

Initiating Marine Spatial Planning in the Falkland Islands to ensure sustainable management

The Falkland Islands are remote, wild, pristine and beautiful. The islands host breeding populations of seabirds of global significance, but are also locally important for the islanders and the tourism industry. The islands are surrounded by the Patagonian Shelf, a hotspot of marine wildlife that also supports the islands' commercial fisheries. The Darwin project 'Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) for the Falkland Islands' started in July 2014, led by the South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute (SAERI), and supported by the Falklands Islands Government (FIG). The project aimed to initiate the process of MSP for the islands by preparing data, tools and analyses, and to produce an MSP framework for FIG.

Marine mapping and stakeholder engagement have been two highlights of the project. Over 50 datasets were gathered and mapped, all of which are available in the MSP Geographic Information System (GIS) database; many layers can also now be visualised online with a new prototype webGIS (click [here](#)). These layers include human activities (e.g. boat traffic, anchoring), environmental variables (e.g. bathymetry, the depth of ocean floors), biological data (e.g. seabird colonies and their use of near-shore areas), and cultural values (e.g. recreational boating areas). All principal marine stakeholders have been involved in the project, via a project steering committee, workshops, public consultation or meetings.

Government and political support is key to ensuring the long-term sustainability of the MSP process. In December 2015, building on their commitment in the Falkland Islands Plan, the FIG Executive Council agreed to the production of an MSP Plan as part of a second (development) phase of MSP that will follow

the initial Darwin project, which is now considered phase 1 (initiation) in the islands' MSP process.

Other project outputs include:

- **New data sets:** For the first time, the MSP project provided shipping data around the islands over one full year. Using the Automated Information System run by the local telecommunications company, the hourly locations of ships within the Falklands' Exclusive Economic Zone were stored and analysed. Despite the remoteness of the islands, shipping routes appeared, in particular on the western side of the islands, including large vessels transiting within 4 km of the islands. This enabled the MSP team to identify vulnerable areas at risk from shipping and boating activities. As part of the MSP, shipping exclusion zones will be proposed to reduce risks to the environment and human safety.
- **Three successful stakeholder workshops** - the last of which took place 5-7 April 2016 in Stanley - brought local stakeholders together with UK experts to have technical discussions on the future for the MSP. All stakeholders agreed that MSP will provide benefits to the islands, with an emphasis on having policies in place, recommending shipping management, and identifying the most ecologically important areas to ensure they are managed accordingly.
- **Identifying and addressing data gaps:** During the workshops and the data collection and mapping work, clear data gaps were identified. This led to the MSP team designing two complementary projects to address these gaps (completed during the length of the MSP project), and also to develop a new proposal



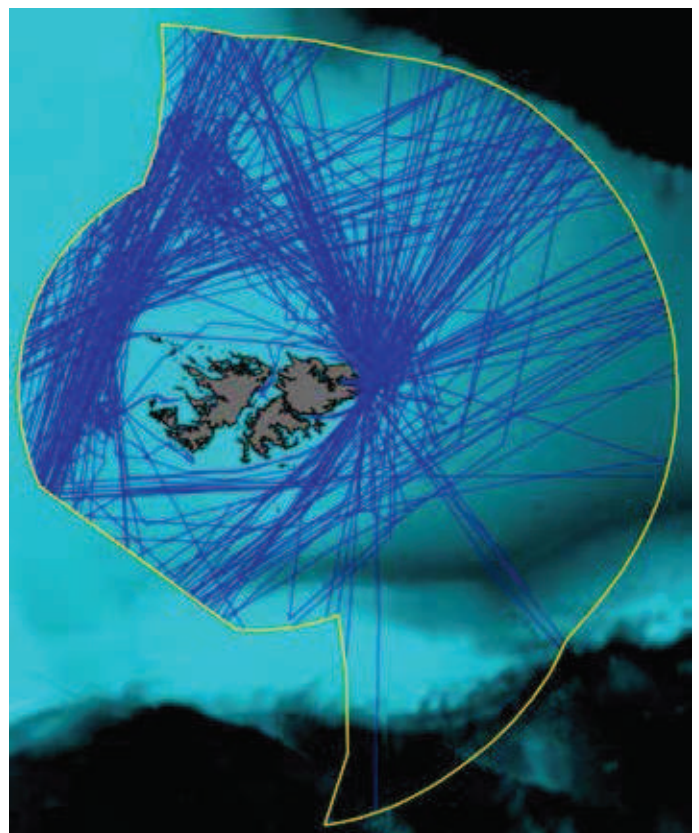
Participants at the MSP workshop in April 2016, Credit: S Hirtle

for a larger project on near-shore cetaceans that will start in 2016. The two complementary projects focussed on mapping the coastal areas of cultural value to islanders and mapping baleen whale recovery from historic whaling. Both required interviewing local residents and allowed for a public communication campaign throughout the islands that promoted MSP in the local community.

The Darwin project is coming to an end in June 2016, but it has developed much needed tools, stakeholder and government consultation and engagement to provide a sound foundation for the long-term sustainability of the MSP process. FIG's renewed commitment to the next phase of MSP with the ultimate production of the first Falkland Islands Marine Spatial Plan will ensure that the islands demonstrate marine environmental stewardship, with a holistic approach to management of the complex, productive and valuable marine environment that provides a wealth of economic and social benefits to the islanders.

For more information about Darwin Plus project DPLUS027 click [here](#), or contact Amélie Augé, AAuge@env.institute.ac.fk

To access to all the workshop reports, maps, webGIS, database, etc, check the project webpage at <http://south-atlantic-research.org/research/current-research/marine-spatial-planning>.



Tracks of cargo ships around the Falkland Islands over one year, Credit: A Augé