

**IORA Ocean Conference on “Marine Spatial Planning – Towards Sustainable Use of the Indian Ocean”**

Concept Note

**A. INTRODUCTION**

Over the past years, there has been a high and rapidly increasing demand for marine space for activities such as maritime shipping and fishing, tourism, aquaculture, renewable energy and ecosystem and biodiversity conservation. Such demands place multiple pressures on coastal resources. In order to promote a sustainable and integrated use of marine space, coastal States all over the world are now adopting an integrated planning and management approach through marine spatial planning. The main purpose of marine spatial planning is to identify the utilisation of marine space for different sea uses, in accordance with national policies and legislation, while taking into consideration the preservation, protection and improvement of marine environment, including resilience to climate change impacts. Marine Spatial Planning plays an important role in avoiding and managing potential conflicts among the users of the maritime domain. It also contributes to the effective management of marine activities and the sustainable use of marine and coastal resources by creating a framework for consistent, transparent, sustainable and evidence-based decision-making.

Marine spatial planning has different advantages towards achieving ecological, social and economic benefits, namely by:

- (i) fostering interaction and promotes cooperation among all stakeholders concerned through the elaboration of a common framework that facilitates the sustainable development of different economic activities in the Exclusive Economic Zone;
- (ii) helping ensure that maximum benefits are derived from the use of the sea by encouraging activities to take place where they bring most value and do not devalue other activities;
- (iii) providing a strategic planning framework to facilitate sectorial development by guiding investment decisions;
- (iv) providing a means of avoiding and managing potential conflicts among users of marine space by ensuring that the needs of different sectors are addressed or reconciled in a transparent and coordinated way;
- (v) facilitating the sustainable exploitation of the marine natural resources, thereby securing the long-term future of the industries that depend on the ocean;
- (vi) helping to ensure that marine activities, including emerging ones (e.g. marine renewable energy, oil and gas exploration, aquaculture, among others), as well as more established marine activities are fairly allocated ocean space to develop;
- (vii) helping to promote a mix of uses that are compatible with each other and the environment with a view to optimizing the use of the marine area;
- (viii) providing the framework to promote activities that depend on environmental quality, such as recreation and fishing. This is particularly true in areas of high conservation value where activities such as diving and wildlife tourism are significant; and
- (ix) bringing cost efficiencies through the development of common approaches to the acquisition, exchange and dissemination of information among sea users, thereby reducing duplication of efforts.

A comprehensive MSP, however, requires the availability and analysis of high quality geospatial data originating from reliable sources. Nowadays these data are accessible namely through sensed mounted on-board satellite and by in-situ measurement through the conduct of scientific cruises. The Second International Indian Ocean Expedition (IIOE-2) which is a program under the auspices of UNESCO IOC, Indian Ocean Global Ocean Observing System (IOGOOS) and Scientific Committee on Oceanic Research (SCOR) aims at advancing our understanding of the Indian Ocean and its role in the Earth System in order to enable informed decisions to support sustainable development and the well-being of humankind. IIOE-2 research activities shall thus collect new in-situ data and undertake process studies on a range of physical, biogeochemical, biological and coupled climatic characteristics of the Indian Ocean which will be valuable to the MSP process.

The elaboration of a Marine Spatial Plan is also in line with the implementation of the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's); in particular, SDG 14 which concerns 'life below water' and aims at conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. Another objective of SDG14 is also to ensure that present developments are not compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, as well as to achieve a healthy, productive and resilient ocean. One key aspect of this strategy is to have appropriate regulatory framework that would support these developmental plans, as well as ensure a safe and stable maritime zone.

Among the ten targets contained in SDG 14, Target 14.2 and 14.5 are of major concern to IORA Member States. Marine Spatial Planning will provide for a clear and guided process to achieve the expected results.

<i>Targets (from the 2030 Agenda)</i>	<i>Indicators</i>
14.2 By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans	14.2.1 Proportion of national Exclusive Economic Zones managed using ecosystem-based approaches.
14.5 By 2020, conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information	14.5.1 Coverage of protected areas in relation to marine areas

With IORA Member States having disparity at respective scientific and technical level, it is incumbent to adhere to a common international and regional arrangement, national policies, best practices, enhanced monitoring and tracking system. There is also a need to bridge implementation gaps, strengthen compliance and improve enforcement of existing regulatory frameworks. However, current ocean governance is recognised as insufficient to properly manage the impact of human activities, ensure long-term sustainability, equity in allocation of resources, and create conditions to maximise economic benefits derived from coastal areas and the high seas.

## **B. PROPOSAL**

It is crucial that economic activities be balanced to promote a healthy ocean. In view of planning a sustainable future for coastal communities, implementation of effective ecosystem management frameworks are of great importance. In fact, relevant stakeholders have already started to discuss and promote a framework that couple the ecosystem-based approach with marine spatial planning, which would support a balance between development needs and the natural environment. In addition, several initiatives are being adopted by IORA Member States to promote sustainable Ocean Economy development, including the Blue Growth Initiative, which aim at restoring the potential of the oceans and wetlands by introducing responsible and sustainable approaches to reconcile economic growth and food security together with the conservation of aquatic resources.

Mauritius is fully aware of the challenges that face developing countries for the protection and preservation of their marine environment, including resilience to climate change impacts. It is therefore proposing to hold a Marine Spatial Planning Conference to provide IORA Member States with an opportunity to learn more about how to achieve their respective targets under SDG 14 by using effective Marine Spatial Planning.

## **C. OBJECTIVES**

The proposed conference would be a platform for experts and policy-makers from different IORA Member States and relevant stakeholders, to discuss on relevant issues, explore strategies and provide guidance on the elaboration of a marine spatial plan to achieve targets set under SDG14.

The objectives of the conference are to:

- Explore strategies for the elaboration of a marine spatial plan in line with targets of SDG 14;
- Promote sharing of experience and good practices in Marine Spatial Planning among the IORA region;
- Promote collaborative research and development for ocean observatory and data management in the Indian Ocean; and
- Promote sustainable ocean economy development in Small Island Developing States through regional initiatives.

## **D. HOST**

Mauritius is among the countries which has fully subscribed to the 2030 UN Agenda to end poverty, fight inequality and tackle climate change. Mauritius has agreed to the elaboration of a Marine Spatial Plan for its EEZ and a MSP Coordinating Committee, including the private and public sector and the NGOs, has been set up at the level of the Department of Continental Shelf, Maritime Zones Administration and Exploration, Ministry of Defence and Rodrigues.

Mauritius has a vast Exclusive Economic Zone consisting of an area of about 2.3 million square kilometers. In March 2011, the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) adopted recommendations confirming the entitlement of the Republic of the Mauritius and the Republic of Seychelles to an area of extended continental shelf of approximately 396, 000 square kilometers making its maritime zones a

determining asset that could contribute to the economic development of the country. In addition, the Mauritian waters harbour a wide range of marine resources that are of great economic and ecological importance, which can be used for a wide range of applications. The vision of the Government of Mauritius is to provide for the sustainable development of the Ocean Economy while recognising its multi-disciplinary nature and large potential to provide a self-sustained economic-well for the present and future generations.

The Department for Continental Shelf, Maritime Zones Administration and Exploration is currently implementing a project entitled "*Developing an Enhanced Ocean observatory in support of Ocean Exploration and Development*" which is partly funded by the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation. The main objectives of the project are to develop a database framework to facilitate the process of collecting, storing, organising and providing access to spatio-temporal data to support the marine spatial planning initiative. By integrating various sources of information and providing access to relevant knowledge, the database will serve both as a guide to identify gaps in existing information and data and as a baseline for environmental impact assessment. The database will also ensure that data meeting the industry and government needs can easily be addressed. By providing relevant information, the database will help developers to understand the challenges while adopting a prudent approach.

In its objectives to better understand and develop a successful Marine Spatial Plan, it is being proposed that the IORA Ocean Conference on "Marine Spatial Planning–Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG14)" be hosted by the Government of Mauritius in November 2017.

## **E. FUNDING**

50% of the funding for the project will come from the IORA Special Fund, and the remaining 50% is expected from the host Member State. Contributions from Member States or sponsorship by other stakeholders will be appreciated. The administrative, logistical and budgetary arrangements will be finalized by the IORA Secretariat in consultation with the Host Member State.