

SAERI NEWS

SAERI staff participate in Ascension Island MPA workshop in London

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Ascension Island is a tiny island in the middle of the South Atlantic, right below the equator. The land area of the island is very small with its 88 km², but it comes with a large marine Economic Exclusive Zone (EEZ) of 445,390 km² administered by the [Ascension Island Government \(AIG\)](#). The island is one of the UK Overseas Territories. As part of the Blue Belt initiative for the UKOTs by the UK Government, some of the islands' waters are going to become a [large no-take MPA](#) with a fishing closure area to be designed for 50% of the area.

AIG ran a workshop on 18 April 2016 at the Foreign Commonwealth Office in London where three SAERI staff were invited: Dr Paul Brickle, Tara Pelembe and me, Dr Amélie Augé. The workshop called 'Towards an evidence-based MPA for Ascension Island: Ensuring scientifically robust marine spatial planning' aimed:

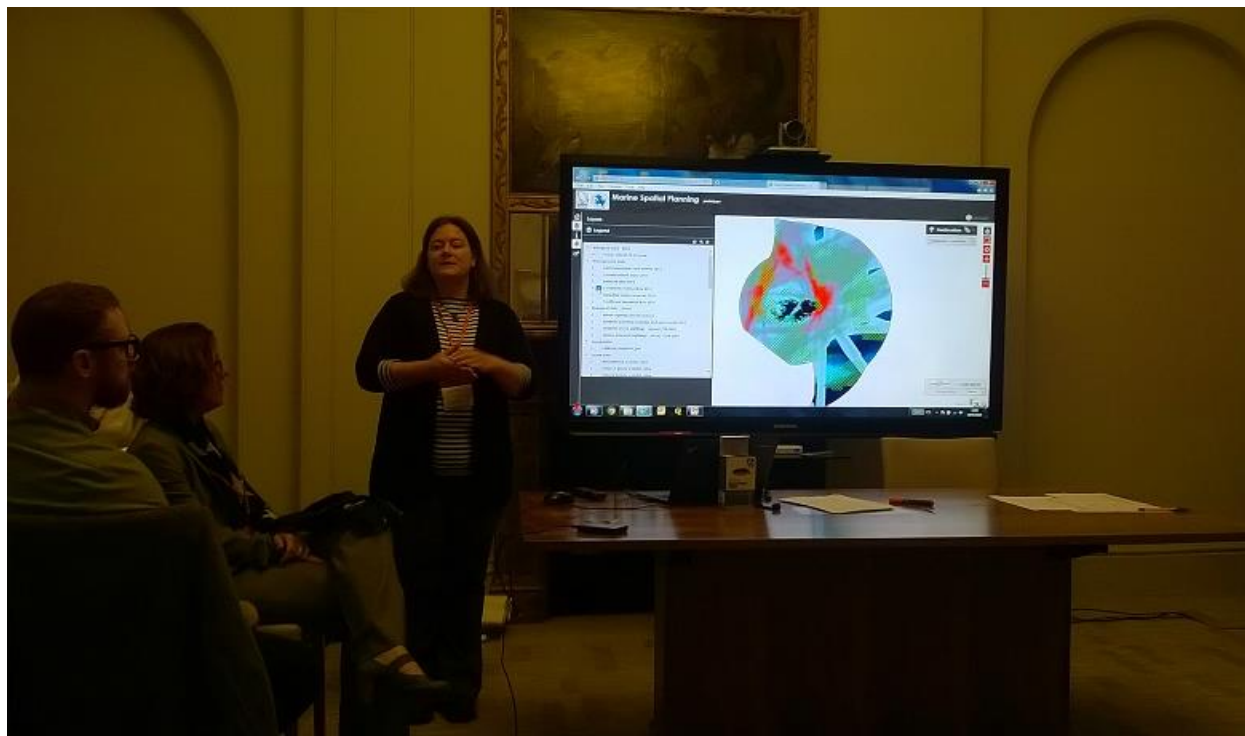
1. To review current knowledge of Ascension Island's marine environment in the context of marine spatial planning and sufficiency for marine reserve designation.
2. To draw up a prioritised and costed list of research that still needs to be completed, including both pre-designation evidence gathering and subsequent monitoring.
3. To discuss practical aspects of delivering the science plan, including logistics and legacy planning

The ultimate objective of the scientific programme will be to integrate all available fisheries and ecological data within a formal marine spatial planning framework to ensure that any future large-scale MPA is placed in the most appropriate location." [*Extracts from workshop material*]

The workshop provided a great venue to discuss aspects of scientific needs to design the MPA and an MSP process to assist AIG in developing best practice to define what areas should be closed and a science program. SAERI has been involved with several marine research projects (and will be with others in the future) that provided important data on fish and benthic habitats around the island and were used in the discussions. I also gave a short presentation about the MSP process in the Falklands, showcasing the

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production of the MSP GIS database and its online application: the prototype [Falklands MSP webGIS](#). This showed an example of how AIG could produce scientific tools to facilitate the identification of areas where the no-zone take would provide the most conservation benefits. Links between the two territories will hopefully be developed in the future to share experience and expertise for MSP research.



Dr Amélie Augé presenting the Falklands MSP process to the participants



Dr Jude Brown summarising the workshop day to UK Minister for the UKOTs

The Minister for the UKOTs joined the participants at the end of the day and Dr Judith Brown (AIG Director of Fisheries, workshop organiser and facilitator) gave a summary of the day's discussions and conclusions to the Minister who, then, provided insights in the importance of the process for the UK Government, and thanked the participants for their inputs.

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An evening reception at the end of the workshop provided great networking opportunities with the participants, along with a range of other invited guests from various NGOs and UK Government representatives. My walk back to the hotel after the reception provided beautiful night-time views of London, a change from the Stanley night lights!



Amélie's attendance was funded as part of the Darwin Plus project 'Marine spatial planning for the Falkland Islands'.