MPA
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MPA Card Game

What is this game about?
The MPA Card Game puts you in the shoes of the actors linked to Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), and the challenges that can be presented in the area. You'll face complex situations like climate change impacts, stakeholder conflicts, or invasive species—and respond using real-life-inspired actions.

Your main mission:
To critically think through the trade-offs and solutions that could respond to each situation from your stakeholder's point of view. You'll need to analyze the impacts of different actions on ecosystems, economies, and communities—just like in real life.

Your goal:
To accumulate positive ecological and socio-economic points over the course of the game by selecting and justifying the most effective actions. The player with the highest combined points at the end wins—but everyone wins by learning!

Game Components

- **Stakeholder Cards** – Define your role (e.g., fisher, NGO, shipping sector, planner).
- **Action Cards** – Solutions or responses you can play to address situations.
- **Situation Cards** – Events or challenges your MPA must deal with.
- **Wildcards** – "Free Action" cards where you come up with your own creative solution.
- **Score Sheet (optional)** – To track ecological (🔵) and socio-economic (🟠) points.

Number of Players

- **3 to 6 players** recommended
- **1 person acts as the Game Lead** (who can also play) and gives the score to the wildcards depending on how good the solution was from the player.

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🕹️ Game Setup

- Shuffle each of the three decks: Stakeholder, Action, and Situation cards.
- **Each player draws 1 Stakeholder Card**—this is their role throughout the game.
- **Each player draws 5 Action Cards**.
- The Game Leader places one **Situation Card on the board** in every round.

🎯 Playing the Game

1. **Draw a Situation Card** - The Game Lead draws a Situation card and places it face up on the board. This sets the scene of what is happening the MPA (e.g., invasive species, a policy shift, or ecological crisis).
2. **Choose an Action** - Each player selects 1 Action Card that best addresses the situation, based on what their stakeholder would realistically do or advocate for. If you have a **Joker Card**, you can come up with your own response!
3. **Play and Justify Your Action** - One by one, in a counter-clockwise direction, players place their card on the table and explain their reasoning: Why did you choose this action? How does it reflect your stakeholder's interests? How do they help or counteract the current situation? What are the ecological and socio-economic impacts that give the punctuation stated on the card?
4. **Score the Action** - After your explanation, collect the ecological (🔵) and socio-economic (🟠) points shown on your Action Card. If you played a Joker, the Game Lead will decide your points (max ±10 per category) based on creativity, feasibility, and how well the action aligns with your stakeholder.
5. **Draw a New Action Card** - Replenish your hand so you always have 5 Action Cards. Move to the next round by drawing a new Situation Card.

🏁 Ending the Game

- The game ends after a pre-set number of rounds (e.g., 6–8), or when the Situation cards run out. We usually play 5 rounds.
- The player with the highest total score (ecological + socio-economic) wins.



Tips for Players

- **Think like your stakeholder**: What matters to them? What compromises would they accept?
- Use the game as a **thinking tool**: explore trade-offs, not just strategies that "win."
- **Be persuasive!** Justifying your action is just as important as playing the card.
- Don't underestimate Joker Cards—they're a chance to **innovate**.

Game Lead Role

- Keep time and pace (5–7 minutes per round works well).
- Help players stay in their role and think critically.
- Score Joker Cards fairly—reward logic, creativity, and balance.

Scoring Table

	Player 1		Player 2		Player 3		Player 4	
Round	🔵	🟠	🔵	🟠	🔵	🟠	🔵	🟠
Round 1								
Round 2								
Round 3								
Round 4								
Round 5								
Total								

eDNA Biosampler

- 5 points

0



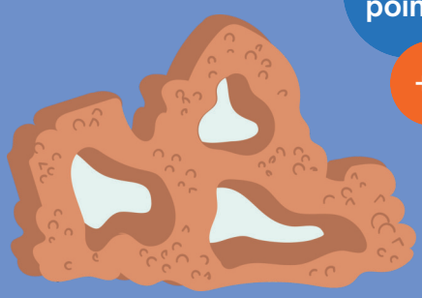
LionFish detected

BioProtect's eDNA sampling detected the presence of the invasive species *Pterois volitans* which harms native species.

Smart Reef Technologies

+8 points

+4



Ideal deployment area found

PHAROS analysis reports that if deploying SRT into coastal areas, the biomass of fish would increase 70% in 2 years time creating also a spillover effect for fisheries.

Ecological Connectivity Assessment

- 7 points

+5



Habitat fragmentation reported

Blue Connect's ECA found that some lanes of the successful shipping industry is causing habitat fragmentation for key endemic species.

Trade-off analysis (TOA)

+4

?

-3

?



environment vs. blue economy

MSP4BIO's TOA show that allowing limited seasonal fishing would cause moderate biodiversity gain and less stakeholder conflict. *Suggest your own TOA and obtain a* different score.

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Designation

+ 9 points

-2



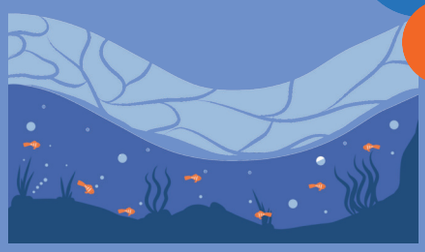
of a blue corridor!

It would establish ecological connectivity, allowing species migration and genetic flow. However, it would restrict some economic activities but allow eco-tourism.

Strict-protection

+10 points

- 4



implementation in key areas

The MPA zoning was strategically designed to have connecting strict-protection areas along the area. This restricts all type of human activities.

Co-management

+ 7 points

+5



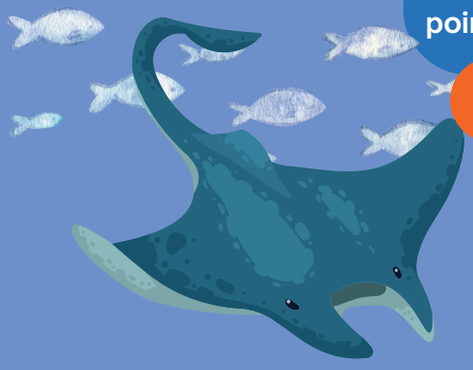
agreement

Using BLUE CONNECT's co-management story map, local communities & stakeholders actively participate in MPA decisions, improving compliance and stewardship.

Large-scale

+ 8 points

+2



marine restoration project

A large scale marine restoration project is implemented at a national level, capacitating local communities to participate in the restoration efforts. All other activities not related to this are temporarily banned.

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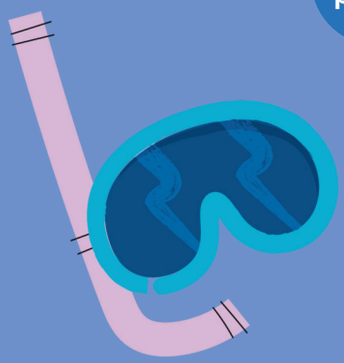
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MPA monitoring

+ 6 points

+ 3



enhancement

Innovative monitoring techniques have been implemented which are budget-friendly and provide continuous data of the ecosystem.

BLUE CONNECT

Public participatory mapping

+2 points

+4

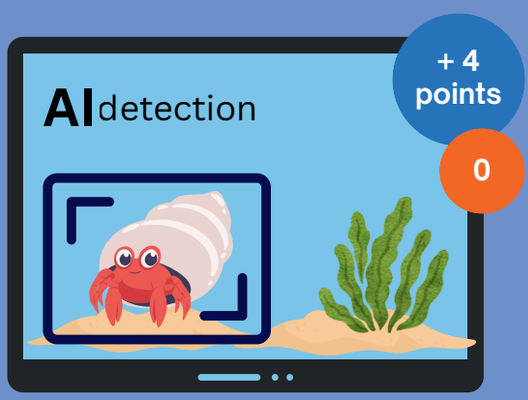


shows cultural value

Marine areas with high cultural value are identified by local inhabitants using on-line participatory mapping tools.

BioProtect

AI tools



+ 4 points

0

for underwater imagery

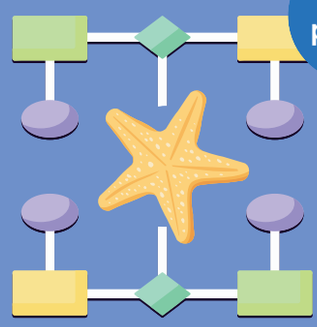
Artificial intelligence tools are deployed to improve the analysis of underwater images, increasing the number of species detected.

BioProtect

Improved modelling

+4 points

-1



of marine biodiversity

New analysis of existing data reveals new areas of high diversity that should be included in an MPA network.

BioProtect

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Detailed mapping

- 7 points

+ 7



of human pressures

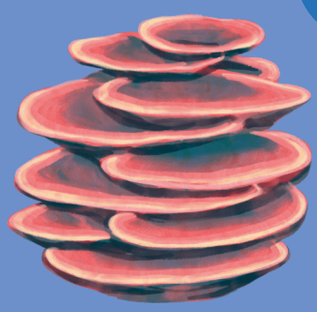
Better understanding of human pressures on coastal environments highlights impacted areas that should be protected.

BioProtect

Large mesophotic

+7 points

0



Smart Enhanced Reef

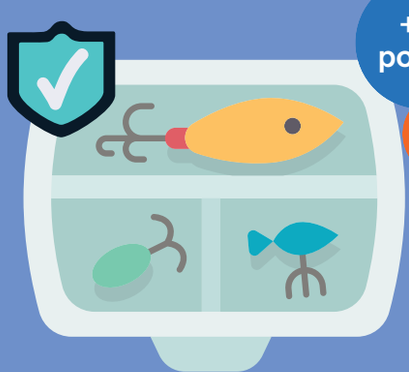
A large, well connected, & purpose designed SER is installed in a highly degraded site in deeper water adjacent to the MPA, providing a protected substrate to increase habitat diversity.

PHAROS

Fisher Guardians

+ 5 points

+ 2



training

A training program is run for all local fishers on new available technologies and best practices to prevent loss of fishing gear.

PHAROS

MPA community

? points

?



wildcard

Come up with your own answer and the group will give you a score depending on how well it addresses the situation.

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MPA community

? points

?



wildcard

Come up with your own answer and the group will give you a score depending on how well it addresses the situation.

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MPA community

? points

?



wildcard

Come up with your own answer and the group will give you a score depending on how well it addresses the situation.

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MPA community

? points

?



wildcard

Come up with your own answer and the group will give you a score depending on how well it addresses the situation.

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? points

?



wildcard

Come up with your own answer and the group will give you a score depending on how well it addresses the situation.

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Smart monitoring

+ 4 points

0



of Smart Enhanced Reefs

Managers invest in advanced real-time remote monitoring technology situated on the Smart Enhanced Reef structures to help assess the MPA and SER effectiveness.

A financial plan

+6 points

-2



is created

Based on BLUE CONNECT's guideline for MPAs to access funding, a financing plan is created, improving long-term conservation sustainability, but requiring significant administrative effort and time.

Better stakeholder

+ 5 points

+ 4



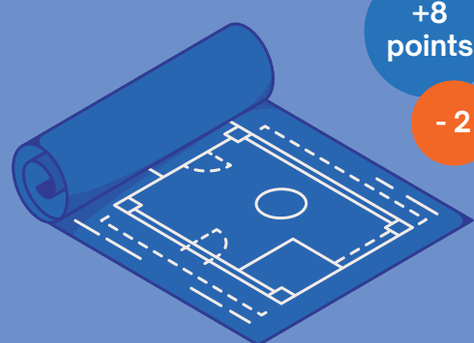
engagement

Utilizing BLUE CONNECT's stakeholder engagement toolkit, MPA managers improve trust and collaboration, reducing conflicts over resource use.

Blue Connect's

+8 points

- 2



Blueprint

Leveraging BC's blueprint, MPA managers optimize conservation strategies, ensuring effective protection and ecosystem health. However, adapting strategies requires investment in data collection.

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Financial Guidelines

+5 points

+5



are applied

Blue4All's guideline for applying a business approach to the financial management of MPAs has supported the managers in ensuring that MPA operations are financial sustainable for the next 5 years.

Stakeholder mapping

0 points

+5



is carried out

Understanding who the stakeholders of an MPA are, allowed for the inclusion of local fishermen in planning which assured their livelihoods by allowing artisanal fishing in a specific zone.

Gender Action Plan

+6 points

+4



is implemented

Implementing a gender action plan allowed for the recognition of the important role of women in catalyzing behavior changes in their peers of the fishing community.

30x30 scenarios

+8 points

+8



agreed on

The prioritization tool offers scenarios for 2030 goals. Stakeholders debate options and reach a consensus balancing environmental, social, and economic needs.

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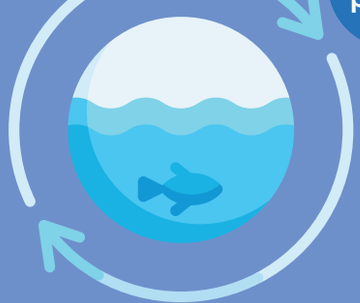
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Ecosystem-based Maritime Spatial Planning

-7 points

-7



assessment tool

Showed that the planned 10% strictly protected areas do not account for future climate threats, failing to safeguard marine biodiversity and risking a fishing industry collapse.

MarinePlan

Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Area (EBSA)

+9 points

-5



criteria application

EBSA criteria revealed that national MPAs fail to protect key spawning and nursing sites, requiring shipping routes and planned to be restructured, increasing costs.

MarinePlan

Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures

+ 4 points

+6



analysis

Suggests future offshore wind farms could support conservation, expanding protected habitats. Though not the most valuable, this secures subsidies for operators integrating restoration.

MarinePlan

3D analysis

+ 6 points

- 3



MarinePlan's 3D analysis reveals deeper habitats need more protection. Strict measures are applied which benefits biodiversity but reduces fishing grounds.

MarinePlan

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Climate Change integration

+3 points

-2



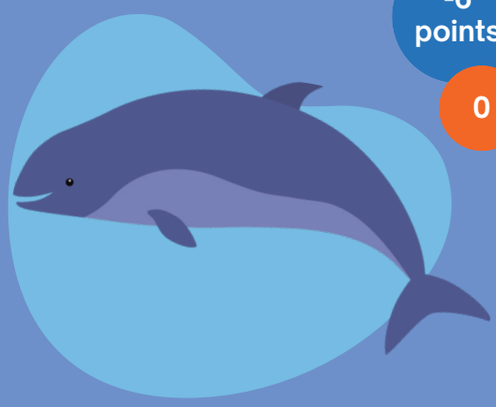
Guidelines applied

By implementing MSP4BIO's guidelines for improved integration of climate change scenarios in MPA management, their adaptability but also complexity of plans increases.

MPA gap analysis

-6 points

0



Key species

A site-specific gap analysis revealed that harbor porpoises, a key species for this ecosystem, are not protected adequately. Persisting harmful activities in the MPA lead to a population decline.

Ecological-Socio-Economic

+4 points

+4



framework applied

During MPA planning, MSP4BIO's ESE Framework is used to incorporate not only ecological, but also societal and economic aspects, increasing the probability of success.

Decision Support Tool

+3 points

+3



ABC Planner applied

MSP4BIO's prioritisation tool with the capacity to incorporate human pressures, is used in a participatory mapping process to prioritise areas for conservation.

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Boating association

+4 points

-2



agrees to speed limits

Sailors, jet skiers and recreational boaters agree to a speed limit within MPA boundaries to protect marine mammals and reduce underwater noise.

Environmental NGOs

-6 points

0



refuses offshore wind farms

NGOs demand no co-location of OWF and MPAs, and strict differentiation between MPAs and OECMs so that no OWF area can be counted as part of the 30% protected area per country.

Youth Association

+3 points

-4



organizes protest

The local youth association organizes a protest for the further restriction of commercial fishing activities in their coastal town.

Living Lab community

+ 3 points

+4



raises awareness

A community of NGOs, school teachers, and scuba divers forms a Local Living Lab. They plan awareness events in support of the MPA.

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Government prioritizes

-10 points

+5



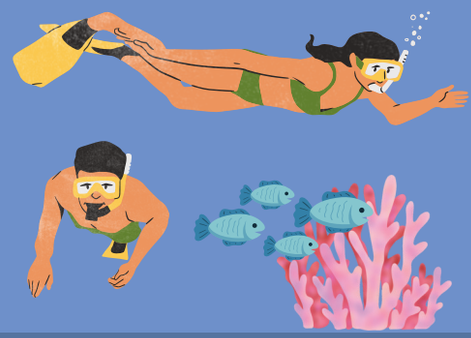
oil and gas

Keeping energy costs low is key for the government as well as securing existing jobs.

Ecotourism in

+5 points

+5



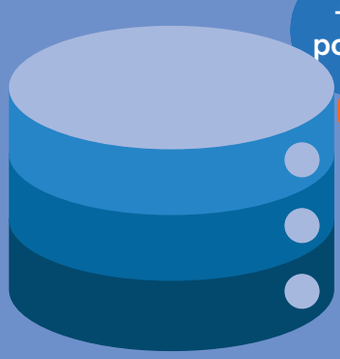
Marine Protected Areas

New guided tours inside the MPA secure more funding for the MPA while increasing public awareness.

Nature Research

+ 3 points

0



Institute

Shares data on the distribution of species improving the design of MPAs.

Trade-off analysis

- 7 points

+6



published

Informs that continuing oil production in certain % would be necessary. However, a phase out into renewables is envisioned.

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Speed Limits introduced

+ 7 points

-2



Mandatory speed limits protocol is introduced in ecologically sensitive areas to reduce underwater noise and vessel collisions with marine mammals.

Green Ship certification programme

+6 points

-2



Major shipping companies invest in eco-friendly technologies and gain certification for reduced emissions and ballast water management.

Data Sharing from shipping industry

+ 3 points

0



Shipping industry agrees to share vessel tracking and oceanographic data to support MPA monitoring and enforcement.

Port electrification pilot

+ 6 points

- 3



A major shipping company co-invests in shore power infrastructure, allowing vessels to shut off engines while docked, reducing underwater noise and emissions.

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Participatory

+ 7 points

+ 7



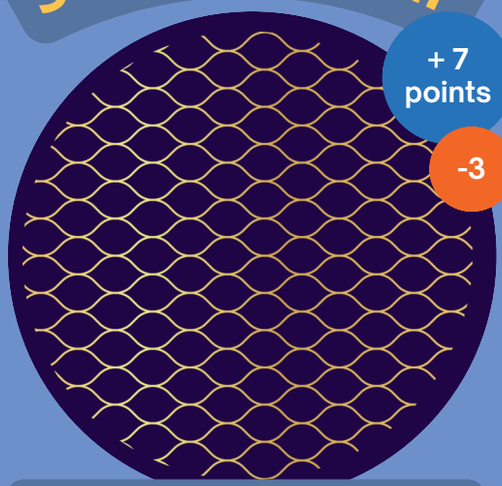
MPA co-design

Stakeholders participates in a committee to co-design MPA zoning, ensuring both conservation and livelihoods.

Selective Gear

+ 7 points

-3



Adoption Campaign

Union promotes use of selective and low-impact fishing gear to reduce bycatch and seabed disturbance in and around MPAs. It is a bit of an investment but with great ecological benefits.

Spawning season

+ 8 points

- 2



ban agreement

Fishers voluntarily agree to a temporary seasonal ban in key spawning areas to support long-term stock regeneration.

Lost Gear retrieval

+ 7 points

+5



operation

The fishers union agree to retrieve ghost gear found at sea to reduce marine debris in coastal protected zones, receiving some incentives in exchange.

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Perception Elicitation & Awareness raising

+3 points

+6



Surveys and interviews with the local community captured how communities perceive the local MPA and their concerns. This created long-term support for conservation activities in the area & compliance with regulations.

Community of practice

+4 points

+4



MPA and MSP planners as well as key stakeholders create a collaborative platform to promote socially just conservation measures in MSP.

Decommissioned Rig Rewilding investment

+ 4 points

- 2



The oil company supports the transformation of a decommissioned offshore platform into an artificial reef, boosting local marine biodiversity and habitat complexity.

Funding MPA Compensation scheme

0 points

+5



The oil company launches a compensation fund for local fishers and coastal communities affected by noise, pollution, or access restrictions caused by nearby extraction activities.

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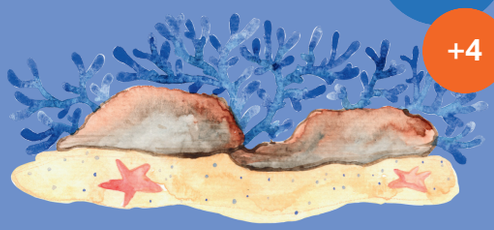
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Ecosystem Service Valuation

+6 points

+4



carried out

Literature research and interviews with the local population and tourists were utilised to assess the value of restoring oyster reefs. Communicating the ecological & economic benefits resulted in support for habitat restoration.

Cummulative effects assessment

+4 points

0



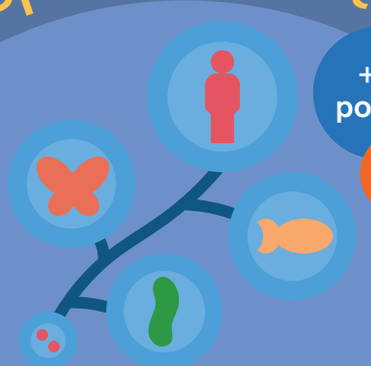
carried out

Software-based analysis identified combined pressures in and around the MPA. By showing cumulative impacts, it enabled evidence-based planning and prioritisation of protective measures in the area.

Non-indigenous Species Effect

+ 7 points

+ 2



Assessment Tool

Managers applied the NEAT tool to assess and map invasive species. This provided clear evidence of their impact, helping to prioritise responses and safeguard native biodiversity.

Participatory Rezoning for

+6 points

+6



Balanced MPA Design

Stakeholders helped redesign MPA zones, ensuring that conservation goals were met while safeguarding local livelihoods, building both ecological effectiveness and community acceptance.

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Fishers Union



The fishers union opposes strict MPAs but supports co-managed areas.

Define your own stakeholder group



Define which stakheolder group you want to represent.

Shipping Industry



The shipping industry is willing to reroute if the shipping route doesn't take more than 1 extra day of travelling (despite the economic consequences).

Marine Scientists



Marine scientists favour strict protection and say that restricting 10% of the MPA could cause a biodiversity increase of 50% in the upcoming 5 years. However, fishing activities will be affected.

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Environmental



NGOs

Local environmental groups support the establishment of areas to protect marine ecosystems.

National



government

National authorities agree to international conservation targets and commit the necessary resources to establish an MPA network.

Nature Research



institute

Nature Research Institute is interested in funding for their studies and the production of data that could help improve the design of MPAs.

Living Lab



community

A community of NGOs, school teachers, and scuba divers forms a Local Living Lab. They plan awareness events in support of the MPA.

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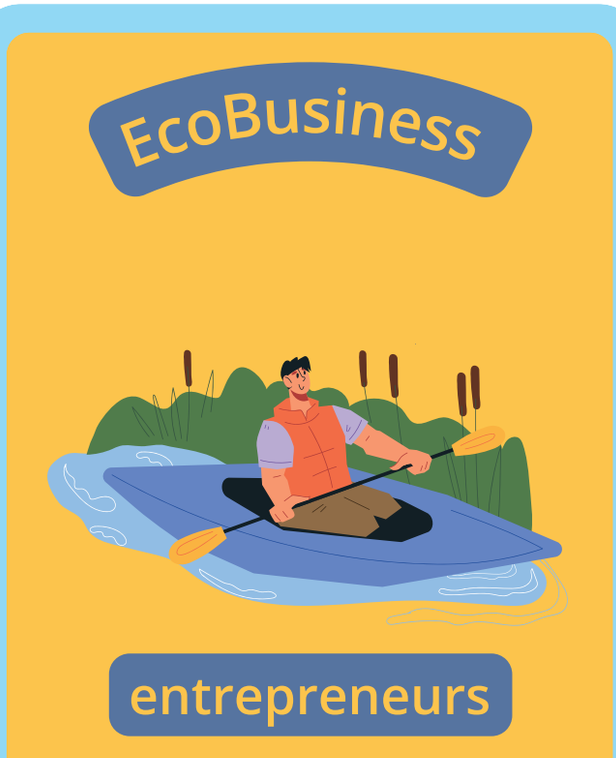
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Define which stakheolder group you want to represent.



Local MPA managers form strong collaborative communities of practice with other MPAs to share knowledge, best practices and lessons learned. Their interest is to protect the environment.



There is a growth in new tourism and craft industry businesses within the allowed use areas of the MPA.



The local youth association fights for further restriction of commercial fishing activities in their coastal town.

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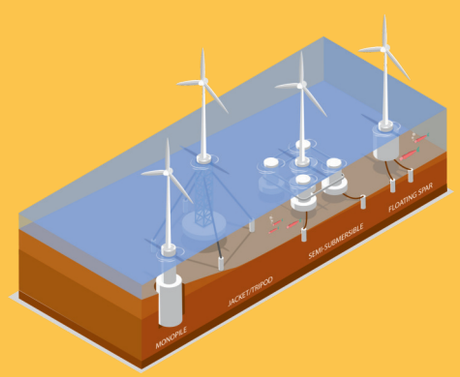
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Offshore energy sector



Supports blue corridors but concerned about restrictions on development, which would cause job losses, slow down the energy transition and lead to increased energy production costs.

Maritime Spatial planners



Marine spatial planners balance conservation, connectivity, and sustainable use, but compromises weaken protection, and conflicts delay decisions and growth.

Oil industry



The local oil companies oppose the implementation of the MPA to continue oil extraction and secure jobs.

Small-Scale fishers



Favor co-management and sustainable use but oppose full closures in MPAs.

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Climate Change

heatwave

- 5 points

0



Killed corals

A prolonged heatwave killed 10% of the population of corals in the reef. There were no economic losses, only ecological pones.

Illegal fishing

- 6 points

+3



area spotted

It has been reported that the illegal fishing area not being surveilled reduces fish populations by 30%.

EU Conservation

Grant

+ 5 points

+ 3



secured

Funding secured for implementing the restoration project.

New policy

+ 4 points

- 2



Favouring MPAs

This new policy strengthens regulations and introduces economic restrictions.

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Stakeholder conflict over MPA expansion

- 5 points

- 3



Disagreements between fishers, conservationists, and policymakers delay MPA implementation, holding up protection measures and causing uncertainty impact son local livelihoods.

Stricter protection targets announced

+ 6 points

- 4



A new policy increases the mandatory percentage of strictly protected zones for all MPAs at a national level.

Major infrastructure project approved

- 8 points

+ 4



A large port expansion disrupts marine corridors bringing economic benefits from trade and shipping.

New Ocean Literacy initative implemented in schools

+ 3 points

+ 3



Education programs raise awareness about oceans, MPAs and connectivity, causing a long-term support for conservation policies.

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Local Authorities do not favor biodiversity protection

- 3 points

+4



New elected authorities favor economic use of the marine environment over establishing protected areas.

New Salmon Farm

-4 points

+6



A local aquaculture firm requests permission to install new aquaculture sea tanks for Atlantic salmon.

Sea urchins damage kelp forests

- 4 points

0



An increase in the size of the population of sea urchins damage local kelp forest, reducing local biodiversity.

New coastal development

- 3 points

+ 6



The higher natural value of the coast raises demand to live in the area and a new residential and tourism development is planned.

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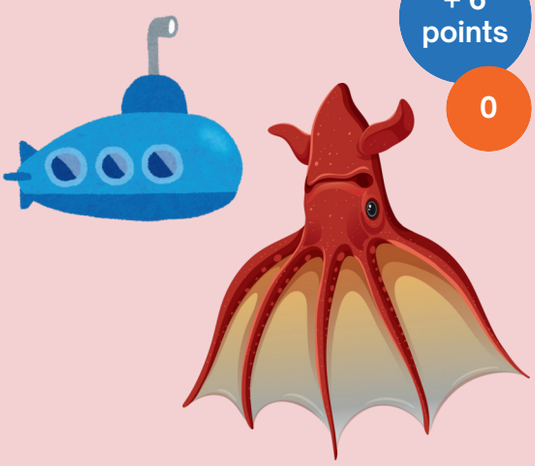
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Unexpected Discovery

+ 6 points

0



A charismatic threatened species is recorded by citizen scientists in the MPA for the first time.

Media Support

+5 points

0



A popular local journalist has presented a video or article in strong positive support of the MPA and process.

Renewable Energy

+7 points

+4



targets increase

The EU Commission raises renewable energy production per country even more. Policy makers struggle to achieve this while reaching 2030's conservation goals.

New Round of MSP

+7 points

+7



The current Maritime Spatial Plan reaches its expiration year, and the new one is designed with a full set of new tools to assist policy makers in the application of an Ecosystem-based approach.

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Unexpected change in MPA

- 4 points

-4



management staff

A new MPA manager lacks key project information, missing engagement in essential conservation tools.

Funding shortage

- 7 points

-7



forces training cancellation

Funding shortages force the cancellation of MPA co-management & co-creation training.

Successful Public Awareness event

+ 2 points

+ 5

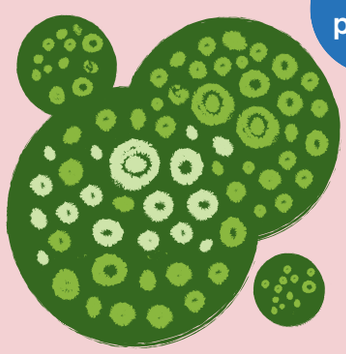


Public awareness event draws 200+ participants, earning positive feedback on MPA effectiveness.

Climate Change Impact

- 7 points

- 4



causes harmful algal blooms

A harmful algae bloom caused by increased temperatures and overnutrification of the water creates an oxygen depleted zone where marine life cannot exist.

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Review of the EU MSP Directive

+ 5 points

-1



The adaptation of the EU MSP Directive leads to higher prioritisation of MPAs restricting certain activities within its boundaries.

Citizen Science Initiative

+ 3 points

+2



increases data availability

By mobilising the local community and tourism sector, citizens deliver hundreds of data records to science. This significantly contributes to the data availability in this region.

Europe gets invaded

-10 points

-10



by a climate change denier president

All sustainability subsidies are removed. Plastic straws become mandatory, biodiversity and economy collapse, temperature exceeds a 2°C increase in 2040. The world burns.

Overfishing wipes

- 10 points

- 10



out fish species

The lack of compliance and enforcement of fishing quotas makes illegal fishing get out of control until wiping out a fish species.

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