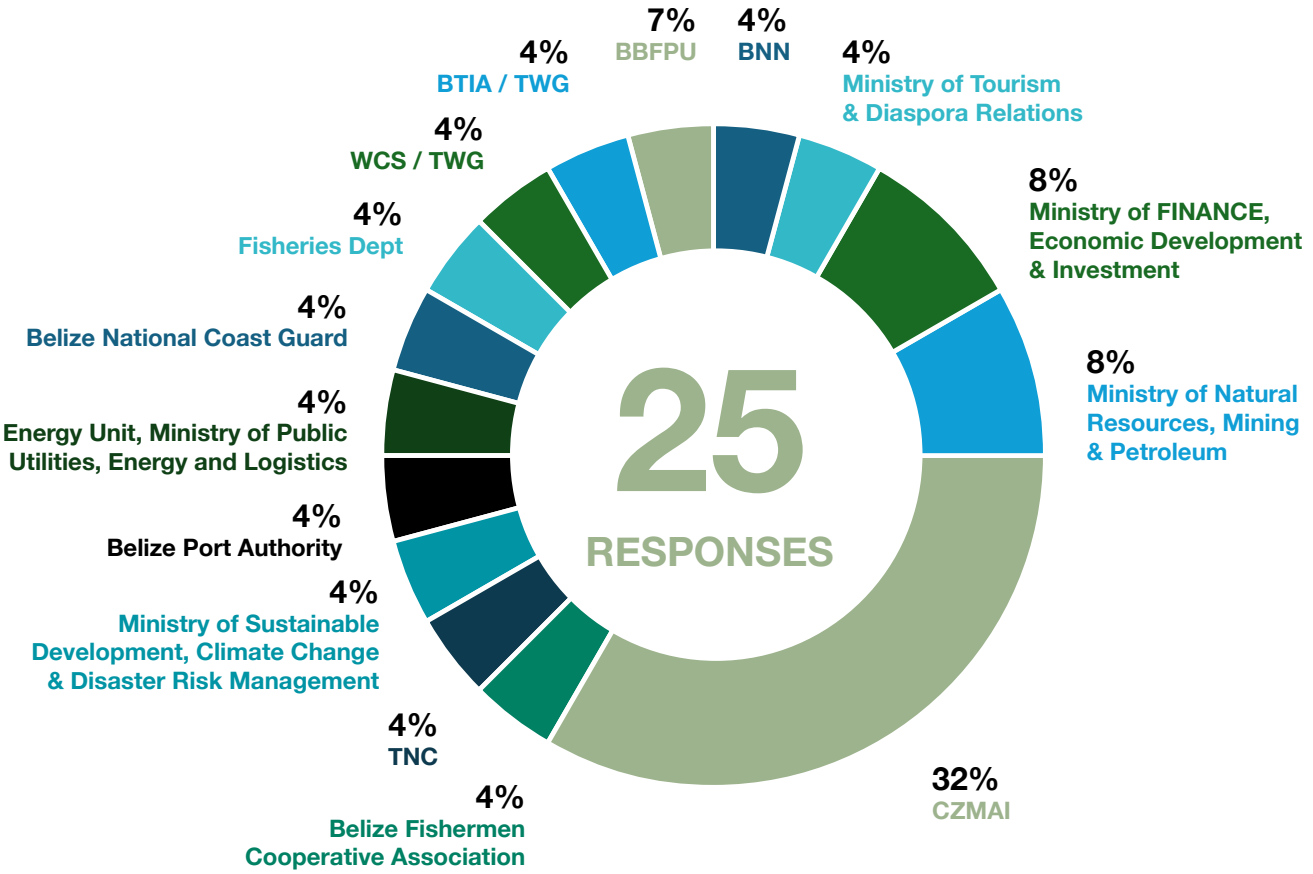
Annex 3: Third Stakeholder Consultation: SWOT Validation via Workshop

The third stakeholder engagement involved a participatory SWOT validation exercise held during a dedicated workshop with the Steering Committee for the Belize Sustainable Ocean Plan (SC-BSOP), conducted on March 28, 2025. A total of 25 participants from government agencies, NGOs, academia, and industry took part in the session, which was facilitated through the interactive platform Slido.

The objective was to validate and refine a SWOT analysis developed from the literature review and earlier consultations. The live session confirmed the relevance of identified strengths (e.g., Blue Bonds framework and institutional leadership), weaknesses (e.g., enforcement limitations), opportunities (e.g., regional cooperation and blue economy sectors), and threats (e.g., illegal activities, fragmentation of marine governance).

Importantly, only SWOT items that received 70% or more support from participants were retained in the final policy document. This validation threshold ensured that only broadly supported items were included as official strategic considerations in the MSP Policy. The validated SWOT informed Section 3 of the MSP Policy.

Participation of institutions



Do you agree with the STRENGTHS listed below?

21 votes

Established Institutional Frameworks: Presence of key entities like CZMAI and the legal foundation provided by the Coastal Zone Management Act (CAP 329). - 21 votes

100%

Existing MSP-Related Plans: Plans such as the BSOP and ICZM Plan (2016) outline goals and priorities, forming a strong foundation for MSP. - 19 votes

90%

Blue Bond Initiative: Provides significant financial support, ensuring long-term conservation funding. - 20 votes

95%

Stakeholder Engagement: Robust processes involving local communities, NGOs, and industry sectors, as documented in workshops and consultations. - 18 votes

86%

Marine Protected Areas: Examples like Hol Chan Marine Reserve demonstrate successful zoning and conservation models. - 14 votes

67%

Do you agree with the OPPORTUNITIES listed below?

24 votes

Global Recognition and Support: Belize's leadership in conservation, including initiatives like the Blue Bond, attracts international attention and funding. - 21 votes

88%

Regional Collaboration: Peer-to-peer exchanges with countries like Barbados and Jamaica offer opportunities to share best practices and align with regional MSP goals. - 21 votes

88%

Nature-Based Solutions: Expansion of mangrove restoration projects and biodiversity protection zones to enhance climate resilience and ecosystem health. - 24 votes

100%

Emerging Blue Economy Sectors: Based on multi-use approaches, the development of for example eco-tourism presents opportunities for economic development. - 20 votes

83%

Do you agree with the WEAKNESSES listed below?

21 votes

Lack of Comprehensive MSP Plan: Despite foundational documents, a fully integrated and approved MSP plan is yet to be developed. - 14 votes

67%

Fragmented Governance: Overlapping roles between institutions like CZMAI and the Fisheries Department hinder coordinated decision-making. - 15 votes

71%

Enforcement Challenges: Limited patrolling capacity and insufficient resources compromise compliance and regulatory enforcement in marine zones. - 20 votes

95%

Gaps in Data Integration: Absence of a centralized public information system limits data sharing and evidence-based decision-making. - 19 votes

90%

Limited Capacity for Implementation: Capacity-building efforts are nascent and require scaling up to support MSP rollout effectively. - 18 votes

86%

Do you agree with the THREATS listed below?

20 votes

Climate Change Impacts: Rising sea levels, ocean acidification, and coral bleaching threaten marine ecosystems and socio-economic resilience. - 18 votes

90%

Competing Economic Interests: Conflicts between tourism, fishing, and other marine activities could intensify without proper zoning and stakeholder management. - 18 votes

90%

Dependence on External Funding: Heavy reliance on international funding, such as the Blue Bond, may create vulnerabilities if financial flows decrease. - 13 votes

65%

Limited Regional Policy Alignment: Inconsistent regional marine governance frameworks could hinder cross-border cooperation and integrated ocean management. - 11 votes

55%

Illegal Activities: Overfishing and unregulated development persist as risks, exacerbated by enforcement limitations. - 19 votes

95%

MSP POLICY

Consultancy to develop an updated Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) policy, plan, and to prepare draft amendments for the Belize Coastal Zone Management (CZM) act and regulations.

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