

## Bringing MPA Management Plans to Life through New Communications Formats

### Dando Vida a los Planes de Gestión de Amps a través de Nuevos Formatos de Comunicación

### Donner Vie a la Gestion de L'amp Prévoit de Nouveaux Formats de Communication

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#### ABSTRACT

In the last year, GCFI and NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program have assisted with the review of marine protected area (MPA) management plans in four Caribbean countries. During the management planning review process for Sandy Island/Oyster Bed Marine Protected Area and Tobago Cays Marine Park, MPA managers, staff, board members and stakeholders indicated that they would welcome updated formatting. In particular, they expressed interest in a user-friendly sectional approach, topline strategic priorities for different sections of MPA management, and summaries or highlight materials as pull-outs. GCFI and TNC worked with graphic design and GIS expertise to develop innovative outputs for the two participating MPAs. Through the outputs created in this way, we helped the MPAs to keep the strategic priorities from the revised management plans top of mind for MPA staff, boards and stakeholders. This represents significant value adding on top of the review of existing management plans, and has saved the new management plans from being relegated to a shelf in the office. We will present these new materials and explain their fit with common templates for MPA management planning and their usefulness for day-to-day MPA management.

KEY WORDS: MPA, management planning, monitoring, communications

#### INTRODUCTION

In 2010 - 2011, GCFI and CaMPAM with support from NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program surveyed 27 MPAs in 10 Caribbean countries and territories about their perceived MPA management capacity and their highest priority needs for capacity building. This assisted self-assessment covered more than 20 aspects of MPA management capacity, including management planning, bio-physical monitoring and outreach/education, and asked MPA managers to describe their current capacity in terms of three tiers. For example, for management planning the three tiers were as shown in Table 1.

Management planning is a fundamental aspect of effective MPA management which underlies all other areas of operationalizing an MPA. Across the group of 27 participating MPAs, management planning was found to be one of the top three capacity building needs of Caribbean MPA managers. About half of the MPAs (56%) reported having an approved management plan that was being implemented, 26% reported that some management activity was being implemented and a management plan had been developed (but not approved i.e. a draft management plan) and 18% had some management activity but no management plan in place (Gombos et al. 2011). These results are shown in Figure 1.

GCFI consulted with the MPA managers who reported Tier 1 and 2 management planning capacity to discuss appropriate site-specific next steps to enable them to take a step up to the next capacity tier. Following discussion with the MPAs and relevant partners in government agencies and non-governmental organizations, we identified four priority MPAs for follow-up assistance that did not have a management plan in place or that wished to work on the updating of old or draft versions of their management plans.

In 2013 - 2014 GCFI and NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program coordinated technical assistance and some small grant funding to address the management planning needs for MPAs in Saint Lucia (Pointe Sable Environmental Protection Area), The Bahamas (Abaco Marine Parks including Pelican Cays Land and Sea Park), St. Vincent and the Grenadines (Tobago Cays Marine Park) and Grenada (Sandy Island/Oyster Bed MPA).

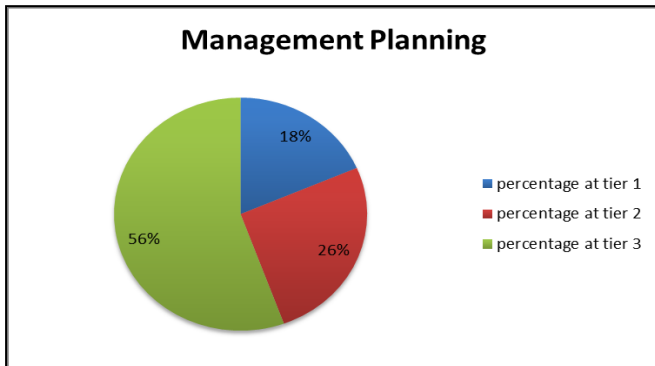
#### METHOD

Existing draft management plans were updated to reflect the status of natural resources in the area, to take into account institutional changes affecting governance of the area, and to reflect priorities for action based on available and forecast likely future resources for management. Throughout the review, GCFI took guidance from the widely recognized best practice in management planning as per the IUCN guidelines in Salm et al. (2000). In three of the four cases, the updates involved reviewing progress, reflecting on the feasibility of achieving management objectives and editing but not re-writing the management plans in their entirety. The updates were achieved through a process of internal review, external expert review, key agency meetings and community consultation meetings. The most recent findings from coral reef, MPA monitoring and socio-economic monitoring were incorporated into the review process. In the case of MPAs in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Grenada, this management planning work overlapped with complimentary efforts by Sustainable Grenadines Inc. supported by the US National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to develop new communications about MPA monitoring findings and adaptive management. GCFI contributed to both processes in tandem.

During the management planning review process, MPA managers and MPA board members indicated that they would welcome updated formatting for the revised management plans and user-friendly summaries or highlights to assist with operationalizing the plans. The MPA managers did not see the management plan review as an end in itself, but as a means to achieving MPA objectives. Rather than seeing the new plans as another report for the bookshelf, they expressed a need to

**Table 1.** Tiered approach to describing MPA management capacity.

Tier 1	Some management activity being implemented, but no management plan in place
Tier 2	Some management activity being implemented and management plan developed
Tier 3	Approved management plan that is being implemented



**Figure 1.** Results of MPA management capacity assessment for management planning (Gombos et al. 2011).

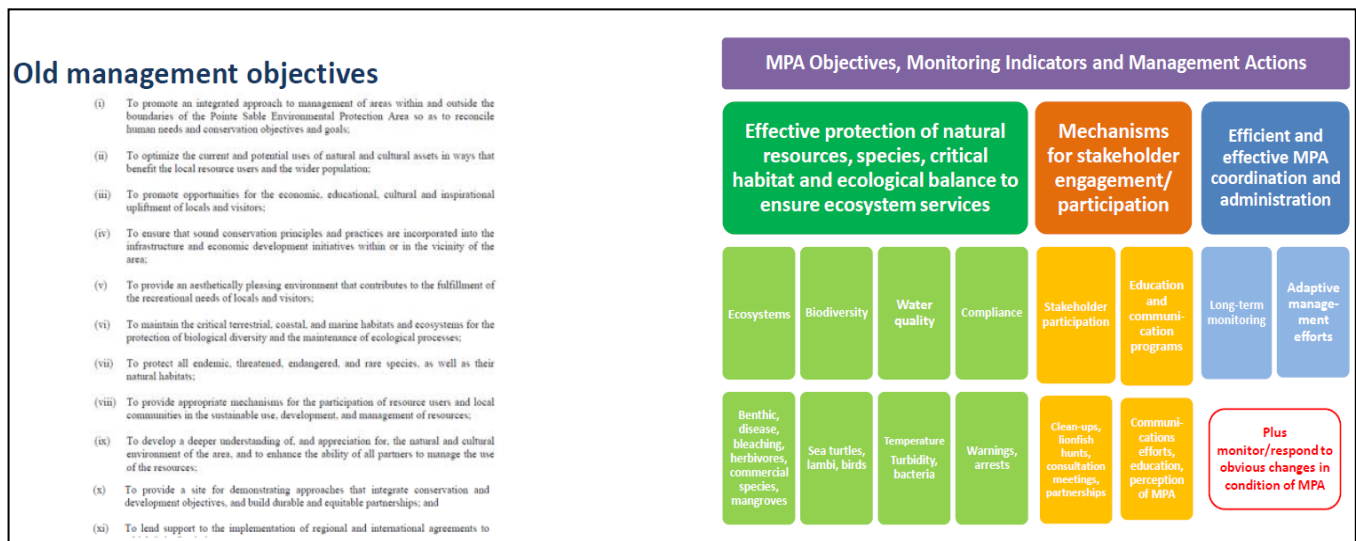
keep management objectives top of mind for all staff and stakeholders, to base decisions upon latest monitoring findings, and they sought assistance with achieving this through more a more engaging approach to presentation of the management plans. Accordingly, GCFI worked with graphic design and GIS expertise to help develop more innovative communications outputs to present the management plans. We took a collaborative and iterative approach to working with MPA managers to review and refine the management plan outputs.

**RESULTS**

Simple but updated approaches were taken to depict MPA management objectives, as shown in Figure 2. Updated Governance structures were represented in a more effective graphic format, as shown in Figure 3. MPA accomplishments based on the former management plan were highlighted in poster format as a way of sharing positive news with MPA staff and Board members (Figure 4).

We retained a focus on SMART goals for action planning, with detailed spreadsheets detailing threats, objectives, management goals, 1-5 year activities, indicators, target/acceptable ranges and monitoring methods. This depth is needed by MPA managers to permit tracking of performance and to help with developing logical frameworks as are required by many partners. However, for presentation in the management plan we simplified the framework as a series of shorter, color-coded tables focused on the priority activities that correspond to each management objective.

Perhaps greatest scope for bringing MPA management planning to life through new communications was provided by the need to more effectively convey MPA monitoring findings. Natural resource condition is typically expressed in management plans through lengthy and descriptive narrative. Monitoring findings are typically represented as a series of numbers in a table. For two of the participating MPAs which are also part of the Grenadines Network of MPAs, we modelled the presentation of coral reef health findings on the Healthy Reefs Initiative reports from the MesoAmerican Reef region. In a one page format we showed topline coral findings and other agreed MPA indicators, we answered a key MPA management question based on monitoring data, and we highlighted the indicated next steps for adaptive management (Figure 5). Whilst not designed for all stakeholders, this format provided a scientifically sound and clear basis for discussion of



**Figure 2.** Old (left) approach to listing objectives and modernized (right) objectives linked with indicators.

monitoring findings by MPA staff, managers and Board members. This single-page format was backed up with a set of indicator reference cards for managers describing the indicators, targets, metrics, background and best practices outlined on a double-sided sheet for each indicator (Figure 6).

The translation of MPA management plans into shorter term operational plans was a high priority for the MPA managers and Boards. Assigning roles and responsibilities to the priority management activities was a necessary further step to fill this gap, and this information was then fed into supporting graphics for MPA managers to apply in

organizational management (Figure 7). Any of these graphics can be easily shared in web format, on social media and produced as large-scale posters and reference materials.

Further input from the participating MPA managers indicated that producing a management plan that is a weighty, bound document no longer reflects the realities of site management planning. Management plans often include specialized and detailed sections such as financial plans, enforcement plans, monitoring plans, outreach and education plans, such as can be found in the IUCN guidelines for management planning in Salm et al. (2000). Yet preparing these as part of one effort for inclusion in a

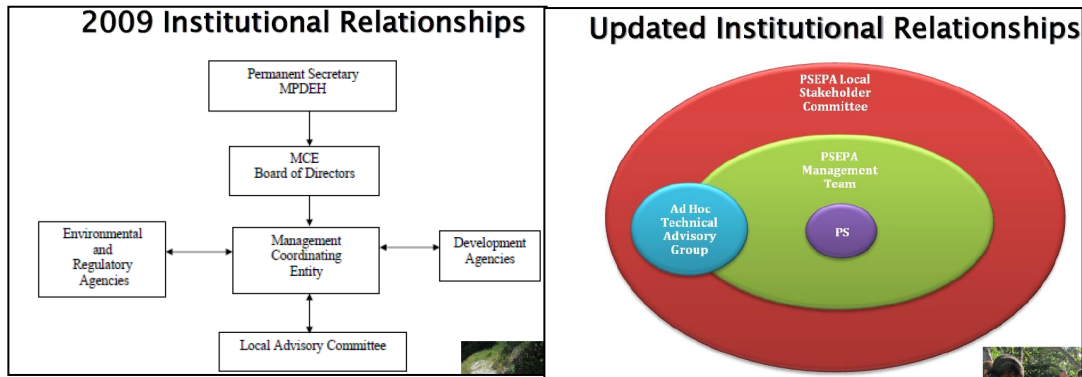


Figure 3. Old (left) and new (right) depiction of MPA governance structure.



Figure 4. Highlighting MPA management accomplishments.

Figure 5. Depicting MPA monitoring findings with innovative communications to underpin adaptive management.

single version of a management plan is unrealistic. The nature of MPA funding, for one, limits the feasibility of preparing or even updating all the ideal components of a management plan at one time, as do the capacity and resources required to undertake this work. Indeed, one of the participating MPAs had long delayed the updating of their draft management plan due to a perception of the overwhelming amount of work involved. The reality fortunately proved different.

GCFI’s consultation with the participating MPAs indicated that Caribbean MPAs are better served by a different format for their management plans than the

standard weighty, bound document. Instead, the various components of a management plan can be presented in a flexible, sectional ring binder format with updatable inserts, easy-reference tabs and pull-out highlights (Figure 8). In an operational sense, this approach makes the contents of the management plan more accessible to MPA managers and Boards for review and consideration on a day-to-day basis. As key sections are created and updated they can be easily inserted and make the MPA management plan a living document.

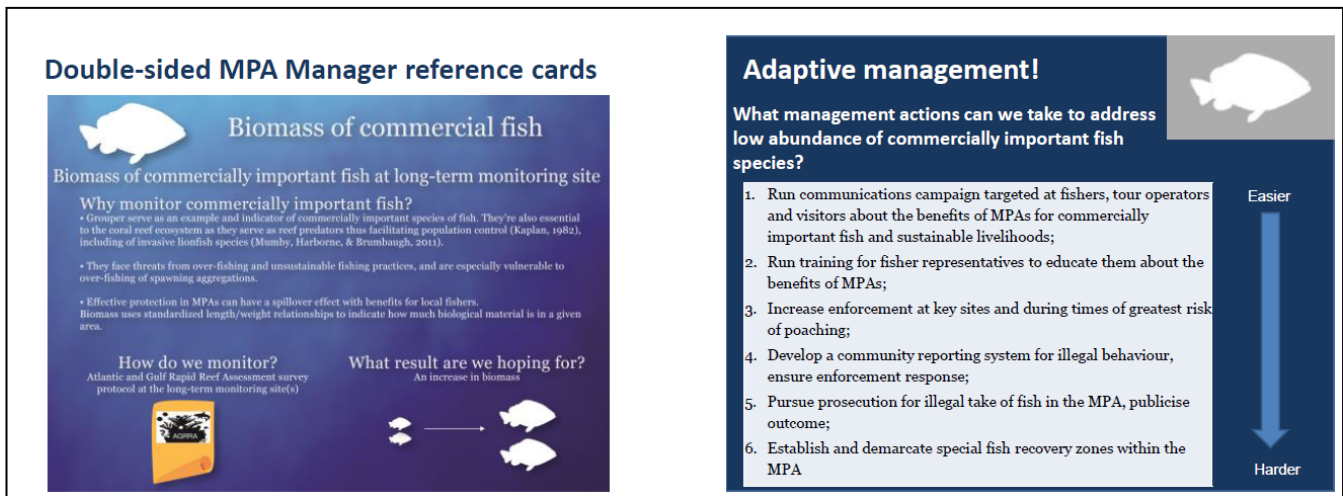


Figure 6. Sample monitoring indicator and adaptive management reference card.



Figure 7. Operational plans can be better founded in MPA management plans (detail of tasks/actions purposely not shown in graphic).

## DISCUSSION

Communications is a rapidly changing field – in recent times we have witnessed a global expansion in communications media and technology, audiences have become savvier and more selective, messages have become shorter and shallower, but communications are increasingly real-time and interactive. On top of this, natural resource managers are open to unprecedented review and criticism. These trends apply equally to the countries and territories of the Caribbean region.

Although communications is a science in its own right, communications theory or analysis for small island states is generally lacking, a fact which makes communications an area where we need to test new approaches, seek feedback and spread good examples. Enhanced communications for management planning lends itself to peer-to-peer sharing through programs such as GCFI and NOAA's peer-to-peer MPA management capacity building and through fora such as the annual GCFI meeting.

In accepting the challenge to bring MPA management plans to life through new communications formats, we discovered that there is a lack of relevant guidance in the existing MPA literature. Key management planning references, such as Salm (2000) emphasize that management plan should facilitate communication between MPA administrators and management, and stress the importance of MPA education, awareness-raising, and community engagement. Thomas and Middleton (2003) see the management planning process itself as a means for MPAs to communicate with the public, and they focus on the benefits for MPA communications of involving people in management planning. The Conservation Action Planning tool includes sharing outcomes of conservation planning within the organization, and argues for appropriate communication outputs for each key audience (TNC 2007). In advice on engaging communities, Davis et al. (2014) describe principles and processes for sharing about MPAs with stakeholders. But none of these cornerstone guides on management planning were found to provide guidance on communicating effectively either within the MPA organization or to Board members or stakeholders about the content of MPA management plans.

We seek to share this communications experience in the hopes of inspiring others to build capacity for effective management planning. In the case of at least one of the

MPAs, achieving formal Cabinet approval of the management plan was an objective of the review process. Tailoring the format of the management plan to engage policy makers through innovative communications featuring topline management strategy is helping to achieve this objective.

## CONCLUSION

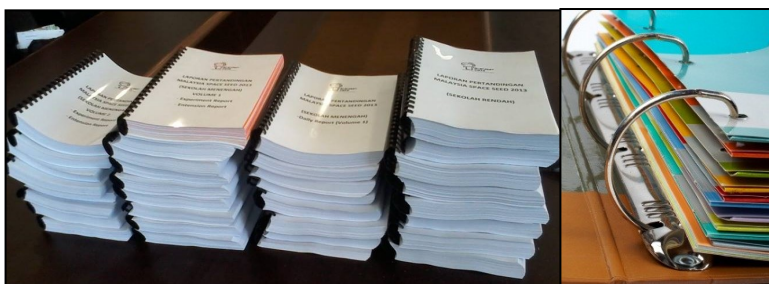
Whilst communications is a rapidly evolving field and can be a specialist area, we argue that MPA management demands and deserves to keep pace with innovation in communications. This is nowhere more important than in the fundamental area of management planning which is at the core of all MPA activities. We demonstrate how enhanced communications, creative graphics and new communications formats can be used to bring greater accessibility and user-friendliness to MPA management plans, ultimately helping to keep management priorities top of mind and to strengthen the implementation of management strategies.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to the participating MPAs for their input, enthusiasm and their patience. Thanks to Seann Dimnon Regan (All Points Geospatial Consulting) for assistance with graphic design. Orisha Joseph and Myles Phillips (SusGren) and Patricia Kramer (AGRRA) provided valuable input.

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**Figure 8.** Old format (left) and new format (right) - the MPA management plan as a living document.