

Government of Myanmar unveils new plan to protect marine wildlife and resources

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The Government of Myanmar and WCS (Wildlife Conservation Society) announced today a comprehensive plan to protect the country's diverse fisheries and marine life—including dolphins, sea turtles, and other species—and other marine resources.

The plan titled "Marine Spatial Planning for Myanmar: Strategic Advice for Securing a Sustainable Ocean Economy" was unveiled at this week's World Ocean Summit in Bali, Indonesia. Sponsored by *The Economist*, the event (Feb. 22-24) provides marine experts and decision-makers with a forum for examining and promoting sustainable uses of the oceans and [marine resources](#).

The new marine spatial planning strategy was produced by Myanmar's Department of Fisheries, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation, with technical guidance from WCS, University of Exeter and Pyoe Pin (a program that provides assistance to democratic and accountable governance). The strategy's central goal is to provide decision-makers with a reliable road map for ocean space management and to create the conditions needed for economic and ecological sustainability and prosperity.

"The Union of the Republic of Myanmar is focused on balancing natural resource use across all production sectors, while providing investment opportunities, and economic prosperity for its people. We believe this strategy provides us with a robust structure through which to develop this goal and our ocean economy," said U Hla Kyaw, Deputy Director of the

Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation (Department of Fisheries). "Our aim is to work with public and private partners to bring this vision to life for the people of Myanmar."

"The Pyoe Pin program has been working to support different key actors to work together to create a model of good governance across Myanmar's coastal states and regions, such that the enabling conditions for co-managing marine fisheries resources now exists," said U Aung Kyaw Thein, Strategic Advisor to Pyoe Pin. "Adopting area based management will ensure that our fisheries and marine resources are secure, and also drive upward flows of economic and social benefits to small-scale fishers."

As mainland Southeast Asia's largest country, Myanmar boasts a vast marine region covering some 486,000 square kilometers, most of which is currently unprotected. The country's extensive coastal areas provide vital habitats for species such as the finless porpoise, several species of sea turtle, and the dugong (a relative of the manatee).

The waters of Myanmar also contribute significantly to the country's economy and provide livelihoods for an estimated 1.4 million inshore and offshore fishers. Local and commercial fisheries also provide protein for millions, but illegal fishing has decimated local fish populations and could put the country's food security at risk if not regulated. The country's sovereign waters are also being explored for coastal development (tourism, ports) opportunities and gas reserves.

"Myanmar is a country undergoing great change as its engagement with the international community increases," said Martin Callow, Advisor to WCS's Myanmar Marine Conservation Program. "At the same time, the country's irreplaceable marine heritage is at risk from this new spirit of openness. The new marine spatial planning strategy fills an urgent need to understand current and future marine resource use and how these

activities can be combined into a coordinated plan for a sustainable ocean economy."

"Our new National Coastal and Marine Resources Management Committee is fully supportive of this marine spatial planning strategy and, this committee, chaired by the Vice President and supported by respective coastal Chief Ministers, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation (MONREC), the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation, and the Navy, look forward to working with partners to enable the development of our sustainable ocean economy", said U Khin Maung Yi, Permanent Secretary of MONREC.

The strategy is a multi-faceted initiative featuring a number of programs focused on: building consensus and developing capacity; developing institutional arrangements; and strengthening data knowledge on marine life, resources, and the scale and scope of various extractive activities such as gas exploration and commercial fishing.

Myanmar representatives and scientific collaborators also announced the publication of a supporting document—the "Myanmar Marine Biodiversity Atlas"—which will provide natural resource managers with a foundation of spatial data for directing management strategies. Specifically, the atlas contains a comprehensive overview of the country's marine environment, its oceanographic characteristics, and the distribution of its abundant marine life. The atlas and strategy will be used in tandem to devise strategic approaches to support sustainable fisheries, and to establish a balance between marine conservation and marine protected area creation with ocean-based industries.

"It has been a great privilege to develop with partners a resource that can be used in future marine spatial planning activities", said Dr. Matthew Witt from the University of Exeter's Environment and Sustainability

Institute. "We hope the atlas will help guide discussions and decision support around sustainable use of Myanmar's coastal and offshore environments, upon which many are dependent for food, employment and biodiversity services"

"We commend the Government of Myanmar for taking the first crucial steps needed to protect its marine resources for future generations with this new strategy," said Jason Patlis, Executive Director for WCS's Marine Conservation Program. "As evidenced in this first-ever marine atlas, Myanmar's waters play a critical role for the health of the global ocean, and the Government's efforts will benefit not only its own citizens, but the region and the world."

More information: [myanmarbiodiversity.org/wp-con ... /10/2015MSP-web2.pdf](https://myanmarbiodiversity.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2015MSP-web2.pdf)

Provided by Wildlife Conservation Society

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