



PRESS RELEASE

“The Republic of South Africa now protects 15.5 percent of its marine and coastal areas, surpassing its commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals”

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nairobi, 16 July 2021 – South Africa has declared 42 marine and coastal areas as protected, representing 15.5¹ percent of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), according to a new [Marine Protected Areas Outlook](#) by the UNEP-Nairobi Convention and the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association. The establishment of these Marine Protected Areas, or MPAs, mean that South Africa has exceeded its commitments under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14.5 and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Target 11, under which governments made a commitment to protect 10% of their EEZ by 2020.

The Marine Protected Areas Outlook, released today, indicates that these MPAs span a breadth of 57,943 square kilometers. 20 of these MPAs were declared in 2019, showing the country’s strong momentum as it prepares to achieve future environmental targets under the Global Biodiversity Framework.

Although the ocean provides us with resources essential for survival—like food, employment, and even oxygen—the world is damaging and depleting it faster than ever, . provided by the ocean. Soon, South Africa may no longer be able to count on the many jobs, health, and economic benefits that the Western Indian Ocean provides.

Marine protected areas offer one of the best options to reverse these trends. “A well-managed MPA can bring significant economic, social, and environmental benefits to the surrounding landscape as well as the country,” **Jacques du Toit of the Helderberg Marine Protected Area in the City of Cape Town.** “They can increase food security by preventing the overexploitation of fish stocks; create and protect jobs in the tourism and fisheries and environmental management sectors; build resilience to climate change; and protect species and habitats, just to name a few benefits.”

The Western Indian Ocean Marine Protected Areas Outlook: Towards achievement of the Global Biodiversity Framework Targets examines the current and future status of MPAs at a regional level. It documents the progress made by nine countries in the WIO region in increasing MPA coverage, highlights best practices and challenges faced by governments in managing MPAs, and provides recommendations on how to make the impacts of MPAs even greater.

Key recommendations from the Outlook include the need for dedicated budgets for MPA management, adopting proactive law enforcement and compliance strategies to ensure MPA guidelines are being

¹ This percentage includes Prince Edward Islands and its marine protected area. When Prince Edward Islands is not included, South Africa has protected 5.4% of its mainland Exclusive Economic Zone.

respected; incorporating research and monitoring programs on biodiversity and ecosystems into decision-making in MPAs, among others.

Though South Africa has made significant strides forward in protecting its marine and coastal areas, there are several opportunities to build on this progress and ensure that people, the economy, and nature reap even more benefits from MPAs.

By seizing on the opportunities presented in the MPA Outlook, South Africa and other countries in the region can capitalize on this momentum of expanding and improving MPA management—thereby safeguarding the WIO's immense natural beauty and resources for generations to come.

NOTES TO EDITORS

This Outlook was developed under the [Implementation of the Strategic Action Programme for the Protection of the Western Indian Ocean from Land-Based Sources and Activities](#) project of the Nairobi Convention, funded by the Global Environment Facility.

The Nairobi Convention, signed by Comoros, France, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa, and Tanzania, aims to promote a prosperous Western Indian Ocean region with healthy rivers, coasts, and oceans. It provides a platform for governments, civil society, and the private sector to work together for the sustainable management and use of the marine and coastal environment.

The UN Environment Programme is the leading global voice on the environment. It provides leadership and encourages partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.

The **Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association is a non-profit, membership organization** dedicated to promoting the educational, scientific and technological development of all aspects of marine sciences throughout the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region, with a view toward sustaining the use and conservation of its marine resources.