



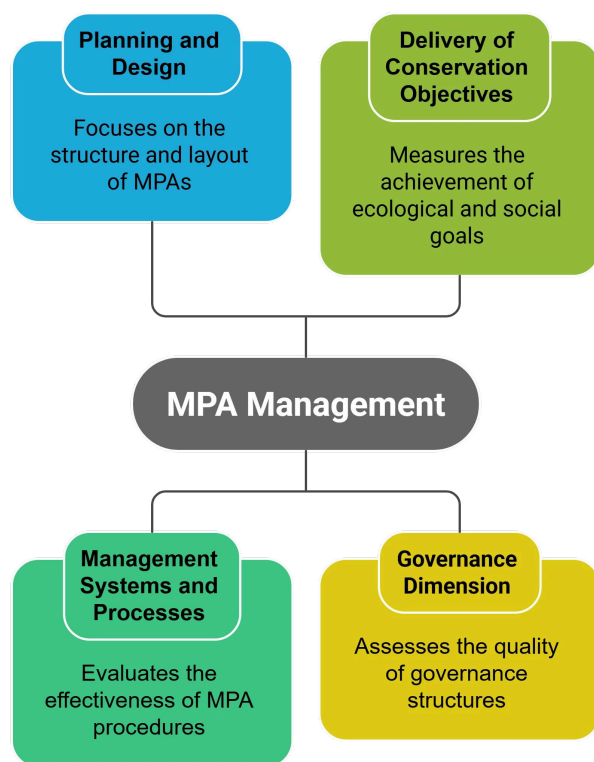
Selecting the Right Management Evaluation Tool for Your Marine Protected Area

A Brief Resource for
Managers



Why assessing management is Key to MPA Success

Effective management is the backbone of any successful Marine Protected Area (MPA). While ecological monitoring tells us what's happening in the water or on the near coast, management assessments reveal why those outcomes occur and how they can be improved. By evaluating how well an MPA is governed, enforced, resourced, and engaged with its stakeholders, managers can gain critical insights into the strengths and weaknesses of their approach. These assessments can also explore external pressures such as climate change, illegal fishing, tourism impacts, and policy gaps that may hinder your success. Tools developed for management effectiveness evaluation (PAME tools) focus on four main components of assessment:



Together, these four components provide a comprehensive picture of how well a MPA is functioning not only in terms of ecological outcomes, but also in its capacity to adapt, engage, and endure.



Choosing the right evaluation approach for your MPA

Define objectives and scope

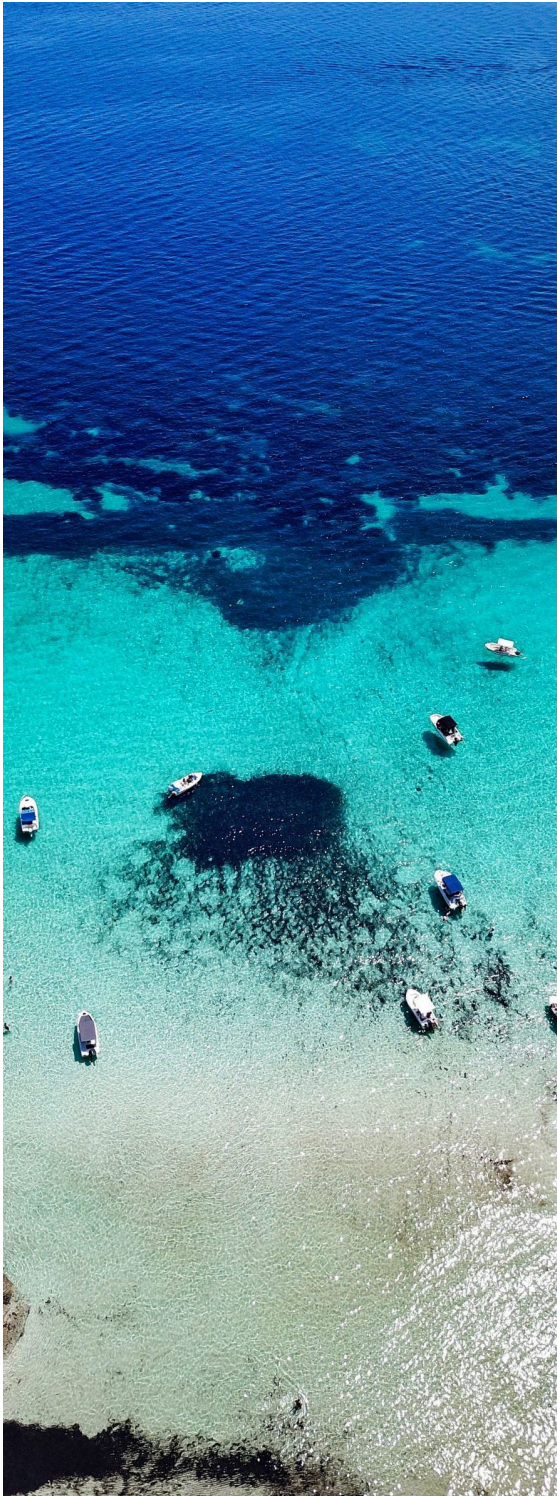
Protected Area management effectiveness evaluations can be carried out at various spatial scales, and the appropriate choice of tools depends on the scale and on the purpose of the assessment. At the level of a single MPA, evaluations typically aim to improve site-level management practices and enhance transparency towards stakeholders. At the level of an MPA network, evaluations focus on broader goals such as ecological connectivity, policy coherence, and regional coordination. They assess how well individual sites contribute to collective conservation outcomes, and whether the network as a whole is functioning effectively. This approach supports strategic planning, harmonization of standards, and shared learning across sites.

Before selecting an evaluation method, it's important to clearly define the scope of your assessment, what you aim to achieve and at what scale. This will help determine which aspects of management should be evaluated, such as governance, enforcement, or community engagement, and ensure the chosen approach aligns with your MPA's specific goals and context. To choose the scope of your evaluation, clearly define what you want to achieve and whether you're assessing a single MPA or an entire network. This will guide which management aspects to focus on and which tool best fits your needs.

At MPA site level, management evaluations can help:	At the MPA network level, evaluations can:
Strengthen site-level management by identifying effective practices, governance and areas needing improvement	Assess the network's overall conservation impact
Evaluate site design level and planning	Evaluate network design level and planning
Monitor progress toward conservation objectives and clearly communicate outcomes	Promote policy alignment and coordination across multiple sites within sea basins or regional protected area networks, supporting collaboration across jurisdictions and addressing shared ecological challenges
Assess how specific species groups (e.g. marine mammals) are addressed in the plans and outcomes	Assess the network's overall conservation impact on species groups
Foster trust and transparency by demonstrating responsiveness to stakeholder concerns	Evaluate how individual MPAs contribute to collective performance and shared goals
Guide strategic adjustments and adaptive management, especially in response to climate change	Facilitate strategic planning, harmonize management standards, and encourage knowledge exchange
Determine readiness for certification or label of effectiveness	

Checklist:

Selecting the right tool for your MPA



As a manager or member of a support team, selecting the right evaluation tool involves balancing practical implementation with long-term sustainability.

Consider whether the evaluation process is achievable given your MPA's current capacity, available resources, and its ability to maintain the process over time. A well-matched tool should be feasible to implement, adaptable to your context, and capable of delivering useful insights that support continuous improvement.

Consider the stage of development of your MPA

Your MPA's maturity level is a key factor in selecting an appropriate evaluation approach:

- If your MPA is **newly established**, prioritize tools that support planning, stakeholder engagement, and the development of governance structures. These help build a solid foundation for effective management.
- If your MPA is **more mature**, look for approaches that assess conservation outcomes, long-term impact, and adaptive management. These will help refine strategies, demonstrate effectiveness, and guide future decisions.

Language availability

- Many evaluation tools are offered in multiple languages. It's important to select a tool that is accessible to your team and stakeholders to ensure clarity and effective participation. Most tools also include manuals, glossaries, and scoring guidance

Consider the time available and the depth of the analysis desired

The available time, resources, and desired level of detail will shape the type of assessment that's most appropriate. Depending on the time, resources, and level of detail required, assessments may take different forms.

- ❑ **In-depth assessments** span several weeks and often include participatory workshops. These provide comprehensive insights using flexible frameworks and require robust datasets across ecological, socio-economic, and governance indicators. They typically involve moderate costs and demand experienced facilitators with technical expertise.
- ❑ **Intermediate assessments** typically take 3–7 days and offer detailed scoring across management components, conservation objectives, and pressures. These rely on structured qualitative and quantitative data and vary in emphasis. Some focus on trends in conservation status, while others prioritize the achievement of SMART objectives. Certain approaches concentrate solely on conservation outcomes, whereas others incorporate socio-economic dimensions to provide a more holistic view of management effectiveness.
- ❑ **Rapid assessments** are completed in 1–3 days and provide a high-level overview of management effectiveness. They are ideal for broad comparisons or thematic evaluations, such as climate resilience or general performance, using existing reports, monitoring data, and expert judgment.

Type of Assessment

When selecting an evaluation tool, it's important to consider who leads the evaluation and how it's conducted. This influences its objectivity, efficiency, and stakeholder engagement:

- ❑ **Self-assessments** are conducted internally by MPA managers and staff, offering a practical and straightforward way to gain insights.
- ❑ **Automatized assessments** use programmatic methods and digital platforms to calculate effectiveness scores based on user-provided data. They are typically applied for network-level evaluations across large numbers of MPAs.
- ❑ **External assessments** involve independent experts or peer reviewers, adding credibility and objectivity, especially useful for formal recognition or comparative benchmarking.

Level of experience required and financial needs

Before selecting a tool, consider the financial and human resources available for implementation in the short and longer term. Costs can vary depending on assessment duration, number of participants and workshops, facilitation needs, data collection, and any software or licensing requirements.

- ❑ **In-depth approaches** tend to be moderate to high in cost and require trained facilitators with technical expertise in MPA management and monitoring.
- ❑ **Intermediate approaches** require moderate resources as they can be led by trained MPA staff with basic facilitation skills and some preparation.
- ❑ **Rapid approaches** are low-cost and rely primarily on existing staff and available data, making them suitable for quick assessments or limited-resource settings.

Outcomes of assessments

Management effectiveness evaluations can deliver insights that go far beyond evaluating operational performance. To get the most value, clarify what outcomes you want to assess:

- Track conservation status of natural values** and monitor changes over time
- Evaluate achievement of site objectives** in relation to specific targets on biodiversity protection or sustainable resource use
- Assess across three key value dimensions:** natural values, socio-cultural values, and ecosystem service values
- Focus exclusively on natural values**, if that aligns with your priorities and available data

Final steps

Finally, align the tool with your conservation objectives and management context. It should address the ecological, social, and governance challenges specific to your MPA and integrate smoothly with existing monitoring and reporting systems. Once selected, ensure your team is prepared to implement the evaluation by:

- Building capacity through training and familiarization with the tool
- Collecting relevant data and actively engaging stakeholders to ensure inclusive and credible results
- Analyzing and scoring performance across key indicators such as planning, inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes

By carefully weighing these factors, you'll be equipped to choose an evaluation approach that delivers meaningful insights, drives continuous improvement, and strengthens the long-term effectiveness of your MPA or network.

Means of verification

To ensure credibility and accuracy, evaluation tools often include built-in verification mechanisms. These may involve:

- Evidence-based scoring**, which requires supporting documents, data sources, or indicator references to justify responses.
- Consensus-based validation**, where results are confirmed through group discussion, stakeholder input, or participatory workshops.





**BLUE
CONNECT**

About Us

The BLUE CONNECT project is a Horizon Europe initiative dedicated to safeguarding the future of our oceans. Running from September 2024 to March 2028, the project responds to the urgent call to protect and restore marine habitats and ecosystems, aligning with the ambitious conservation targets set by the European Union and global frameworks for 2030.

Through a collaborative and inclusive approach, BLUE CONNECT brings together Marine Protected Area managers, public authorities, research organisations and local communities across 12 Demonstration Sites and beyond. Together, we are co-developing, promoting, and demonstrating a systematic, science-based methodology for marine conservation planning and management.



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