

Audit on Marine Protected Areas

What have we audited?

The Portuguese Court of Auditors audited the actions developed by Portuguese authorities for the protection of marine biodiversity through the creation and management of marine protected areas. The audit covered the period from 2010 to 2016.

The Portuguese government approved a *National Ocean Strategy* (2013-2020), which is currently under implementation. This strategy applies to the marine waters under Portuguese sovereignty or jurisdiction, aiming at increasing the economic, social and environmental value of the national maritime space. It comprises separate strategies for the mainland, for the islands of Azores, for the islands of Madeira and for the continental shelf.

The total area of marine areas already protected or designated by Portugal in the mainland and in the exclusive economic zone is close to 35 thousand km². In addition to these, there are five OSPAR protected marine areas of about 120 thousand km² on the extended continental shelf. There are processes underway to designate new sites of European Community importance and to extend one of the existing ones as well as to create new marine protected areas, covering close to additional 243 thousand km².

What have we concluded?

We have observed that, in general, the initial versions of the involved strategies were designed based on scientific work and were subject to public consultation.

The assessments conducted on the environmental status of the marine waters and on the environmental impact of human activities on them indicate that in Portugal there are no paramount risks of degradation of the sea environment. Even though, for those indicators where risks exist, monitoring was established.

The audit has found lack of coordination among the several competent authorities at different levels: as regards the processes to classify marine protected areas, concerning the management of these areas, in what relates to the authorisation of human activities in the protected areas and, also, in the performance of controlling activities. The most serious lack of coordination exists between the Directorate-General for Natural Resources, Safety and Maritime Services and the Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests.

The Court concluded that there are planning instruments for each marine protected area that include appropriate management measures to address the identified specific threats in that area. In many cases, the applicable planning instruments did not include measurable objectives, effective indicators, measurement of the baseline and information update systems. However, for the future review of these plans were legally established a command and a deadline.

Two other important shortcomings identified were that there is no sustainability assessment conducted for marine protected areas and that there is not a global monitoring structure for these areas. On the other hand, we observed that the public bodies currently and directly involved in the management of marine protected areas face shortage of means to effectively monitor and supervise them.

Goal 14 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Target 11 of Strategic Goal C of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets establish that, by 2020, 10% of the coastal and marine zones should be under protection. At the time of the audit (2018), this objective was far from achieved, since only 4% of those zones were covered by implemented protected areas. However, the processes already underway to create new marine protected areas, once concluded and formalised, will allow the achievement of those objectives, by covering a total area of 10,2%.

What did we recommend?

- **To the Minister of the Environment:**
 - To ensure that targets and measurable indicators are set for the revised programs
 - To implement a scheme for the monitoring and overall evaluation of marine protected areas
- **To the Minister of the Sea:**
 - To make efforts for the approval and publishing of the law that formalises the designation of the protected areas located in the exclusive economic zone
 - To submit to the Parliament a triennial report on *'the state of the planning and management of the national maritime space'* (already legally envisaged but not actually submitted until now).
- **To the Directorate-General for Natural Resources, Safety and Maritime Services and to the Institute for Nature Conservation and Forestry:**
 - To improve the coordination between themselves of the several competencies and procedures they are in charge with.