Guidelines for stakeholder engagement in MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

BLUE4ALL PROJECT 2026



Blue4all

MPA Community Network

Guidelines for stakeholder engagement in **MARINE PROTECTED AREAS**

is a publication developed by Blue4All, an EU-funded project (GA 101094014) focusing on developing science-based tools for achieving Marine Protected Areas that meet conservation and restoration objectives, while addressing the needs and concerns of all stakeholders.

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Contact

Ana Krvarić (akrvaric@wwfadria.org)
Kora Dvorski (kdvorski@wwfadria.org)
WWF Adria

Contents

Introduction 2

01 Principles of effective stakeholder engagement 4

02 Preparing for engagement 5

03 Choosing engagement approaches and methods 10

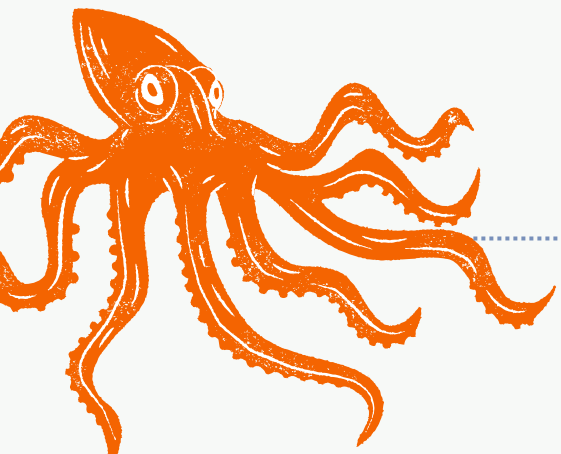
04 Establishing and maintaining Stakeholder Engagement Groups 13

05 Communication, conflict and risk management 16

06 Monitoring, evaluation and learning 19

07 Example: Stakeholder engagement in establishing a strictly protected zone in an MPA 20

08 Practical tools and templates 24



Introduction

Effective, efficient and resilient Marine Protected Areas (MPA) depend not only on ecological measures, legal designation and management capacity, but also on how people who use, manage, depend on or care about marine areas are involved. Stakeholder engagement can help managers understand local context, identify needs and conflicts, improve the relevance of management tools, and build understanding and ownership of management decisions. Engagement is not a single consultation event but a planned process that should be proportionate to the purpose, context and available resources. However, it does not guarantee conservation success on its own. It needs to be supported by sound scientific evidence, clear conservation objectives, adequate resources, effective governance and continuous monitoring.

Stakeholder engagement brings together different forms of knowledge, skills and experience, helping protected area managers develop a more comprehensive understanding of the area and the challenges it faces. It also provides opportunities to identify concerns and competing interests early, explore possible solutions, and address potential conflicts before they escalate. By involving stakeholders in decision-making and implementation, managers can better understand local needs and constraints, clarify roles and responsibilities, and adapt management measures to the specific conditions of the area. Ongoing dialogue and feedback further support shared learning, enable management approaches to be evaluated and refined, and help build trust between protected area managers and stakeholders.

Informing, consulting, involving and collaborating are different forms of engagement. Be clear about the level of influence stakeholders have; do not promise shared decision-making if the process only allows advice.



These guidelines look at stakeholder engagement through five connected stages:

FIVE CONNECTED STAGES	
Stage	**What to specify**
Preparation	What are we trying to achieve and with what capacity?
Identification and inclusion	Who is affected, interested, influential or missing?
Engagement	What level and method of involvement is appropriate?
Testing and validation	Do proposed measures work in this setting and for the people who use them?
Evaluation and adaptation	What has changed and what should happen next?

Although these five stages can be followed in every stakeholder engagement process, guidelines can, and should be adapted to a specific MPA, a small group of neighboring MPAs or a large or transboundary MPA network.



1 Principles of effective stakeholder engagement

Effective stakeholder engagement is a meaningful opportunity to contribute knowledge, experience and different perspectives to a specific issue or management of a protected area in general, and where appropriate, take action. Each engagement activity should have a clear objective and explain why stakeholders are being involved, as well as what their expected contribution is and how much influence their input may have on final decisions on the issue.

Transparency, trust and accountability

This principle highlights the importance of open communication and is demonstrated by ensuring the stakeholders understand the process, can follow how decisions are made, know who is responsible for what and receive clear feedback on what happened to their contribution.

Inclusiveness, diversity and accessibility

Inclusive stakeholder engagement is achieved by ensuring different groups are present, and understanding who may be excluded, addressing any barriers they may face and creating conditions in which different voices can be heard and influence the process.

Managing differences, power dynamics and constructive dialogue

Different stakeholder groups may have competing interests, priorities, expectations and levels of influence. Stakeholders can also differ in their degree of trust in public authorities, institutions or one another. These differences are a natural part of engagement and should be openly acknowledged and addressed.

The emphasis is on creating a fair and constructive environment in which different perspectives can be expressed, understood and considered. A neutral facilitator can play an important role in managing discussions, clarifying assumptions and helping stakeholders address sensitive or contentious issues.

Meaningful engagement does not require consensus about every issue. The objective is to ensure that disagreements are understood, documented and transparently considered in subsequent decision-making.

2 Preparing for engagement

Define the purpose, scope and focus of engagement

Before initiating stakeholder engagement, you should identify a clear purpose. When the purpose is clear, start with an explanation of the issue to be addressed, the management stage at which engagement is taking place and the specific decision or activity that stakeholders are expected to contribute to. Also, clarify the boundaries of the process by identifying which matters are open to discussion and influence.

DEFINE THE PURPOSE, SCOPE AND FOCUS OF ENGAGEMENT	
Planning question	**What to specify**
Why do we need stakeholder engagement?	The management issue being addressed
What are we asking participants?	The intended decision, outcome or management output
What can be influenced?	Management options, priorities, activities or recommendations
What is not open to interpretation?	Legal duties, ecological thresholds, budget limits or decisions already made
How will participants hear back?	Timing, method and person responsible for feedback



Understand the protected area and governance context

Before designing any stakeholder engagement activities, it is important to understand the existing governance, management objectives, decision-making structures, ongoing processes, and previous stakeholder participation. This helps determine whether a new engagement activity is necessary or an existing participation structure can provide a more effective platform. Attention should be given to avoiding unnecessary duplication of engagement activities, which can contribute to stakeholders' fatigue, reduce participation and undermine trust in the process.

UNDERSTAND THE PROTECTED AREA AND GOVERNANCE CONTEXT	
Instead	**Do**
Establishing a new stakeholder working group for every management issue	Review existing groups to identify whether they can address the issue through their existing mandates or with appropriate adjustments
Organizing a new consultation without reviewing previous stakeholder contributions	Build on previous consultations, communicating what has already been decided and identifying which issues require further input
Inviting stakeholders to several separate meetings organized by different institutions	Coordinate engagement activities with relevant authorities and existing forums to reduce duplication and stakeholder fatigue



Identify and map stakeholders

Stakeholder analysis helps you understand interests, objectives, expectations, knowledge, relationships, and past interactions. It provides a basis for identifying who should be involved, understanding the different roles and perspectives they bring and determining the most appropriate forms of engagement.

Stakeholders should be identified across relevant sectors, including local communities, fishers, businesses, NGOs, government agencies, academia, and others, adapted to the specific context of an MPA.

Different sources should be combined to identify both formal and informal stakeholders, including less visible groups and individuals who may be indirectly affected by MPA management decisions. If stakeholders are represented through nominated individuals or organisations, it is also important to clarify how representatives communicate with their wider constituencies, gather their views and report back on discussions and decisions.

IDENTIFY AND MAP STAKEHOLDERS	
Mapping dimension	**Question to ask**
Interest and relationship	How are stakeholders connected to the protecteda area? What do they value, use or depend on?
Influence	Can stakeholders shape decisions, implementation or public opinion and through what means?
Knowledge and experience	What local, technical, scientific, cultural or operational knowledge can stakeholders contribute?
Expectations	What do stakeholders expect from the protected area or the engagement process?
Capacity and willingness	Do stakeholders have time, staff, resources and motivation to participate?
Relationships and conflict	Which stakeholders collaborate or disagree? Are there trust or power imbalances?
Representation gaps	Who is not represented, including indirect or less visible stakeholders?

Consider stakeholders' interests and influence

In order to design appropriate levels and types of engagement, stakeholders should be assessed by their interest and influence in relation to a specific management issue. This can be done through an interest-influence matrix.

HIGH INTEREST / LOW INFLUENCE
keep involved

local communities, small-scale fishers and indirectly affected groups

two-way communication, consultation and accessible participation

HIGH INTEREST / HIGH INFLUENCE
collaborate

relevant PA authorities, active advisory bodies and influential organizations

ongoing involvement, cooperation and partnership

LOW INTEREST / LOW INFLUENCE
keep informed

wider public and groups with limited direct involvement in a specific issue

public information, updates and opportunities to ask question

LOW INTEREST / HIGH INFLUENCE
keep engaged

institutions or organizations with relevant decision-making authority but limited immediate interests

targeted communication and focused consultation

Important considerations:

- Low influence does not mean low importance. Stakeholders who are directly affected should always be included.
- Stakeholders may be in different quadrants depending on the issue (someone who has high influence over fisheries management may have a low influence over tourism-related decisions).
- The matrix is dynamic. Stakeholders' positions can change during the management cycle.
- As management priorities or stakeholder interests and influence change, the matrix should be reviewed and updated.

Plan resources, roles and timing

Early planning and careful allocation of time and resources are important and should be adapted to a specific MPA.

- Name a lead coordinator and identify who is responsible for invitations, technical input, minutes, data handling and feedback.
- Estimate time for preparation, meetings, follow-up, analysis and reporting.
- Budget for accessible venues and refreshments, as well as a neutral facilitator if possible.
- Schedule around seasonal work, fishing and tourism cycles, weather, local events and other MPA activities.
- Agree on a realistic timeline and avoid a large number of meetings in a short period.



3 Choosing engagement approaches and methods

Match the level of engagement to the purpose

There are four levels of engagement which correlate with how much influence you grant to your stakeholders.

Inform (pull/push communication)	What it means: Provide information through channels such as websites, newsletters, notices or direct updates. Suitable when: People need awareness or background information; broad audiences need to be reached. Be clear that: Information is being shared; this is not a request for joint decisions.
Consultation	What it means: Ask for views, experience or feedback on a defined issue. Suitable when: The management authority needs advice, evidence or reactions, but responsibility for decisions remains elsewhere. Be clear that: Input will be considered, but participants do not automatically decide the outcome.
Participation / involvement	What it means: Stakeholders take part in meetings or workshops and contribute actively, without necessarily holding full decision responsibility. Suitable when: Stakeholders can help shape the work, refine options or support implementation. Be clear that: The exact scope of influence and responsibility should be stated.
Partnership / collaboration	What it means: Joint learning, decisions and actions are developed, with responsibility and accountability shared among partners. Suitable when: Key stakeholders have high interest and relevant influence, and the MPA authority can genuinely share responsibility. Be clear that: The process requires clear roles, resources, accountability and a workable agreement.

Choosing engagement approaches and methods

There are several methods that can be used in any stakeholder engagement, and they should be chosen according to the issue, as well as the stakeholder interest-influence matrix. While choosing a method, consider combining them to improve access or depth where appropriate or necessary because of the complexity of the group.

Also, methods should be explained to the stakeholders clearly and with accessible and appropriate language.

SELECT METHODS ACCORDING TO THE ISSUE	
Method	**Useful for | Points to consider**
Interviews	Useful for: Detailed perspectives, sensitive issues, expert or local knowledge. Points to consider: Allow time for preparation and analysis; explain confidentiality and consent.
Questionnaires / surveys	Useful for: Collecting comparable views from a wider group or checking patterns. Points to consider: Question design and analysis require expertise.
Focus groups / facilitated discussion groups	Useful for: Understanding experiences, priorities and differences within a stakeholder group. Points to consider: Homogeneous groups can help people speak freely; mixed groups can support dialogue but need careful facilitation.
Workshops	Useful for: Exploring options, co-designing actions, prioritizing needs or reviewing tools. Points to consider: Prepare materials in accessible formats; define outputs and record decisions.
Participatory mapping	Useful for: Visualizing uses, knowledge, resources, pressures, conflicts or potential measures in an area. Points to consider: Use understandable maps; be clear about sensitivity and ownership of spatial information.
Shared-history exercise	Useful for: Understanding how a contested issue developed and how groups experienced it. Points to consider: Allow participants to present different accounts without forcing agreement.
Learning exchange	Useful for: Sharing experience and practical solutions across sectors or MPA sites. Points to consider: Focus on lessons and adaptation, not simply presentations.
Online / hybrid meetings	Useful for: Including geographically dispersed participants or those unable to travel. Points to consider: Check connectivity, digital confidence, accessibility and equal opportunity to contribute.

Design meetings for balanced participation

No matter which method you end up using, certain rules should be followed:

- Send a clear invitation and concise background information in advance.
- State the purpose, expected outputs, agenda, time commitment and decision space.
- Use a facilitator who can manage time, participation and disagreement; consider an independent facilitator, especially for contentious meetings.
- Use small-group work, written input or anonymous feedback to avoid dominance by a few voices.
- Provide accessible visual or technical materials. User-friendly maps and technical tools are important when discussing complex proposals.
- Close with a summary of what was heard, what remains unresolved, next steps and when feedback will be provided.



4 Establishing and maintaining Stakeholder Engagement Groups

Decide whether Stakeholder Engagement Group is needed

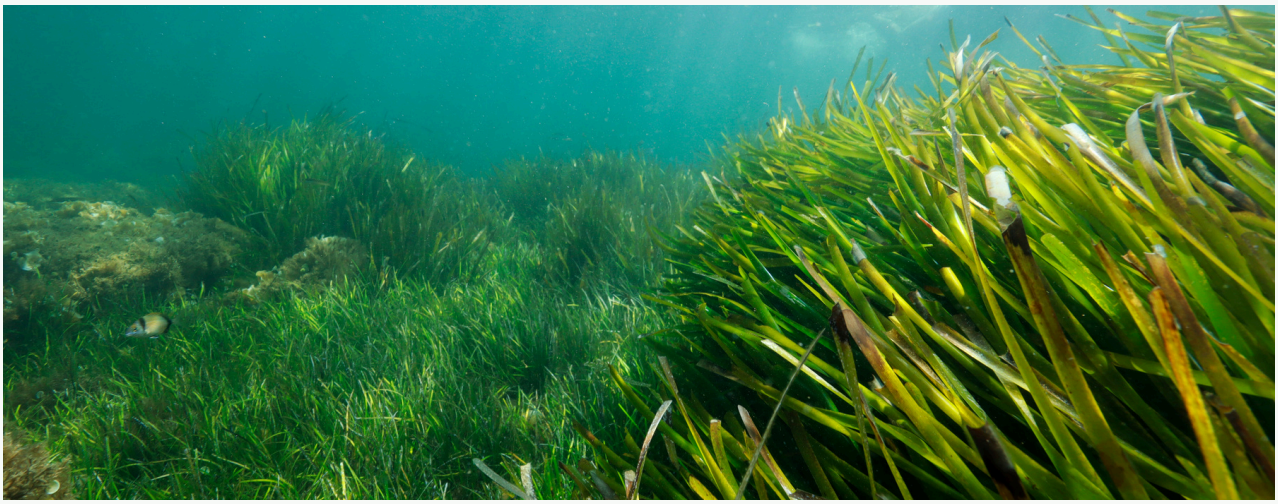
Stakeholder Engagement Group (SEG) provides a structured and continuous mechanism through which a wide range of stakeholders can contribute to management objectives and activities. Its effectiveness depends on a clear mandate, appropriate representation, meaningful collaboration and a demonstrable connection to management processes.

Before establishing a new SEG, existing participation structures should be assessed and strengthened wherever possible to avoid duplication and unnecessary stakeholder fatigue.

Agree on the SEG' purpose and scope

After deciding on establishing a new SEG or utilising an existing SEG, define what the group is expected to do. In an MPA management context, SEG can support discussions of management objectives, activities, zoning options or implementation challenges.

The role of SEG should be clearly distinguished from the formal decision-making responsibilities of the MPA management authority. Establishing these boundaries early helps manage expectations, promotes transparency and ensures that stakeholder contributions meaningfully inform management processes without creating confusion about decision-making authority.



- Ensure that SEG reflects the diversity of interests, perspectives and knowledge relevant to the MPA, rather than relying on stakeholders who are already engaged or easiest to contact.
- Depending on the local context, membership may include local communities, fishers, tourism and maritime businesses, NGOs, scientists, public agencies and other relevant stakeholder groups.
- Aim for a balance between broad representation and a manageable group size that allows for meaningful discussion, active participation and effective follow-up.
- Clarify whether members represent themselves, an organisation, or a wider sector.
- Where a member represents a sector, agree how they will communicate with that sector and bring feedback back to the group.
- To strengthen inclusiveness and transparency, provide routes for non-members and underrepresented groups to contribute between meetings.

Define roles and ways of working

Each SEG consists of several individual roles, as well as the group members, who have typical responsibilities. Individual roles can and often overlap.

DEFINE ROLES AND WAYS OF WORKING	
Role	**Responsibilities**
Group coordinator/contact point	Maintains contact, organizes meetings, prepares and maintain agreed documentation, links the group with the MPA authority, circulates information and tracks feedback from both sides.
Facilitator	Supports balanced discussion, manages conflict and ensures that the process is fair.
MPA authorities	Explains mandates and constraints, provides information, considers recommendations and communicates decisions.
Technical experts	Explains scientific evidence, responds to questions and identifies technical limitations.
Group members	Contribute with knowledge and perspectives and follow up with agreed tasks.

Adopt a simple operating framework and code of conduct

In order to build trust and support effective collaboration, agree on an operating framework that explains how SEG will operate. It should outline the purpose, membership criteria, roles and responsibilities, meeting arrangements, decision-making or advisory status, confidentiality, record-keeping procedures, duration and procedures for joining or leaving the group. Also, establish a shared code of conduct to guide participation and cooperation. Members should represent the views of their sectors and commit to transparency, inclusivity, accountability, open communication, respectful dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution.

Sustain participation

Participation in SEG may change over time, especially when involvement is voluntary. Maintain engagement through regular but manageable meetings, clear communication and opportunities for members to contribute in different ways. When meetings are not possible, questionnaires, targeted consultations or follow-up interviews can provide alternative ways to participate.

In order to support continuity, agree on a meeting calendar, share minutes and action points promptly, and follow up on agreed actions. Regularly review membership to identify gaps in representation and allow members to leave or new participants to join when needed. Acknowledge contributions and explain how stakeholder input has influenced activities and decisions to maintain trust, motivation and long-term involvement.



5 Communication, conflict and risk management

Use a planned communication approach

Communication is the core of engagement; therefore, a communication plan should identify audiences, messages, appropriate language, channels, timeline, responsible people and feedback routines.

All interested stakeholders	Information to provide: Purpose, timeline, public updates, how to participate and contact details. Possible channel: Website, notice, newsletter, public meeting, direct email.
SEG members	Information to provide: Agenda, background papers, questions, meeting records, actions and progress. Possible channel: Email, group platform, meetings, phone or messaging where agreed.
Underrepresented / less organized groups	Information to provide: Accessible explanation, tailored invitation, practical arrangements and alternative routes to contribute. Possible channel: Trusted local intermediaries, direct outreach, short interviews, community events.
Decision-makers and technical teams	Information to provide: Stakeholder input, unresolved issues, evidence gaps, risks and recommendations. Possible channel: Briefing notes, reports, technical meetings.

Anticipate common risks

Effective stakeholder engagement requires recognising and addressing challenges that may affect participation, trust and collaboration. Identifying potential risks early and responding to them appropriately can help maintain an inclusive, transparent and constructive engagement process.

Exclusion	How it may appear: Some sectors, locations or social groups are absent or cannot participate. Possible response: Refresh mapping; vary timing, channels and formats; include indirect stakeholders.
Power imbalance	How it may appear: A few participants dominate, or some views are discounted. Possible response: Use neutral facilitation, structured turns, small groups and confidential input options.
Conflict between groups	How it may appear: Disagreement over specific issues. Possible response: Map relationships early; establish ground rules; separate facts from values; use facilitated dialogue.
Unrealistic expectations	How it may appear: Participants believe engagement guarantees adoption of their proposal. Possible response: Explain decision authority, constraints and the influence available before participation.
Stakeholder fatigue	How it may appear: Repeated requests, little feedback or unclear value may lead to disengagement. Possible response: Coordinate requests, avoid duplication, vary methods, acknowledge input and report outcomes.
Low participation	How it may appear: Meetings clash with work, seasons, travel or access constraints. Possible response: Adapt timing and format; use follow-up interviews or questionnaires; provide advance notice.

Technical barriers	How it may appear: Materials or tools are too complex for some participants. Possible response: Use plain-language summaries, visual aids, demonstrations and expert support.
Loss of trust	How it may appear: Promises are not kept, or decisions appear predetermined. Possible response: Communicate consistently, document decisions and explain how input was treated.

Manage disagreement constructively

- Before discussing sensitive or controversial issues, agree on clear ground rules and present the issues in a neutral way, distinguishing facts from assumptions.
- Allow everyone to share their views and concerns, and use a neutral facilitator when conflicts or power imbalances may affect participation.
- Record where participants agree or disagree without forcing everyone to reach the same conclusion.
- When issues cannot be resolved within the group, refer them to the appropriate authority or decision-making process.

Prevent stakeholders' fatigue

The most common cause of fatigue is inadequate communication of purpose and the influence stakeholders have regarding a specific issue. Therefore, careful planning, clear communication, different ways of engaging stakeholders and continuous feedback are important. Also, before organising any kind of stakeholder engagement, coordinate with other departments and institutions to see if the information you need has already been collected and ask whether your activity adds value or if you can use the existing one.



6 Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Evaluate the process and its influence

While the number of meetings and participants is a useful measure, it does not fully reflect the success of stakeholder engagement. An effective evaluation should assess whether the process reached the right stakeholders, allowed meaningful participation, treated everyone fairly, influenced the process as intended and clearly communicated the outcomes.

Establish a small set of indicators

Key areas to consider while evaluating effectiveness of stakeholder engagement, as well as examples of indicators can be used for assessing engagement and identify ways for improvement in the future.

Area	Example indicators
Reach	Stakeholder groups contacted; groups represented; participation by location or sector; response to outreach.
Inclusion and accessibility	Identified representation gaps; accessibility measures used; barriers reported; participation across different formats.
Quality of participation	Range of voices heard; opportunities to contribute; participant feedback on methods, facilitation and materials.
Transparency	Timely agendas and minutes; clarity of decision space; feedback provided on how input was used.
Influence	Changes to priorities, tools, options, plans or implementation arrangements linked to stakeholder input.
Relationships and learning	New connections, improved understanding of other perspectives, recurring collaboration or unresolved tensions.
Efficiency	Time and resources used; duplication avoided; perceived fatigue.
Follow-through	Actions completed; outstanding issues assigned; feedback delivered by agreed dates.

Use feedback to improve the process

Collect feedback regularly using simple methods that match the scope and purpose of engagement. This can be a short feedback session at the end of the meeting, an informal discussion or interview with participants, or surveys following major engagement activities. Feedback should focus on what worked well, what could be improved and whether the process met participants' expectations. Main findings and possible adjustments should be shared with participants in order to build trust and further demonstrate that stakeholders' contributions are valued. At the end of the phase, provide an account of what was done, who participated, what was learned, what changed, what remains unresolved, and what the next steps are.

7 Example: Stakeholder engagement in establishing a strictly protected zone in an MPA

This is a hypothetical example that shows how the five stages of stakeholder engagement can be applied in a real-life scenario.

The management authority of an MPA is considering establishing a strictly protected zone around a sensitive reef and seabird nesting area. In the proposed zone, extraction of marine resources and public entry would be prohibited (no-take, no-entry). Only exceptions would be activities of research, monitoring and emergency response. The area is currently used by small-scale fishers, recreational boaters, divers and tourism operators. Some stakeholders support establishing a strictly protected zone; others are concerned about access, traditional use and enforcement. MPA authority begins engagement before determining final boundaries and access rules.

Step 1. Preparation

MPA authority explains why a no-take, no-entry measure is being considered, what ecological evidence is available and who has legal decision-making responsibility. It clarifies the elements stakeholders can influence (boundary alternatives, access arrangements outside the zone, monitoring priorities and the transition period) and which conservation requirements are fixed.

The expected output is a short engagement plan with objectives, decision limits, timeline, responsibilities and feedback commitments.

Step 2. Stakeholders' identification and inclusion method selection

Directly and indirectly affected groups are identified as relevant stakeholders, by considering interests, influence and local knowledge. An engagement approach is chosen and will be scheduled around the fishing and tourism season. Fishers may be offered interviews outside working hours.

Example: Stakeholder engagement in establishing a strict zone in an MPA

Stakeholders	Key concerns/knowledge	Engagement approach
Small-scale and commercial fishers	Loss of fishing grounds; seasonal use; navigation	Targeted interviews; participatory mapping workshop
Recreational boaters, divers and tourism operators	Loss of access to sites and routes; business impacts	Focus groups; participatory mapping workshop
Local residents and coastal users	Traditional access; community impacts	Community meeting; participatory mapping workshop
Scientists and conservation NGOs	Habitat sensitivity; ecological effectiveness	Technical briefing; participatory mapping workshop; option review
Enforcement agencies	Legal powers; surveillance; safety; compliance	Coordination; option review

Expected output is a stakeholder map noting relevant stakeholders, their main interests and engagement methods that can be used for each group of stakeholders.

Step 3. Exploring concerns and spatial options

- **Information session**: MPA authority uses appropriate language to explain the difference between no-take and no-entry restrictions, give the ecological rationale for establishing the strict zone, define limits of stakeholder influence and proposes the legal process.
- **Participatory mapping workshop**: Participants mark fishing grounds, navigation routes, diving locations, landing sites, sensitive habitats and alternative boundaries on maps.
- **Focused discussions**: Using smaller groups within the workshop to explore livelihood effects, access changes, safety, displacement of activities and possible practical responses. Neutral facilitation is utilised to resolve disagreements.

Participants who could not be present at the workshop are included through targeted interviews, focus groups and technical briefings.

The expected output is a structured record of collected local knowledge, access concerns, potential conflicts and proposed alternatives.

Example: Stakeholder engagement in establishing a strict zone in an MPA

Step 4. Reviewing workable options

Based on the results of stakeholders' input, the MPA authority prepares mapped alternatives and checks them against scientific evidence, conservation objectives, legal requirements and practical implementation needs and identifies three options:

- **Option 1**: A single larger no-take, no-entry core covering the sensitive habitats, with substantial access restrictions.
- **Option 2**: A differently shaped core that protects the required habitats while avoiding a heavily used navigation corridor, that is still ecologically and legally feasible.
- **Option 3**: A core no-entry area alongside a surrounding zone with different restrictions, with a design that still achieves the required protection.

MPA authority presents these results to stakeholders at a workshop. Any options that may have been identified, but do not achieve conservation objectives or are not feasible, are mentioned but not presented. Stakeholders give their opinion on options.
The expected output is a transparent comparison of feasible options, remaining uncertainties and stakeholder views.

Step 5. Evaluation, adaptation and decision feedback

After discussing options with stakeholders, MPA authority considers all inputs and comes to the decision that option 2 is the most feasible. This is then presented to the stakeholders with an explanation of why other options were not accepted.

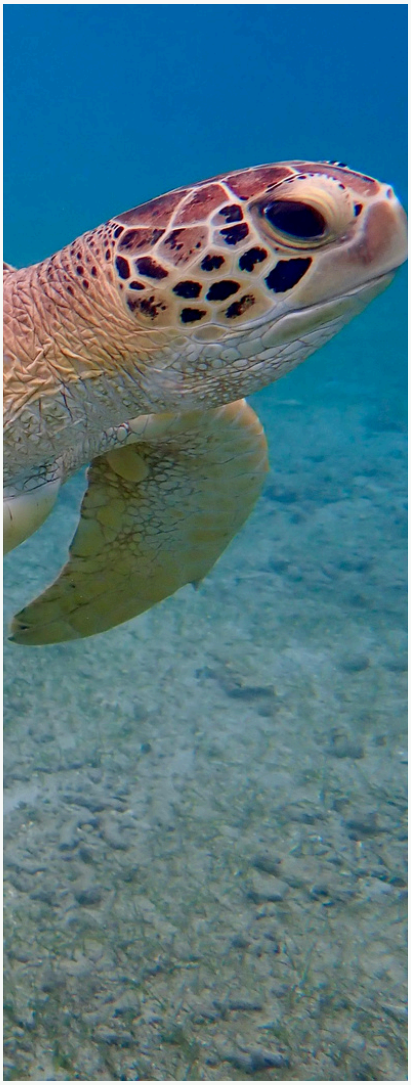
A short feedback survey checks if the engagement process reached relevant stakeholders, explained the restriction, listened to the concerns and considered opinions. After implementing the zonation change, the MPA authority reviews compliance and conservation objectives indicators.

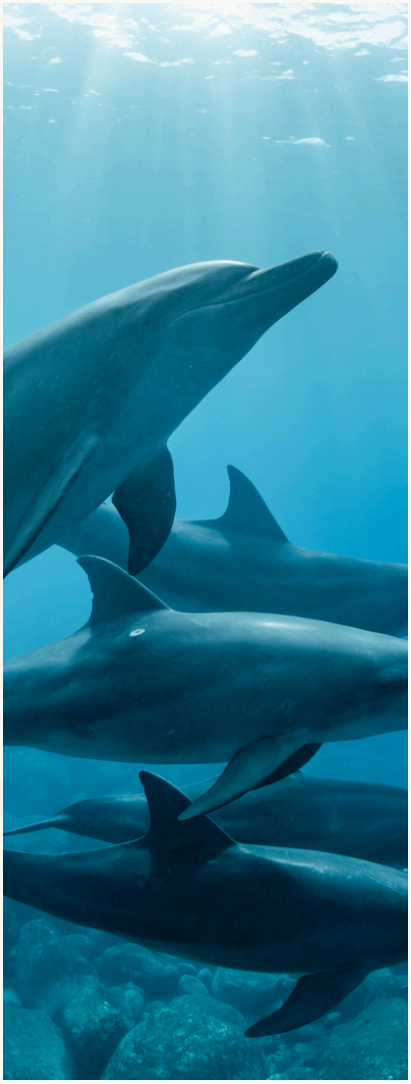
The expected output is a documented decision and feedback report, plus a monitoring and engagement follow-up plan.

Example: Stakeholder engagement in establishing a strict zone in an MPA

Examples of stakeholder input and possible responses

Stakeholder input	Possible management response
Fishers identify a highly used fishing ground	Test boundary alternatives without compromising protection requirements; document any unavoidable impact.
Boaters identify a common passage through the proposed zone	Assess safe alternative routes and clear navigational marking; review boundaries if feasible.
Divers ask whether non-extractive visits could continue	Explain that a no-entry zone excludes recreational entry; consider diving access outside the core.
Residents question enforcement and exceptions	Publish clear rules, maps, signage, authorized-exception procedures and enforcement contacts.
Scientists flag an especially vulnerable habitat	Use the evidence to assess whether proposed alternatives offer sufficient protection.







8 Practical tools and templates

The following templates are starting points. Adapt them to local governance, legal and organisational requirements. They are intentionally concise so they can be used in planning meetings and updated as the process develops.

Tool 1. Engagement purpose and scope brief

Complete this before inviting participants. A focused question linked to a real management output is more likely to produce useful contributions than a broad invitation to "discuss the MPA". Clarify the management stage, decision space and limits of influence.

Field	Prompt / template
MPA / location / network	[Name and geographic scope]
Issue to address	[In 1–3 sentences: what problem or opportunity needs attention, and why now?]
Management stage	□ Planning □ Options development □ Decision preparation □ Implementation □ Monitoring / evaluation
Decision or output informed	[e.g., zoning options, visitor management measures, fisheries arrangements, monitoring priorities]
Questions for participants	1. [Question] 2. [Question] 3. [Question]
Open to influence	[Which elements can participants shape?]
Outside scope / constraints	[Legal duties, decisions already made, budget or mandate constraints; explain clearly]
Who is responsible?	[Process lead, decision-maker, facilitator, record keeper]
How input will be used	[Who will assess contributions, against what criteria, and how?]
Feedback and next steps	[When, how and by whom will participants hear back]
Date / version / owner	[Complete]

Tool 2. MPA governance and existing stakeholder engagement

Review the MPA's status, objectives, management arrangements, mandates, existing participation structures and previous engagement before creating a new process. Existing forums can reduce duplication and fatigue if they are inclusive and have an appropriate mandate.

Area to check	Questions / Evidence	Finding / Implications for engagement
MPA status and objectives	Designation, legal status, management objectives, current plan and priorities.	
Authorities and mandates	Which authority or body has which powers, responsibilities and decision rights?	
Current planning processes	What plans, reviews, permits, consultations or implementation activities are underway?	
Existing participation forums	Advisory group, fisheries/tourism forum, local council, network, community initiative?	
Forum suitability	Is it inclusive, accessible, active, trusted and authorised to address this task?	
Previous engagement	Who participated, what was heard, what commitments remain open, and what lessons were learned?	
Coordination opportunities	Can activities be combined or scheduled to avoid repeated requests and fatigue?	
Gaps / decisions needed	What cannot be addressed through existing structures? Is a new mechanism justified?	

Tool 3. One-page engagement plan

Field	Complete for your MPA
MPA / network and lead organization	
Issue / management stage	
Purpose of engagement	
Decision or output to be informed	
What is open to influence?	
What is fixed / outside scope?	
Stakeholder groups to involve	
Level of engagement for each group	
Methods and accessibility measures	
Coordinator / facilitator / decision-maker	
Timeline and resources	

Ethics, consent and data safeguards	
How input will be analysed and used	
How and when feedback will be provided	
Evaluation indicators	

Tool 4. Stakeholder identification and mapping

Build the list from multiple sources: management records, advisory bodies, local organisations, sector representatives, community contacts, previous consultations and stakeholder suggestions. Do not assume one organisation speaks for an entire sector. Apply the stakeholder interest-influence matrix as a guide for the method of engagement.

Stakeholder group / organisation	Interest	Influence	Knowledge / contribution	Capacity / willingness	Risks or barriers	Engagement approach / next step
Example: small-scale fishers	Livelihood and access to fishing grounds	High / medium / low	Local use patterns, seasonal changes	Seasonal availability	Time, trust, representation	Targeted interviews; sector representative; flexible timing

Tool 5. SEG operating framework – suggested headings

- Name and purpose of the group.
- Relationship to the MPA authority and formal decision-making bodies.
- Scope of topics and activities (e.g., needs assessment, co-creation, tool testing, validation, management advice).
- Membership criteria, representation and process for inviting or replacing members.
- Roles of coordinator, facilitator, members, technical experts and secretariat.
- Meeting frequency, formats, quorum or participation expectations where relevant.
- How advice, recommendations or decisions are recorded and communicated.
- Confidentiality, data protection, conflicts of interest and use of information.
- Code of conduct: transparency, inclusivity, accountability, open communication, respect and peaceful conflict resolution.
- Duration, review date and process for members to leave or for the group to be renewed.

Tool 6. Meeting preparation and follow-up checklist

Before	During	After
Confirm purpose, decision space and expected output.	Restate purpose, agenda and ground rules.	Send minutes and action list promptly.
Map invitees and identify missing voices.	Use facilitation methods that balance contributions.	Record agreements, disagreements and open questions.
Send invitation, agenda and accessible materials.	Explain technical information in plain language.	Assign action owners and deadlines.
Check venue, access, timing, interpretation and online links.	Track whose voices are heard; invite quieter participants.	Explain how input will be considered.
Arrange facilitator, note-taker and consent process.	Summarize key points and confirm next steps.	Provide feedback and update the engagement plan.

Tool 7. Short meeting feedback questions

- Was the purpose of the meeting clear?
- Did you have a fair opportunity to contribute?
- Was the information understandable and accessible?
- Do you understand how your input will be used?
- Which perspectives or groups were missing?
- What should be changed for the next activity?
- Would you prefer another way to contribute?

Tool 8. Engagement evaluation scorecard

Question	Evidence / indicator	Finding / action
Were relevant stakeholder groups reached?	Groups mapped vs contacted / represented	
Were underrepresented groups considered?	Gaps identified; outreach and access measures	
Was the level of influence clear?	Participant understanding; expectation issues	
Was participation balanced and safe?	Facilitation observations and participant feedback	
Did engagement influence the work?	Changes to options, tools, plans or implementation	
Was feedback provided?	Date and content of response to participants	
Was the burden proportionate?	Time, resources and fatigue feedback	
What should change next time?	Agreed improvement actions and owners	

Tool 9. Workshop feedback form

Thank you for participating in this workshop. Your feedback will help us improve future workshops and stakeholder engagement activities.
Please indicate how much you agree with each statement by ticking one box per row.

1 = Strongly disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Neither agree nor disagree | 4 = Agree | 5 = Strongly agree

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1. The purpose and objectives of the workshop were clear.	□	□	□	□	□
2. The topics discussed were relevant to me.	□	□	□	□	□
3. The information and materials were easy to understand.	□	□	□	□	□
4. I had enough opportunities to share my views and ideas.	□	□	□	□	□
5. I felt that my opinions were heard and respected.	□	□	□	□	□
6. Different perspectives were considered during the discussions.	□	□	□	□	□
7. The workshop was well organized and facilitated.	□	□	□	□	□
8. I understand how the feedback collected will be used.	□	□	□	□	□
9. Overall, I am satisfied with the workshop.	□	□	□	□	□

10. What did you find most useful about the workshop?

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11. What could be improved in future workshops?

Thank you for your feedback!

Tool 10. Session plan and facilitator checklist

Use this to translate the engagement purpose into a structured activity. A neutral facilitator can help participants listen, clarify assumptions and discuss difficult issues constructively. The facilitator should not manufacture consensus or suppress disagreement.

Session element	Plan / prompts
Session purpose and output	[What specific question will the session answer? What output will be produced?]
Participants and missing voices	[Who is invited? Who may be absent? How will they be reached?]
Roles	[Facilitator, technical resource person, note-taker, decision-maker, access support]
Opening	Restate purpose, scope, decision-maker, what is open / outside scope, consent and ground rules.
Evidence and context	Present relevant information in plain language; distinguish evidence, assumptions and uncertainties.
Participation design	Use round-robin, paired discussion, small groups, silent writing, mapping or anonymous input as appropriate.
Power and inclusion	Monitor speaking time, interruptions, jargon, dominance and barriers; invite different modes of contribution.
Handling tension	Acknowledge disagreement, clarify the issue, separate positions from underlying concerns, and record unresolved points.
Closing	Summarize contributions, agreements, disagreements, open questions, decisions (if any) and next steps.
Feedback route	[Who will send what summary, to whom and by when?]

Facilitator self-check

- Have I explained my role and any limits to my neutrality?
- Have I made space for people who may be less confident, less fluent or less powerful?
- Have I avoided treating silence as agreement?
- Have I checked whether technical language or meeting dynamics are excluding people?
- Have I captured minority views accurately and without attribution unless agreed?
- Have I distinguished stakeholder advice from formal decisions by the competent authority?

Tool 11. Activity tracker

Action	Origin / meeting	Owner	Due date	Resources / dependencies	Status	Update / evidence of completion
[Specific action + deliverable]	[Date / issue]	[Named role / organization]	[Date]	[Complete]	[Not started / in progress / done]	[Link or summary]

Tool 12. Evaluation and adaptation

Review question	Evidence / observation	Change for next time	Owner / deadline
Did the activity answer the purpose question?			
Were the right groups reached, including less visible stakeholders?			
Were timing, format, language and access arrangements appropriate?			
Were contributions balanced and disagreement handled fairly?			
Did participants understand the decision space and limits?			
Were contributions demonstrably considered and feedback provided?			
Was the time and effort asked of stakeholders proportionate?			
What should be stopped, continued or changed?			





Guidelines for stakeholder engagement in **MARINE PROTECTED AREAS**

2026

MPA Community Network

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