



Jason Houston



Hagai Sviridun

SEYCHELLES

30% OCEAN PROTECTION GOAL REACHED

MARCH 2020

The Government of Seychelles is announcing the final details of Marine Protection Areas to reach its goal to protect 30% or 410,000 sq. km (158,000 sq. miles) of its ocean. That area will now be fully or significantly safeguarded to encourage sustainable development and to adapt to the effects of climate change.

The protected areas are split into two 'zones'. There are High Biodiversity Protection Areas (Zone 1) where almost no extractive human activities are allowed. These Zone 1 areas include one of the world's most ecologically important habitats, the waters around the Aldabra Group. This is home to the Indian Ocean's only dugongs, the world's second-largest raised atoll, regionally significant populations of seabirds, and critically-endangered turtles. It is on migratory routes for calving Southern Ocean humpback whales, and includes the highest fish densities in Seychelles.

There are also Medium Biodiversity Protection and Sustainable Use Areas (Zone 2), designed to conserve natural ecosystems while allowing some economic activities, including fishing, tourism charters, renewable energy, and others. Significant new conditions will regulate businesses operating in these areas. Activities are allowed so that those economically-important enterprises continue to have the marine resources they rely on.

Designation of the Marine Protection Areas and the drafting of 'allowable activities' followed perhaps the most comprehensive process of consultation of its kind in Seychelles, to ensure the largest number and diversity of people, businesses, and institutions provided information and input, and ultimately their support, to the planning.

The announcement of the protection areas delivers on a 'debt-for-conservation' deal that Seychelles signed with The Nature Conservancy in February 2016, the first such deal for marine conservation in the world. Under the deal, private philanthropic funding and loan capital was raised for Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust (SeyCCAT), which then extended loans to the Seychelles Government to enable the purchase of \$21.6 million of sovereign debt at a discount. The Government now repays SeyCCAT on more favorable terms, and the Trust then directs a portion of repayments to immediately fund marine conservation and climate change adaptation projects and develop long-term financing to implement the Plan in 2021.

The Marine Protection Areas are a key part of the new Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan that covers the second-largest area of ocean in the world (after one in Norway) and is the largest plan for tropical waters to account for both conservation and climate change.

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

The mission of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

TNC works in partnership with government and local NGOs, sharing technical tools, skills, and resources to increase the scale of their impact and implement solutions that preserve nature while improving people's lives.

TNC established the Africa Program in 2007, and today it operates in seven countries across the continent.

CONTACT

HELENA SIMS
Seychelles MSP Project Manager
Email: helena.sims@tnc.org
nature.org/africa
seymsp.com

ANGELIQUE POUPONNEAU
CEO, SeyCCAT
Email: ceo@seyccat.org
seyccat.org

Designating 30% of its marine area by 2020 means Seychelles has tripled the UN Convention of Biological Diversity target for 10% by 2020 in marine protected areas, and the UN Sustainable Development Goal SDG-14 for 10% coastal and marine protection.

Beyond the Marine Protection Areas, the Marine Spatial Plan as a whole also covers how Seychelles' remaining 70% of ocean is addressed in terms of increasing management of all marine resources, regulatory attention, and unified government oversight of all activities that take place to support the country's Blue Economy.

WHY IS A MARINE SPATIAL PLAN NEEDED?

Although there are various existing laws, international agreements, and regulations governing the management of all waters in Seychelles, there has previously not been a comprehensive, public, and participatory process to plan for sustainable development and integrate large-scale marine conservation in the context of a changing climate that will also ensure ecological protection for years to come.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT

On March 26, 2020, in the capital Victoria, the Government of Seychelles is expected to announce meeting its target of 30% of its ocean in Marine Protection Areas, completing a pioneering environment and Blue Economy initiative financed by a world-first debt refinancing deal for marine conservation.

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

Marine Protection Areas span a distance of more than 1,100 kilometers (690 miles) from the Mahé Plateau to the UNESCO World Heritage Site at the Aldabra Atoll. These new areas include shallow and deep water lagoons, complex reef systems in Outer Islands, dropoff walls and canyons, and the open ocean that is home to some of the world's largest migratory species.

They include five High Biodiversity Protection Areas designated as Marine National Parks totalling 203,071 sq. km:

- Aldabra Group (Marine) National Park — expansion & re-designation
- Bird Island (Ile aux Vaches) (Marine) National Park
- D'Arros Atoll (Marine) National Park
- D'Arros to Poivre Atolls (Marine) National Park
- Amirantes South (Marine) National Park

There are also eight Medium Biodiversity Protection and Sustainable Use Areas designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), totalling 238,442 sq. km:

- Amirantes (Marine) to Fortune Bank (Marine) AONB — expansion & re-designation
- Denis Island (Marine) AONB
- Desroches Atoll (Marine) AONB
- Poivre Atoll (Marine) AONB
- Alphonse Group (Marine) AONB
- Farquhar Atoll (Marine) AONB
- Farquhar Archipelago (Marine) AONB
- Cosmoledo and Astove Archipelago (Marine) AONB

WHAT

- 410,000 sq. km of ocean in Seychelles now safeguarded as Marine Protection Areas (MPAs).
- The MPAs are home to endangered species and economically vital fish stocks, including tuna.
- The Seychelles Marine Spatial Plan will cover the second-largest area of ocean in the world.

WHY

- A Marine Spatial Plan is needed to manage conservation and direct sustainable development and climate change adaptation in these areas.

WHERE

- Five High Biodiversity Protection Areas designated as Marine National Parks cover 203,071 sq. km.
- Eight Medium Biodiversity Protection and Sustainable Use Areas designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty cover 238,442 sq. km.

WHEN

- Official Government announcement on March 26, 2020.

WHO

- Government of Seychelles
- The Nature Conservancy
- Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP)
- Stakeholders from fisheries conservation, tourism, energy, recreation, and maritime security
- Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust
- Private funders



All images: Jason Houston

PARTNERS INVOLVED

- The Government of Seychelles, who initially decided to increase the protected area of its ocean under the aegis of the UN's Convention on Biological Diversity.
- The Nature Conservancy, through its Africa Region, its Global Oceans team, and its NatureVest conservation investing unit. The Nature Conservancy is facilitating the process to identify new protected areas, provides all technical and scientific support, and is helping the Government create the Marine Spatial Plan.
- The Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), who support the Government in the Program Coordinating Unit.
- Seychelles' citizens, local and international experts, scientists, finance and legal experts, policy consultants, fisheries businesses, tourism operators, and public utilities, who took part in more than 250 consultations to inform the design and location of the Marine Protection Areas.
- SeyCCAT, the Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust, an independent private trust disbursing blue grants funded by the debt conversion and other recent financing opportunities in Seychelles to support ocean conservation and implementation of the Plan.
- Private funders including the China Global Conservation Fund of The Nature Conservancy, Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation, Lyda Hill Foundation, Oak Foundation, Oceans 5, The Jeremy and Hannelore Grantham Environmental Trust, Turnbull Burnstein Family Charitable Fund, and Waitt Foundation, contributed to the debt swap.



Left to right: Cameapax, Hagai Svullin, Jason Houston

DETAILED TECHNICAL Q+A

WHY PROTECT THESE AREAS?

Climate change creates warmer sea surface temperatures and warmer temperatures cause sea level rise. It is uncertain how marine ecosystems will be affected but we do know that distribution patterns of species are changing and some species, e.g. some corals, are not recovering from extreme warm water events. By taking account of scientific studies that show how well-designed and effectively-managed marine reserves are more resilient to climate change because pressure is reduced on each ecosystem component, Seychelles is taking precautionary measures to best position its environment and economy for the long term.

HIGH BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION AREAS

The ocean surrounding the **Aldabra Group (Marine) National Park** (201,235 sq. km; 14.9% of Seychelles' territory) is an internationally-recognized biodiversity hotspot. The Aldabra Atoll is the world's second-largest raised coral atoll, with a fringing reef system whose intactness is rarely paralleled in similar ecosystems. The area is home to a small population of dugong — the most endangered animal in the Western Indian Ocean — and is a migratory route for calving humpback whales.

In the **Amirantes Group**, three new areas are in high protection status (1,730 sq. km; 0.132%): Darros Atoll, Darros and Poivre Atolls, and Amirantes South.

The waters surrounding **D'Arros Atoll** (25 sq. km; 0.002%) contain seagrasses, complex coral reefs and a high diversity of fish species including a new species discovered in 2019. Recent studies found notable high aggregations of rays.

The shallow waters between **D'Arros and Poivre Atolls** (370 sq. km; 0.03%) contain seagrasses as well as a unique reef type — high relief bank type reef, infilled rim.

Amirantes South (1,335 sq. km; 0.1%) surrounds Etoile, Boudeuse, Desnoeuvs, and Marie-Louise Atolls. The island of Marie-Louise contains the only red-footed booby colony in the Amirantes, and the beaches are important turtle nesting sites.

North of Mahé, **Bird Island**, or **Ile aux Vaches**, is a high protection area that surrounds one of only two coralline atolls on the Mahé Plateau (106 sq. km; 0.008%). These shallow waters have very high species diversity because of their close proximity to deep water canyons, bringing nutrient rich waters from depths of more than 1,000 meters.

MEDIUM BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION AND SUSTAINABLE USE AREAS

The eight new areas in Medium Biodiversity Protection and Sustainable Uses (238,442 sq. km; 17.6%) increase biodiversity protection and ensure sustainable uses.

The **Amirantes to Fortune Bank** Marine Protection Area, (217,589 sq. km; 16.1%) surrounds the atolls from the Amirantes Group, across the Mahe Plateau south to Platte Island, Coetivy Island, and Fortune Bank. This area is especially rich in biodiversity because ocean currents bring prey from deep below the surface, which feeds significant populations of pelagic animals including tuna, billfish and cetaceans. This area is important for fisheries that will need to demonstrate high standards of sustainability to be allowed.

Denis Island is a new Marine Protection Area for the second coralline atoll on the Mahé Plateau (31 sq. km; 0.002%). The waters are used by many species including breeding green and hawksbill turtles, five species of seabirds, and breeding cetaceans. Tourism, and sport and artisanal fishing are very important.

The waters surrounding **Desroches Atoll** (333 sq. km; 0.03%) are home to five species of sharks, two species of rays, and bottlenose and spinner dolphins, and contain regionally important seagrass beds used by endangered turtles and lobsters.



Jason Houston

Poivre Atoll Marine Protection Area (56 sq. km; 0.004%) contains a unique and complex suite of habitats including drying reefs, deep channels, pools, banks, and flats. The reef flats are teeming with molluscs and crustaceans, and it has a very high percentage of live, hard corals (38% total cover).

Alphonse Group Marine Protection Area (215 sq. km; 0.02%) surrounds Alphonse and St. Francois Atolls and contains both extensive corals and substantial coastal mangroves and mudflats. The waters are important spawning sites for grouper and important foraging sites for green turtles.

Farquhar Atoll Marine Protection Area (415 sq. km; 0.03%) is considered one of the most topographically complex lagoons in the world with over 16,000 ha of reef. Extensive seagrass beds, spawning sites, and numerous pelagic fish contribute to the high biodiversity of this area. Farquhar is a globally recognized saltwater fly-fishing destination, and long-term sustainability is extremely important.

The **Farquhar Archipelago Marine Protection Area** (14,482 sq. km; 1.07%) is a large protection area that surrounds Providence, Farquhar, St Pierre and Wizard Reef. The deep waters contain several seamounts and canyons, and westward flowing ocean currents provide rich nutrients to support sustainable tourism and fishing.

The **Cosmoledo and Astove Archipelago Marine Protection Area** (5,321 sq. km; 0.39%) contains some of the most spectacular reefs in the world and the largest seabird colony in Seychelles. The surrounding waters are very important for sustainable tourism and were recently explored by the Nekton Expedition in 2019.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN 'HIGH BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION' ZONES AND 'MEDIUM BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION/SUSTAINABLE USE' ZONES?

High biodiversity protection — known as Zone 1 — conserves and protects the top priority areas for marine and coastal biodiversity in Seychelles. Half of the 30% of Seychelles' waters now protected are Zone 1.

Zone 1 areas are habitats and species that may be rare, endangered, unique or with narrow distribution ranges, and include breeding or

spawning areas, key foraging habitat, fragile or sensitive species and habitats, and internationally significant areas.

When combined, Zone 1 areas provide long-term protection, and are large enough to ensure ecological resilience and climate change adaptation. Extraction or altering the seabed are not suitable for Zone 1 areas.

Medium biodiversity protection and sustainable use areas — known as Zone 2 — can be managed with a 'medium' level of protection where some human activities will be compatible with the sustained protection of that biodiversity. These areas will comprise the other 15% of Seychelles' waters.

Zone 2 areas include habitats and species that have some tolerance to disturbance and human use. These zones also include regionally and nationally significant areas. This zone category is suitable for some level of extraction and sea-bed alteration — which will vary depending on location — with appropriate consultation and management, depending on the objective of each area.

WHAT ARE 'ALLOWABLE ACTIVITIES'?

The Marine Spatial Plan is designed to protect Seychelles' ecological assets at the same time as allowing its 'Blue Economy' — businesses that rely on ocean resources — to continue in a sustainable manner for generations to come. More than two-thirds of Seychelles' economy relies on the ocean. The Plan therefore provides information to government and stakeholders about what is allowed and where.

Tables of Allowable Activities are being developed using information from stakeholders, published studies, and experts about each activity's environmental impact, and the potential for compatibility or conflict with the objective of each area. The Allowable Activities Table identifies restrictions or conditions, and specifies what will need to change over the long term.

Examples of such activities are tourism, including cruise ships; multiple fisheries such as industrial, artisanal, and sport; commercial shipping; petroleum exploration; dredging; renewable energy e.g. tidal energy; and scientific research.



Jason Houston

To develop Allowable Activity Tables more than 100 stakeholders have been consulted, and their views and information on which activities will be allowed, and where, form the backbone of the Plan.

The planning process has held 27 public workshops, 47 committee meetings and 136 consultations with marine sectors, local experts, and agencies since 2014.

WHAT WILL CHANGE FOLLOWING DESIGNATING 13 MARINE PROTECTION AREAS ANNOUNCED IN MILESTONE 3 OF THE MARINE SPATIAL PLAN?

The completion of the Marine Spatial Plan will take place in 2020, for implementation in 2021. Nothing changes until Seychelles enacts the legislation necessary to enforce the regulations that the Plan and the Marine Protection Areas introduce. Implementation is expected on January 1, 2021.

Once implemented, all commercial fishing will not be allowed in the Marine National Parks (subsistence fishing is allowable in the management plan for the Aldabra Special Reserve); exploration and development of non-renewable energy resources will not be allowed in Marine National Parks; dredging and coastal infrastructure will be conditional in order to access and regulate these areas.

In Zone 2 areas, new conditions for sustainability include a requirement that Electronic Monitoring and Vehicle Monitoring Systems be installed and operational in all vessels before catch can be landed. Full details of Allowable Activity Tables for the 13 areas will be finalised in coming months well as for applicable regulations, surveillance, and enforcement.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE MARINE SPATIAL PLAN AND THE MARINE PROTECTION AREAS?

The Marine Spatial Plan is a document guiding all activities that take place across all of Seychelles' 1.4 million sq. km territory. Under that

Plan, 30% of that territory — a total area of 410,000 sq. km — will be designated as Marine Protection Areas.

Marine Protection Areas carry greater conditions on the human activities that are allowed there, if at all. These areas — decided after significant consultation in the case of the Seychelles' Marine Spatial Plan — are located to protect areas of significant biodiversity while not overly impacting economic activities.

- Milestone 1 of the Marine Spatial Plan was completed in February 2018 and covered the first 16% or 210,000 sq. km (81,080 sq. miles) of Seychelles' ocean.
- Milestone 2 was completed in April 2019 to add another 10%, taking the total area of ocean protected to 350,915 sq. km (135,490 sq. miles).
- The March 26 2020 announcement marks the third and final Milestone that will bring the total of Marine Protection Areas to 441,513 sq. km, a little over twice the size of Great Britain, or the size of Sweden.

The Marine Spatial Plan document will be completed in 2020 and cover management for all of Seychelles' territory.

WHAT ARE THE DETAILS OF THE 'DEBT FOR CONSERVATION' DEAL?

The Marine Spatial Plan is the result of the first conservation and climate adaptation debt restructuring, finalized between the Government of Seychelles and its Paris Club creditors in February 2016.

The transaction, structured by TNC's NatureVest conservation investing unit, introduces impact investing to debt restructuring and provides proof of concept for other Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) — or more accurately Large Ocean Developing States (LODS) — to replicate.

The debt restructuring uses a combination of investment capital and grants to provide Seychelles with an innovative financial tool



to restructure its debt and allow its national government to free capital streams and direct them toward climate change adaptation and marine conservation activities that benefit their fisheries and tourism industries, and ultimately the livelihoods of their citizens.

The financial transaction can be summarized in four steps:

- Private philanthropic funding (\$5 million) and loan capital (\$15.2 million) was raised for Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust (SeyCCAT).
- The Trust extended loans to the Seychelles Government to enable the purchase of \$21.6 million of sovereign debt at a discount.
- The Seychelles Government now makes its payments to SeyCCAT on more favorable terms compared with its preceding creditors.

In turn, the Trust:

- Repays the \$15.2 million in loan capital over a 10-year term.
- Funds \$5.6 million over a 20-year period to marine conservation and climate adaptation activities like the Marine Spatial Plan.
- Funds \$3 million over a 20-year period to capitalize an endowment that can fund similar activities in perpetuity.

SeyCCAT combines funds from the debt conversion with proceeds from Blue Economy programs of other organizations (e.g. the World Bank) to sustainably finance total annual grants in excess of \$700,000.

ABOUT NATUREVEST

In 2010, The Nature Conservancy launched its impact capital strategy with support from the Robertson Foundation which continues today, and built a global network with subsequent support from the Jeremy and Hannelore Grantham Environmental Trust. In early 2014, with founding sponsorship from JPMorgan Chase & Co, TNC launched NatureVest as a concerted effort to change the way we invest in nature. JPMorgan Chase provides strategic input to NatureVest research, investor outreach, market analysis and structuring conservation investments.

The Nature
Conservancy



SEYCHELLES CONSERVATION
AND CLIMATE ADAPTATION
TRUST
SeyCCAT

