

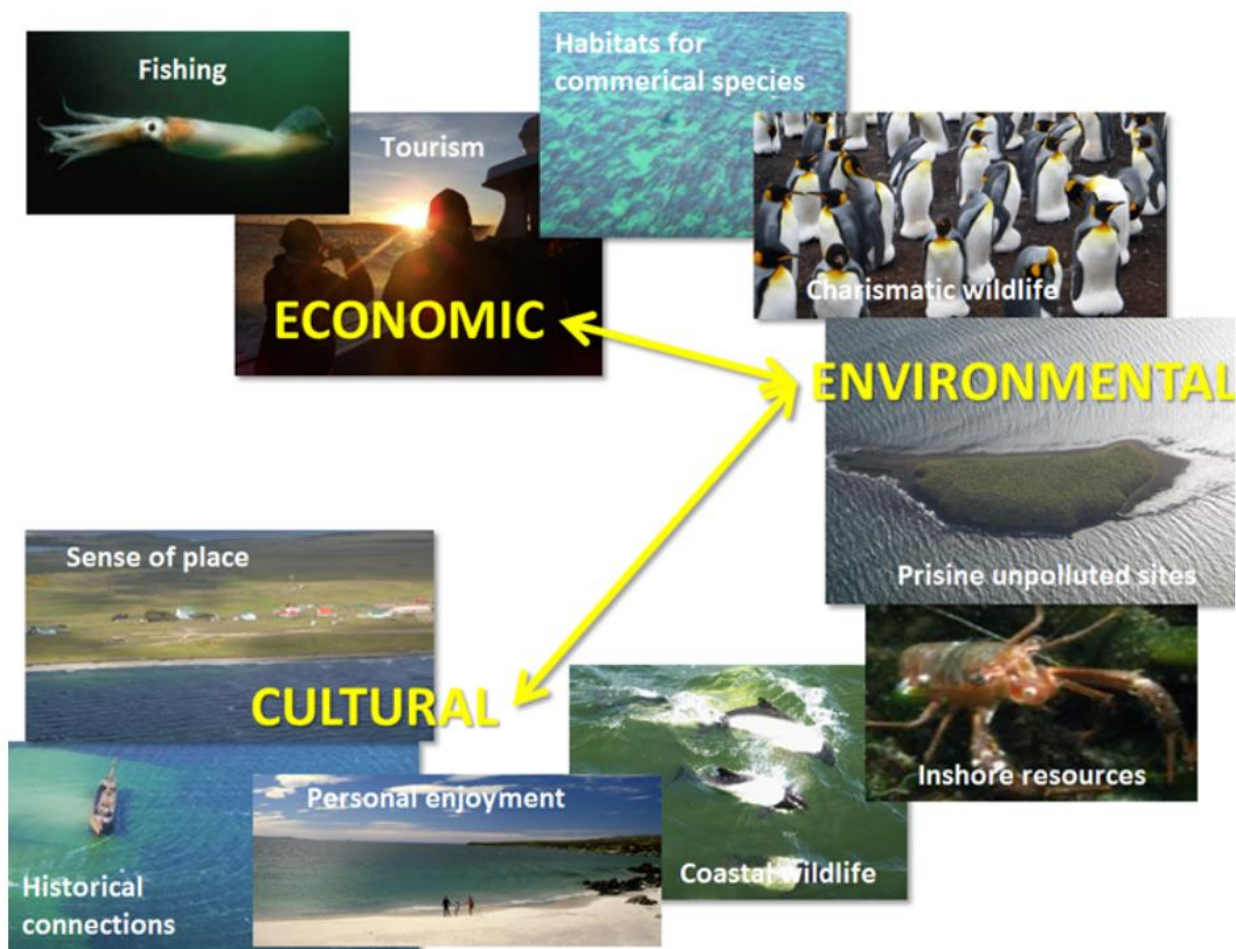
Marine spatial planning: Ensuring long-term future of the Falkland Islands' economy and beauty

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The ocean around the Falkland Islands is very productive, hosts many marine species, and is still in excellent condition compared to most other parts of the world. The long-term economy of the Islands depends almost entirely on this prolific and healthy marine environment. Commercial fisheries and tourism are the two main current activities that, if managed sustainably and safely, will provide long-term economic security for the Islands. In comparison, oil exploitation will be a fixed-term economic benefit and is, by default, not sustainable because it relies on a non-renewable resource that will run out. New and expanding marine activities should therefore be managed co-ordinately and soundly to ensure fishing and tourism can still thrive along with potential new sustainable activities. Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) is the process of developing a strategic plan to manage marine activities and ensure that economic, environmental, and also cultural values are included in the decision process.

The easiest description for MSP is "land-use planning – for the sea"! Most people understand the need for land-use planning. For instance, it avoids someone building a house and realising 2 years later that, next to it, was the only suitable plot for a sewage treatment plant... Planning is all about looking in and thinking about the future. Keeping the marine environment healthy and safe is crucial for the long-term economy of the Falklands because it will keep providing fish and squids and habitats where they can reproduce and grow, but also because it will allow charismatic wildlife attracting tourists here to thrive. Though, it does not end here. An often-forgotten link to the marine environment is cultural. Watching the waves, walking on the coast with the kids or the dog, admiring a sunset over the ocean, and visiting a historical wreck are examples of personal enjoyment the sea can bring to us. The beautiful areas that you cherish also require management to ensure that they are still there for future generations and stay clean. Finally, another benefit provided by efficient MSP is increased marine safety because the aim of MSP is, overall, to decrease the risks of maritime accidents by managing where things happen. Imagine if a boat grounded next to your favourite spot, threatening the life of the crew on board, while having oil and rubbish cover the coast. Would you have thought that asking that boat to travel only a few kms further from the coast (taking that boat may be an extra 30 mins) would have been too much then? Well, this is exactly why MSP is so important, because it provides the tools to FIG to think of future risks and act now to manage them so that no one has to be sorry in the future.

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The figure illustrates the intricate links between the marine environment and economic and cultural values of the Falkland Islands.

The Falkland Islands currently have no MSP in place at the exception of temporary fishing closure areas. With an increasing level of human activities in the ocean, in particular for oil exploration, but also for shipping traffic for instance, the need to identify areas sensitive to safety and environmental risks has been wisely identified as a priority by the current government. The Islands Plan 2014-18 states as an action to “Implement appropriate [...] marine spatial planning frameworks to ensure the preservation and management of [...] marine environments of the Falkland Islands”. In July 2014, a 2-year project funded by Darwin Plus (a UK Government grant scheme for the UKOTs) was initiated at SAERI to produce scientific data and a best-practice framework needed for FIG to implement an MSP process here. The project is conducted with a strong stakeholder engagement that has included public consultation and local workshops, meetings with MLAs and FIG staff, and a steering committee with local stakeholder representatives. The spatial data gathered and mapped so far are, for example, shipping traffic, military exercise areas, pleasure boating areas, and anchoring areas. Wildlife data are also gathered and analysed.

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Areas of potential conflicts are then identified by overlapping the spatial datasets, which can reveal where risks exist, for safety and/or environmental damage. All data, results of analyses and recommendations will be provided to FIG that will then decide what MSP will look like in the Falklands. SAERI provides objective scientific tools to FIG to help them make appropriate decisions for a sustainable future and ensure long-term economic wealth and clean enjoyable marine and coastal environments of the Islands.



The figure shows hourly locations of all ships and boats (red dots) around the Falkland Islands over one year (May 2014 to May 2015). During that period, over 1,500 different boats used the Falklands' marine area, including 119 oil tankers. The data come from the AIS system run by Sure in Stanley (thanks to Mark Street for providing the raw data from this system).

An interesting example of established MSP can be found in the Shetland Islands where, for the last 12 years, a team based at the local university has worked on MSP providing scientific tools that helped the government managed new development, including for oil, aquaculture and marine wind turbines, by making informed decisions. You can check out their website here: <http://www.nafc.uhi.ac.uk/departments/marine-science-and-technology/strategy/marine-spatial-planning>.

For more information, questions or interest in being involved in MSP in the Falkland Islands, Dr Augé can be contacted at SAERI by phone 27374 or email AAuge@env.institute.ac.fk.

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