

# MPA

Issue Briefs for the Caribbean  
*Lessons learned for building and sustaining effective marine protected areas*



## MPA GOVERNANCE

*Design and implement the appropriate legal, policy and social framework for long-term success*

### WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

Governance is a broad topic that encompasses the legislative and jurisdictional framework, policies, and mechanisms used to support decision-making and the rule of law in a sector of responsibility in society. Establishing effective marine resource governance requires long-term commitment to develop the **formal and informal arrangements, institutional capacity, public engagement processes and social behavior** that determines how resources are managed for present and future generations. In creating a system of authority and accountability, **governance helps shape resource management planning, enforcement and development of shared social norms regarding sustainable use of the marine environment.** Progressive governance models increasingly seek to combine top-down, bottom-up and market driven approaches that support effective, ecologically resilient and socially equitable MPAs.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) recognize four main types of governance (see table 1): centralized governance, shared governance or co-management, locally led governance and private governance. Each is comprised of distinct yet sometimes overlapping attributes regarding decision-making processes and designated management authority. A centralized or government led approach to acquiring, establishing and designating MPAs remains the traditional form of governance in many places. At the same time, innovative co-management (shared governance) agreements and locally led efforts evolving across the Wider Caribbean regularly demonstrate the benefits of devolved management and shared responsibility. **In any approach, the institutional arrangements, governance capacity and level of public involvement all affect MPA design, implementation and potential for long-term success.**

	Centralized governance	Shared governance or co-management	Locally led governance	Private governance
Main attributes	Government institutions working in cooperation with each other and often in some form of stakeholder consultation	Management and joint decision-making bodies include a range of stakeholder interests, operating by collaborative engagement and informed consent	Locally declared and managed areas, often occurring at a small-scale with high levels of community participation	Private sector governance led by non-profit entities (NGOs, universities or research organizations) or for-profit entities (individual landowners or businesses)
Advantages	Creates potential to consider ecological and network connectivity over large areas in designing MPAs and MPA networks	Sometimes evolves from a community-driven process based on collaboration, trust and ownership of process	Often most feasible in the context of weak institutions or strong resistance to centralized authority	Driven by proper incentives, the private sector may pursue protected area status, conserve resources and promoted sustainable development
	May benefit from consistently dedicated financial resources, existing institutional infrastructure, and technical expertise	May realize community benefits and foster compliance through incorporation of stakeholder interests during early planning stages	May evolve into co-management structure with government authorities if desired and guided by informed consent	Private sector often has the ability to act quickly, efficiently and effectively
	Often easier to apply of fees structure  Independent of local economic and political pressures	Promotes integration of the best aspects of both top down and bottom up management	Commonly responsive to local knowledge, resource conditions and interest in self-determination	
Challenges	Requires strong institutions and significant financial and technical resources for implementation	At times difficult to reconcile local socioeconomic needs and interests with national and global environmental pressures	Often most feasible in the context of weak institutions or strong resistance to centralized authority	Sometimes generates controversy, particularly in relation to resource access or misalignment with local values and conservation efforts
	May be difficult to align centralized goals to local socioeconomic needs and interests  May reveal disagreements between and community and managers, particularly in areas with weak enforcement	National institutions may feel threatened by co-management structures that question centralized authority  Establishment of co-management boards may be difficult without clear mandates and steady financial resources	May evolve into co-management structure with government authorities if desired and guided by informed consent  Commonly responsive to local knowledge, resource conditions and interest in self-determination	May have limited resources compared to governance structures with access to dedicated government funding or grants
Examples	Cozumel Reefs National Marine Park, Mexico	Cayos Cochinos National Monument, Honduras	Locally Managed Marine Area Network in the Indo-Pacific:	Belize Association of Private Protected Areas:
	Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary, California	La Caleta Marine Park, Dominican Republic.	Hinatuan Bay Marine Sanctuary, Philippines	Community Baboon Sanctuary
	Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, Florida	Roatan Marine Park, Honduras	Namena Marine Reserve, Fiji	Golden Stream (Ya'ache')
	Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Australia	Soufriere Marine Management Association, St Lucia  Sandy Island/Oyster Bed Marine Protected Area, Grenada	Nahtik Island Marine Protected Area, Pohnpei  Raja Ampat Islands, Indonesia	Monkey Bay  Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area  Shipstern Nature Reserve

Table 1. Adapted from IUCN (2008) and Christie and White (2007).

## WHAT LESSONS MAY APPLY TO MY MARINE PROTECTED AREA?

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**Embrace a holistic approach.** MPAs are increasingly embedded within complex governance systems such as Integrated Coastal Management, Ecosystem Based Management or Marine Spatial Planning processes. This is especially true when governments declare protected areas that include both terrestrial and marine environments. These larger frameworks tend to be more effective than uncoordinated or isolated efforts at facilitating knowledge sharing and cooperation among governing bodies, incorporating public interests, utilizing science and technology, and considering the marine ecosystem as a whole, including humans. (See [Belize National Protected Area Network](#); [California Marine Life Protection Act](#); [Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority](#).)

**Strive to achieve clarity.** A well-formulated legislative framework enhances coastal and marine policy development, management planning, law enforcement and decision-making. Effective governance structure requires clear objectives as well as broad understanding and acceptance of the roles and responsibilities of government agencies, designated co-management authorities and interested parties. For marine resource managers and staff, clarity is essential to create the enabling conditions that strengthen adherence to management goals, policies and priorities over time and across changing government regimes. Ambiguity and uncertainty limit the likelihood of success. (See [Integrated Coastal Management Planning in Belize](#).)

**Cultivate leadership and political will.** Effective marine resource governance requires strong leadership based on integrity and good faith actions, open and honest communication, long-

term commitment, and the presence of supportive partners across the network of government authorities, non-governmental organizations, stakeholders and community interests. Garnering early support among policymakers is critical, particularly when developing the legislative framework and any associated planning documents. Management subsequently benefits from enhanced political will, potential for dedicated funding and clear rule of law. (See [Hol Chan Marine Reserve, Belize](#).)

**Involve stakeholders early and often.** Successful governance models commonly facilitate collaborative engagement among interested stakeholder groups. Remember that effective governance depends on the ability of people from different backgrounds and perspectives to understand each others needs, forge agreements and come to mutual agreement on a comprehensive vision that incorporates economic, social and environmental concerns. Initiating outreach during the early planning stages is a critical first step. Stakeholders bring valuable knowledge of the resource, help identify goals, priorities and trade offs, and assist policymakers and government planners in aligning institutional arrangements with social and cultural norms. Perhaps most importantly, effective stakeholder engagement builds trust and ownership in the process, generates support for management and improves compliance with established rules and regulations. (See [Belize managed access fisheries program](#).)

**Formalize collaborative engagement.** The formal establishment of management boards, steering committees, advisory groups or other collaborative bodies helps managers secure consistent stakeholder input, promote shared

responsibility for sustainable resource use, and foster both transparency and accountability among all parties. Advisory groups generally represent a range of interests working together to achieve a specific set of objectives. In some local contexts, informal collaboration naturally evolves into the establishment of a management board that sets the strategies, policies, and budgets that guide the daily operations of MPA staff. For centralized authorities, advisory groups allow managers to listen to, understand and incorporate public sentiment into management planning. In any case, ensure that the guiding legislative framework includes a mechanism or provision that supports collaboration. (See [Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Reef Advisory Committees](#) and [Local Marine Advisory Committees](#); [Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Councils](#) and [Coralina's work in the Seaflower Biosphere Reserve, Columbia](#).)

**Consider a devolved management arrangement.** A growing number of case studies demonstrate the benefits of shared marine resource governance or what is now commonly referred to as co-management. Under a co-management scenario, government agencies and stakeholder interests share responsibility and management authority. Managers and staff often interact closely with affected communities and are thus well positioned to build partnerships and foster good governance. Co-management is typically developed and implemented using a combination of top down (statutes, policy, enforcement) and bottom up (stakeholder engagement, informed consent) approaches. The key for any situation is to find the right mixture of both. Every context is unique and thus no single arrangement can be universally applied with success. (See [Roatan Marine Park, Bay Islands](#), Honduras among a growing

number of developing sites across the Caribbean.)

**Develop open lines of communication.** Trust is a critical variable for building and maintaining public support for MPAs. Developing a communication plan as early as possible helps improve understanding of the planning process and preempts any misinformation about how management may affect stakeholders. At minimum, early communication should aim to educate a wide audience on the relevant issues, identify affected and interested stakeholders, acknowledge local resource values and demonstrate the benefits of management. A parallel outreach effort may promote communication and cooperation between government agencies, and with NGOs or other organizations charged with co-management responsibilities. (See [Bonaire Marine Park](#).)

**Commit to building a talented management team.** MPAs advance in concert with the institutional capacity and professional abilities of those responsible for management. Regular investment in professional development training builds the requisite knowledge, skills and experience of managers and staff, and by extension, the capacity of the management authority itself. Over time marine resource professionals become effective, efficient, technically skilled and legitimate in the eyes of the public. Consider sending MPA staff -- managers, enforcement officers, scientists or outreach specialists -- to the annual [UNEP-CEP/CaMPAM Training of Trainers Course in MPA Management](#).

**Facilitate an adaptive, step-by-step approach.** Patience and flexibility are needed to effectively monitor, understand and respond to changing circumstances, whether biophysical, social or

economic. Remember that effective management sometimes requires change as new information comes to light. Design monitoring and evaluation processes that enable an adaptive approach and be prepared for opportunities and challenges as they present themselves. Also recognize that governance models need not be set in stone. Experimenting with various structures and processes specifically to learn what works best reflects a proactive rather than reactive approach to management.

**Practice principled actions.** Successful marine resource governance is based on principles of transparency, accountability, inclusiveness and equity, among others. Experience demonstrates that governance led by principled action helps legitimize management authority in the public sphere, enhances trust and collaboration, and improves compliance with rules and regulations.

## WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

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