

Development of General Management Plans For the Marine Protected Areas of The Turks and Caicos Islands

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the Wider Caribbean, Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are increasingly looked at to address a series of management issues, ranging from collapsing fisheries, to unbridled tourism development, to the impacts of climate change on coral reefs and related ecosystems. In practice, however, the establishment and management of MPAs often leaves much to be desired, particularly in view of the growing problem of paper parks, MPAs that have been theoretically, established, “on paper”, but hardly managed on the ground. This paper looks at the MPAs of the Turks and Caicos, how they were established and to what end, and contrasts the present situation with the objectives managers could hope to reach through adequate management. While the Turks and Caicos were pioneers in the establishment of MPAs, many of the objectives of these MPAs are poorly understood and the stakeholder communities have not been sufficiently involved in their implementation. As a result, the Centre for Marine Resource Studies and the Department of Environmental and Coastal Resources initiated a process of drafting general management plans (GMPs) for the MPAs in each of the islands, drawing on a model developed by IUCN – The World Conservation Union in East Africa. While the GMPs are still in the drafting phase, their implementation is expected to take several years and is based on the full participation of the local communities and all stakeholders involved.

KEY WORDS: Marine protected areas, general management plan, stakeholder participation, Turks and Caicos Islands

El Desarrollo de Planes de Manejo General en Áreas Marinas Protegidas de las Islas de Turcos y Caicos

A través del Gran Caribe, las áreas marinas protegidas (MPA) están siendo consideradas ampliamente acercarse a una serie de aspectos de manejo, desde el colapso de pesquerías, hasta freno al desarrollo incontrolado del turismo y los impactos del cambio climático sobre los arrecifes de coral y otros ecosistemas relacionados. En la práctica, sin embargo, el establecimiento y manejo de MPAs usualmente deja mucho que desear, especialmente desde el punto de vista del problema creciente de los parques de papel, MPAs que han sido teóricamente establecidos ‘en papel’ pero difícilmente manejados en el campo. Este artículo mira a las MPAs de las Islas de Turcos y Caicos, como se establecieron y al final como la presente situación contrasta con los objetivos de manejo y como se podrían alcanzar un manejo adecuado. Mientras las islas de Turcos y Caicos fueron pioneras en el establecimiento de MPAs, muchos de los objetivos de estas MPAs han sido pobremente entendidos y las comunidades no han estado suficientemente involucradas en su implementación. Como resultado, el Centro para los Estudios de los Recursos Marinos y el Departamento de Ambiente y Recursos Costeros están en un proceso de producir un borrador de un plan general de manejo (GMPs) para las MPAs de cada una de las islas, reproduciendo un modelo desarrollado por IUCN -Unión mundial para la Conservación- para el Este de África. Mientras los GMPs están en su fase de diseño, su implementación se espera tome varios años más ya que están basados en una amplia participación comunitaria con el involucramiento de muchos representantes.

PALABRAS CLAVES: Áreas marinas protegidas, Planes generales de manejo, Participación comunitaria, Islas de Turcos y Caicos

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INTRODUCTION TO THE TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS AND THEIR MPAS

The Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) are a British Overseas Territory located south of the Bahamas Chain, in the northern Wider Caribbean. The small archipelago of the TCI is heavily dependent on the health of marine ecosystems, as they support the development of a booming tourism industry as well as rich fisheries of queen conch, spiny lobster and a burgeoning finfish fishery. The third source of development in the TCI is offshore banking, which is not directly related to the status or management of marine resources. In spite of a recent boom in tourism, the TCI are still home to healthy marine ecosystems, including extensive mangroves, seagrass beds and coral reefs. While all but a handful of islands host at least some level of tourism (with most mass tourism directed toward Providenciales and Grand Turk, Figure 1 - see map below), the heaviest level of fishing occurs on South Caicos – where up to 70% of the population depends, directly or indirectly, on fisheries – and, to a lesser degree on Providenciales.

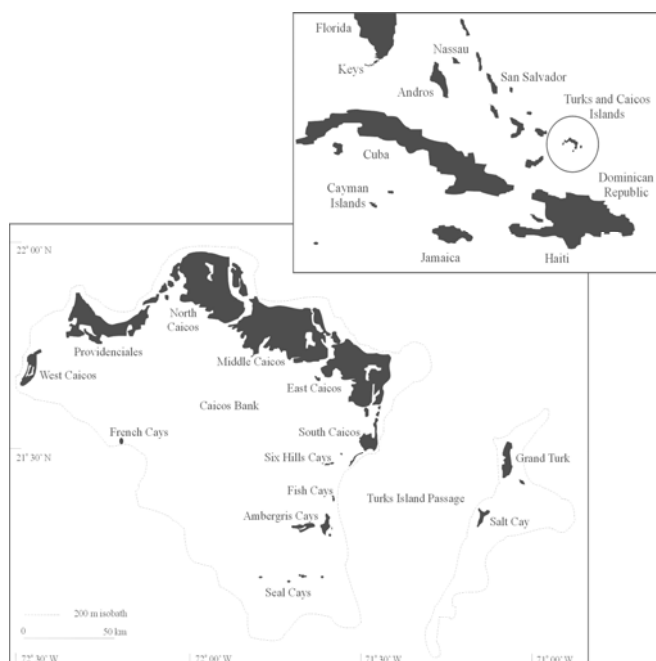


Figure 1. Map courtesy of the Department on Environmental and Coastal Resources of the Turks and Caicos Islands.

The TCI are also home to an extensive network of protected areas, both marine and terrestrial, which are classified as National Parks, National Reserves, Sanctuaries, and Areas of Historic Interest. Marine protected areas fall under the purview of either the Fisheries Division of DECR, or its Protected Area Division. Some of the MPAs were selected early in the seventies, but in practice, all MPAs are not fully managed or protected, mainly because the DECR does not have the resources to manage each designated area. Worse still, in some instances, the

objectives of some MPAs are not clearly understood by the stakeholders who are affected by their designation and buy-in by the local community is, in some instances, very limited. In fact, many of the MPAs were designated so long ago that their establishment and designation did not benefit from many of the innovations from which more recent MPAs have benefited. For instance, MPAs today are understood as more than mere marine parks but are considered particularly useful in addressing a variety of goals, be they fisheries management, management of tourism development, and even mitigating the impacts of climate change on some critical ecosystems. MPAs are essentially flexible tools, but they can only be established and managed properly if their objectives are clearly understood. In the Turks and Caicos, MPA management is devolved to the DECR and their management depends on two sets of variables: the objectives for which they were set up on the one hand, and the impacts imposed by tourism and fisheries on the other.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN (GMP) FOR SOUTH CAICOS

In view of the limited resources available to the DECR to manage fully all the MPAs under its jurisdiction, an effort was undertaken at the School for Field Studies' Centre for Marine Resource Studies to adapt a model of General Management Plan (GMP) that had been developed by IUCN for the Mnazi Bay Ruvuma Estuary Management Plan in Tanzania. Though the situation in the TCI is very different from the one that prevails in Mnazi Bay, it was felt that many lessons learned from the latter could be adapted, with some modifications, to the former. General Management Plans are usually drafted as the MPA is set up and aim to refocus on the original objectives of an MPA to achieve its goals. In the case of the TCI, the MPAs had long been in place but had not necessarily been implemented and the involvement of the local community had been extremely limited. For logistical reasons, a GMP was drafted for the MPAs of South Caicos, and developed by the students at the Centre for Marine Resource Studies under faculty supervision. The MPAs covered under the draft GMP included: the Admiral Cockburn Land and Sea Natural Park, the Admiral Cockburn Nature Reserve, the Bell Sound Nature Reserve and the East Harbour Conch and Lobster Reserve. The dual goal of the project was to attempt to draft a GMP for the MPAs of South Caicos and to assess the extent to which sufficient data were available to that end. Another very important aspect of the project aimed to develop a "product" that would be useful to the DECR and as a result it was discussed extensively with government partners, to ensure that it would not become just another study destined to sit on a shelf.

The fact that the GMP for the MPAs of South Caicos follows closely the structure of the one that was developed in a completely different context, that of Mnazi Bay in Tanzania, points to the importance of lesson drawing

among different projects, even when said projects are as different as one from the insular Caribbean can be of continental Africa in the Indian Ocean. The structure of the GMP was organized as follows:

- Chapter 1. Introduction, need for a general management plan, target audience, historical development of MPAs in the TCI and purpose and objectives of the MPAs
- Chapter 2. Resource description and resource use: area and location, physical features, the natural environment and natural resources industries
- Chapter 3. Management issues: natural resources issues, lack of compliance and enforcement, research and monitoring, socioeconomic issues, and land-based issues
- Chapter 4. Management and operational framework: guiding principles (ecosystem approach, precautionary approach, equitable sharing of benefits), and management strategies
- Chapter 5. Zoning scheme: rationale, definition of zone types, possible designation of additional zones, and modification of zones
- Chapter 6. Prohibited and regulated activities: activities in national parks, activities in reserves, fisheries regulated activities, and potential regulations
- Chapter 7. Management structure: institutional structure of MPAs in the TCI (and suggested changes) and sources of funding
- Chapter 8. Monitoring the effectiveness of the MPAs: need for a monitoring program, monitoring indicators (biophysical, socio-economic and governance indicators), fishing and tourism impacts, and site-specific monitoring indicators.

A full draft of the GMP is available from the author by writing at: Fontaubert@att.net

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PROCESS

First, and because this GMP was developed within the framework of a study-abroad program, a strong emphasis was placed on the involvement of the students, in order to ensure that their tasks would be as similar as possible to the actions that a government representative would have taken in similar circumstances. Consequently, a representative of the DECR was consulted at every stage of the project, both to ensure that the information used was accurate and to ensure that the end product would meet the needs of the government. As a result, the students accrued additional benefits from knowing that their work would be applied and directly useful to the Government of the Turks and Caicos.

Second, and because of logistical and time constraints, the interaction with the local community, which is most directly involved by the management of the local MPAs, was necessarily limited and the GMP remains in very rough draft form. Throughout the process, however, students were encouraged to indicate how they would seek and incorporate local input in a final draft. By way of comparison, the Mnazi project was concluded after more than two years of constant interaction and outreach to the local community, whereas the project was developed in South Caicos in less than three months, and with limited local input. This should not take away from the value of the final product, but merely calls for the draft to be presented at length to the local community and for their input to be incorporated before the GMP is finalized.

Third, the draft of the GMP has merely been handed over to the DECR but its implementation is likely to require time, resources, and extensive involvement of the local community. In many ways, the draft of the GMP represents but a roadmap for the longer process that will be required to manage the MPAs of South Caicos fully.

Fourth, and while the case of South Caicos may be unique (very limited tourism impact, limited destructive fisheries practices), all the information that was available before this project was initiated had to be ground-truthed and nothing was taken at face value. This is likely to be the case in many other countries in the Caribbean, where the information available may be limited or of uneven value.

Finally, though the two case studies were starkly different, the lessons from Tanzania proved incredibly useful in developing a GMP for the Turks and Caicos Islands. In the case of many MPAs that are either unmanaged (paper parks) or poorly managed, the size of the task at hand may be daunting, so undertaking a GMP process can be a good way of organizing the different tasks that must be undertaken. If nothing else, the suggested structure of the GMP should help ensure that the MPAs and their objectives are better understood, by managers and stakeholders alike. For each MPA, a similar structure can be adapted to the local situation, but in each case, local stakeholder involvement must be given the highest priority. Marine Protected Areas are difficult to design and implement, and they take time, but the guidance of a GMP provides one with a strong sense that the most important aspects of the MPA are addressed, and that a forum has been created in which the interests of all the stakeholders affected can be incorporated. In this respect, a GMP can go a long way towards ensuring that an MPA will eventually be successful.

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