

# The impact of environmental audits relating to designating and the management of protected marine areas

Good practices and lessons learned

# Presentation objectives

- Background
- Why did we do this audit?
- Approaches Adopted
- Audit Findings
- Audit Impact
- Lesson learned

# Location of MPAs

Natura Terrestrial and Marine Sites (SCI, SPA, SCI-SPA) April 2016



# WHAT ARE WE PROTECTING?

SOURCE: "OCEANA / CARLOS MINGUELL © LIFE BAHAR FOR N2K"



# Why did we do this audit?

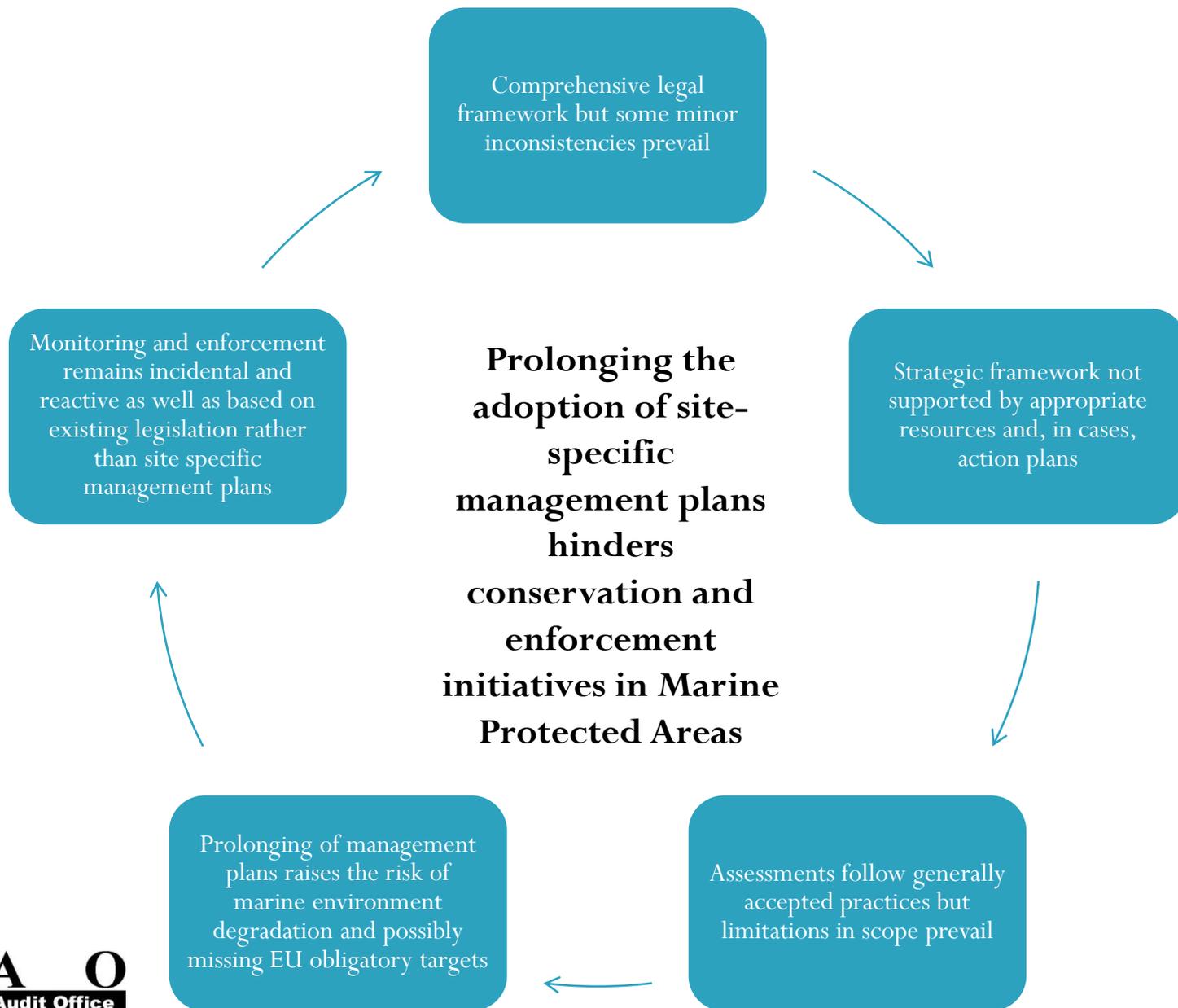
- Malta has 14 MPAs which amounts to around a third of its waters (FMZ)
- Reports from various sources highlight an imbalance between conservation and economic activity in Maltese Waters. Examples of contentions made in these reports include:
  - Threats from the maritime industry
    - Anchoring at Sikka l-Bajda (Bunkering area) is damaging the Posidonia beds
    - Littering
    - Routes close to protected areas
  - Excessive diving at Mgarr ix-Xini
  - Threats from the fish-farm industry – we are aware that ERA is taking action in this regard
- The Environmental Resource Authority is the main national entity entrusted to designate and monitor MPAs. As a newly established Authority, MPA related work was not always allocated priority
- Participation in the cooperative audit with partner Mediterranean SAIs

# Approaches adopted

- Documentation review
- Semi structured interviews

- Harmonization of methodology with partners of the cooperative audit
- Attendance in conferences and informative talks organised by stakeholders
- Benchmarking – UN sustainable goal 14
- Direct and indirect expert input

# Audit findings



# Audit impact (1 of 2)

- ERA accepted the audit findings, conclusions and recommendations
  - Requested NAO briefing to its Board
    - Use of videos to show the impact of bad practices
    - Various questions on methodologies applied and audit criteria used
  - Updated business plans to facilitate the implementation of recommendations
  - Preliminary action already being taken to implement recommendations
  - ERA aims to mitigate the risks of conflict of interest by focusing on its regulatory function by the transfer of responsibilities relating to the implementation of measures to third parties

# Audit impact (2 of 2)

- Report generated public and stakeholder interest but substantially more needs to be done by national authorities
  - Various initiatives by stakeholders such as Bird Life to further protect habitats and species
- Designation of 8 more MPAs
- Nonetheless, incidents concerning protected species such as turtles prevail

# Lessons learned (1 of 2)

- Understanding the complexities of competing interests
  - Micro state characteristics
  - Immediate economic interests vs sustainable blue growth
- Managing the fragmentation of responsibilities
  - Problems of coordination
  - Rationalisation of different organisational goals
- Not always a question of one size fits all
  - Different circumstances prevail for specific MPAs
  - Need to develop site specific audit criteria

# Lessons learned (2 of 2)

- Managing expert advice
  - We needed to broaden our knowledge on MPAs
  - We needed to prioritise areas where we sought expert advice
  - Attending conferences and seminars organised by stakeholders
  - Exploiting knowledge sharing opportunities with other SAIs participating in the cooperative audit
- Understanding the tensions brought about by the international political scene
  - Conflicts within the Mediterranean
  - Priorities shift from environmental sustainability
  - Understanding the political sensitivities concerning jurisdiction

# Thank You

Report can be accessed from:  
<http://nao.gov.mt/en/press-releases/4/186/performance-audit-prolonging-the-adoption-of>