

CALL FOR COMMENTS AND INPUT INTO THE MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE NAMAQUA FOSSIL FOREST MARINE PROTECTED AREA

DOCUMENT PREPARED BY: Anchor Environmental Consultants

GOVERNING AUTHORITY: Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment

PROJECT PURPOSE: The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) is in the process of developing a Management Plan for the Namaqua Fossil Forest Marine Protected Area. This is done with the help of an independent service provider (Anchor Environmental Consultants) and would necessitate input and comments from the public, stakeholders and Interested and Affected Parties (all referred to as I&APs), facilitated by this service provider.

PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT: The purpose of this document is to provide a concise, meeting-ready summary of the Namaqua Fossil Forest Marine Protected Area (MPA) draft management plan and highlight the key information needed for stakeholder engagement, discussion, and comment.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

1. WHAT IS A MPA AND WHAT IS ITS PURPOSE?

A Marine Protected Area is a defined area of ocean managed to protect biodiversity, ecological processes, and the benefits that marine ecosystems provide to people. MPAs are used to conserve sensitive habitats and species, support sustainable use, help restore ecosystem productivity, and reduce further degradation, including climate-related impacts.

South Africa expanded its offshore MPA network through the Operation Phakisa process and, after public participation, declared 20 new MPAs in May 2019. The Namaqua Fossil Forest MPA was one of those MPAs and contributes to improving offshore protection within South Africa's Exclusive Economic Zone.

2. WHAT IS A MANAGEMENT PLAN AND WHY IS IT NECESSARY?

A Management Plan serves as a guide for the governmental bodies responsible for the management of a specific marine area, to effectively manage and conserve that area, and sets rules in terms of access and exploitation for MPA users. It outlines strategies, objectives, guidelines, specific activities and actions that must be implemented within the MPA. The main goal is to ensure the sustainable use and conservation of marine resources to optimise the overall health of the ecosystem while considering the diverse needs of various stakeholders dependent on the marine environment, including those involved in fishing, mining, recreation, etc.

The Management Plan needs to be developed in accordance with certain Acts (National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act) (NEM:PAA), and guidelines, specifically the Guidelines for the Development of a Management Plan for a protected area. The plan will be valid for 10 years and needs to be adhered to by all stakeholders within and adjacent to the MPAs. The plan must be implemented and coordinated by the responsible management authority as appointed by the Minister of the DFFE.

3. NAMAQUA FOSSIL FOREST MPA

The Namaqua Fossil Forest MPA lies south-west of Port Nolloth, about 28 km offshore, in water depths of roughly 120–150 m. It is a relatively small offshore MPA of about 495 km², consisting of a single rectangular block that includes the substrata, seabed, subsoil, and water column within its boundaries.

The MPA was declared in 2019 in terms of the NEM:PAA under Government Gazette 42479, Notice R767. It was selected primarily to protect a unique fossilised yellowwood forest, while also protecting cold-water corals, habitat-forming sponges, and associated shelf ecosystems.

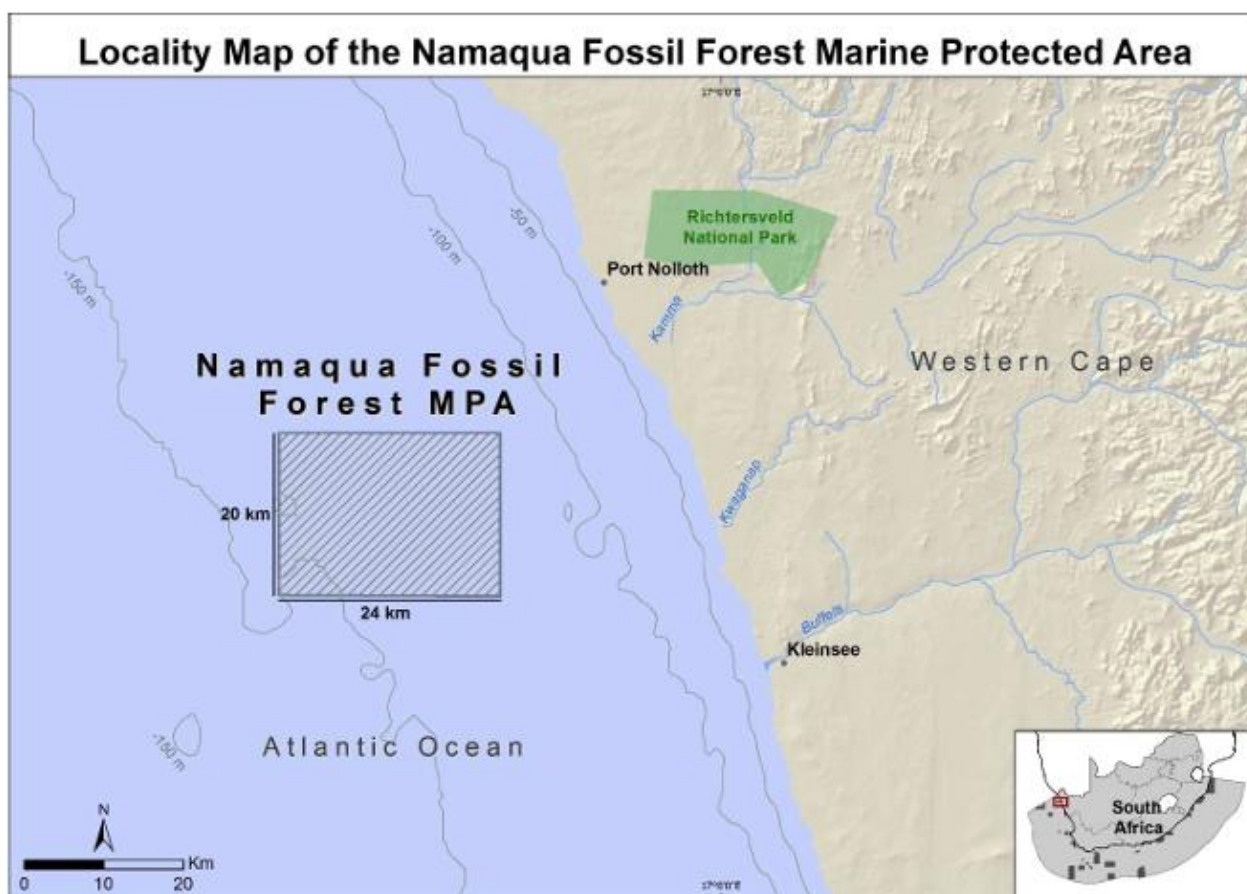


Figure 1 Location of Namaqua Fossil Forest MPA.

4. LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Management of the Namaqua Fossil Forest MPA remains a national responsibility through the DFFE. The implementation of awareness, compliance, and the management plan is assigned to the Chief Directorate Specialist Monitoring Services, with Monitoring Control and Surveillance and Fisheries Protection Vessels playing important roles.

There are currently no co-management arrangements in place, and the department will need to engage stakeholders on any future co-management options. The MPA has no municipal affiliation because it is offshore, but it falls within the proposed revised Namaqua Fossil Forest Ecologically or Biologically Significant Area (EBSA) due to its uniqueness, fragility, and relative naturalness. The purpose for Namaqua Fossil Forest MPA is to:

- a) Contribute to a representative system of marine protected areas by protecting benthic shelf ecosystems in the region.
- b) Conserve fragile ecosystems including in-situ fossilised trees, associated cold-water corals, and habitat-forming sponges.
- c) Conserve ecologically sensitive biodiversity and the ecological processes associated with these features.
- d) Provide an appropriate reference environment for research, monitoring, climate change research, and environmental education.

SUMMARY OF THE DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR NAMAQUA FOSSIL FOREST MPA

The purpose of the Namaqua Fossil Forest MPA Draft Management Plan is to establish clear objectives and proposed activities to ensure the protection and sustainable use of its unique fossil forest, cold-water coral and sponge ecosystems, and associated shelf habitats over a ten-year period. The plan indicates where management efforts should be focused to optimise protection of this relatively small but highly sensitive offshore MPA and to provide a framework for the prioritised allocation of resources and capacity in its management, use and development. The drafting of the Management Plan follows the Guidelines for the Development of a Management Plan for a Protected Area in terms of NEM:PAA and the Norms and Standards for the Management of Protected Areas in South Africa.

Draft 'Vision' for the Namaqua Fossil Forest MPA

The draft vision is: *"To effectively manage the Namaqua Fossil Forest MPA with its unique fossil, coral and sponge features in a way that maintains its ecological integrity, conservation value and contribution to the sustainable management of key fisheries"*.

Key ecological features of the MPA

The MPA was chosen to include the Namaqua Mid Shelf Fossils ecosystem type, which contains the fossilised yellowwood forest, but it also protects Namaqua Muddy Mid Shelf Mosaic, Namaqua Muddy Sands, and Namaqua Sandy Mid Shelf ecosystems. All of these ecosystem types are presently classified as Least Concern, although protection levels differ across them.

The fossil forest is the defining feature of the MPA and includes fossil wood species such as *Podocarpus jago* and *P. umzambense*. Fragile *scleractinian* cold-water corals colonise the fossil tree trunks, and the area also supports a newly described habitat-forming sponge, *Suberites dandelini*.

The MPA lies within the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem, a highly productive system shaped by upwelling and broader oceanographic variability. The area likely contributes to productive marine processes and may help protect a hake nursery area, although the biodiversity and ecology of the site remain poorly understood.

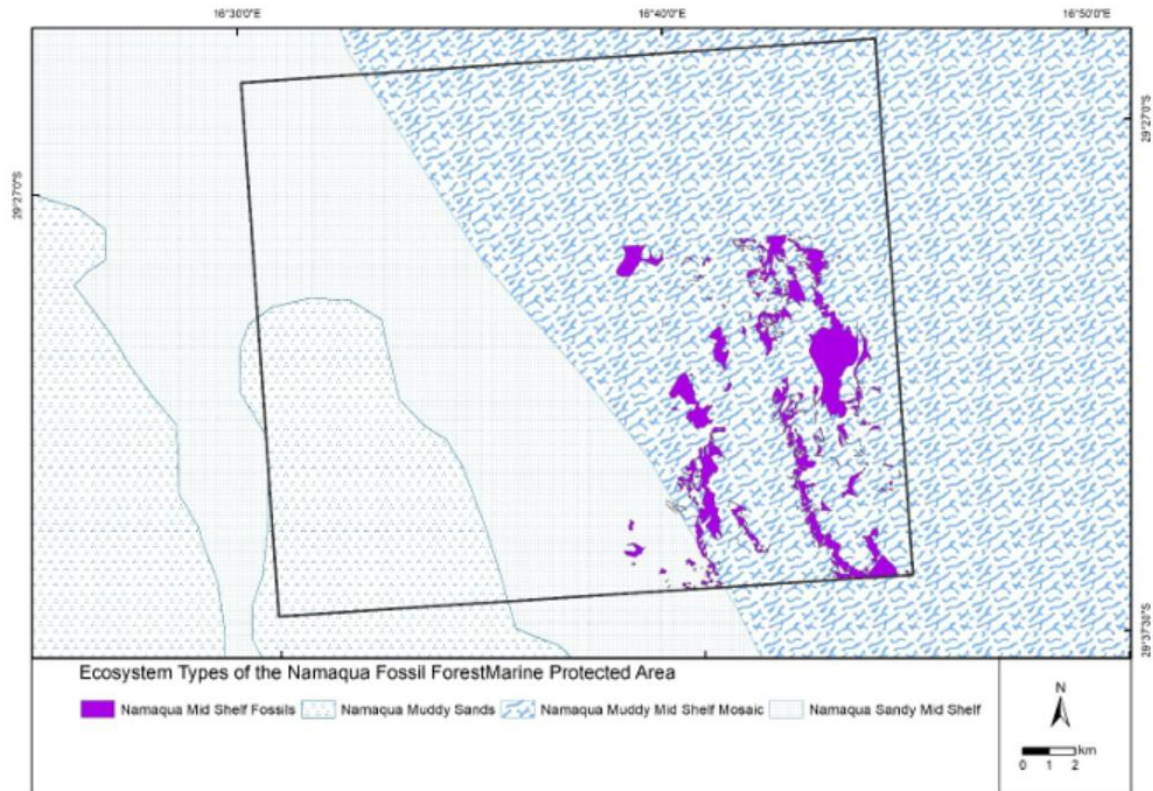


Figure 2 Map of ecosystem types in the Namaqua Fossil Forest MPA.

‘Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats’ analysis

A Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats (SWOT) assessment has been used to help guide the development of the Management Plan and the focus of the themes, objectives, activities and indicator deliverables for the Namaqua Fossil Forest MPA.

STRENGTHS
• Only protection for a unique fossilised forest heritage resource. • Protection of rare cold-water corals and habitat-forming sponges. • Contribution to fisheries habitat and bycatch management. • First protection of the Namaqua Muddy Mid Shelf Mosaic ecosystem type. • Support for MSC certification conditions for hake trawl by protecting vulnerable marine ecosystems. • Inclusion within the Namaqua Fossil Forest EBSA.
WEAKNESSES
• Limited knowledge of cold-water coral distribution and associated ecosystems. • Offshore compliance monitoring is difficult. • Limited offshore patrol vessel capacity. • No dedicated management budget at present. • Relatively small MPA size. • Limited staff capacity for sophisticated VMS/AIS analysis and 24/7 monitoring. • Weak cooperative arrangements with global surveillance systems. • Environmental monitoring offshore is difficult and expensive.

OPPORTUNITIES
• Research opportunities involving DFFE, SAEON, SANBI/NMU, and the University of Cape Town. • Potential to improve understanding of historical climate patterns from fossilised trees. • Support for economic benefits through eco-certification. • Potential to co-opt the linefishing sector to assist with compliance monitoring.
THREATS
• Gas and petroleum interests in the immediate area. • Diamond mining interests in the area. • Uncontrolled access to the MPA. • Oil spill risk from oil and gas activity. • Seismic survey impacts. • Climate-linked changes in circulation and productivity.

Consultation and stakeholders

The management plan states that a formally constituted Stakeholder Forum should guide the ongoing development, review, evaluation, and updating of the MPA management plan. The forum should be representative, manageable in size, properly mandated, administratively supported, and should meet at least once a year or more often when necessary.

Major stakeholders identified for the MPA and its surrounds include:

- DFFE
- The Department of Mineral Resources and Energy
- Petroleum Agency South Africa and Tosaco
- SA Commercial Linefish Association
- South African Pelagic Fishing Industry Association
- Belton Park Trading (diamonds)
- Researchers, including SAEON, SANBI, and universities
- SAPS Marine Unit

Key concerns raised during establishment of the MPA related to overlap with mining concessions and fisheries-rights concerns around accommodating small-scale fishing interests.

Restrictions of the MPA and permitted activities

The entire Namaqua Fossil Forest MPA is zoned as a controlled fishing zone, allowing limited fishing activities in accordance with regulations. The MPA regulations are contained in Government Gazette 42479 of 2019, Notice 786.

Restrictions include:

- No anchoring, except under force majeure or for authorised state vessels carrying out their mandate.
- No polluting activities in the MPA.
- Mandatory activation of a VMS transponder where vessel requirements stipulate a vessel tracking device.
- Fishing gear on vessels not permitted to fish in the MPA must be properly stowed.

Summary of MPA Management Objectives Framework

The aim of the **Management Objectives Framework** for the Namaqua Fossil Forest MPA is to translate the high-level purposes of the MPA into concrete, achievable management objectives grouped under key

management themes. These purpose statements underpin the themes, goals and objectives that will guide the management of the MPA over the next ten years.

Key Management Themes structure the day-to-day and strategic management of the MPA, with each theme encompassing a cluster of management actions such as governance, biodiversity conservation, socio-economic benefits, compliance, disaster management, planning, engagement and monitoring. Each theme has an overall goal, which is pursued through specific management objectives that are implemented via defined actions over a ten-year period, linked to measurable deliverables, indicators and targets to support ongoing evaluation and adaptive management.

Meeting discussion prompts

The following topics are likely to be useful for meeting discussion based on the draft plan:

- Whether the draft vision adequately reflects the heritage, biodiversity, and fisheries value of the MPA.
- Whether the identified stakeholders and forum structure are sufficiently representative.
- Whether current zoning and permitted linefishing adequately protect the fossil forest, corals, and sponges.
- How best to address conflicts between conservation objectives and nearby oil, gas, and diamond interests.
- What priority research is needed on fossils, corals, sponges, hake nursery functions, and climate implications.
- What realistic compliance and surveillance arrangements are feasible given current staffing and vessel constraints.

Management Objectives Framework	
KEY MANAGEMENT THEMES	MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES
Theme 1: Governance Goal: To ensure effective governance and management of the MPA. (Purpose a, b, c)	1.1 To establish and ensure the ongoing involvement of a representative and functional MPA Stakeholder Forum to participate in and help in the management of the MPA 1.2 To identify and resolve any emerging conflicts among stakeholders of the MPA 1.3 To ensure sufficient and effective staff capacity to achieve management objectives 1.4 To improve management effectiveness through appropriate monitoring and evaluation 1.5 To adopt an ecosystem approach to management of the MPA
Theme 2: Biodiversity and Conservation Goal: To conserve and protect the ecosystems, ecological processes and biodiversity. (Purpose a, b, c)	2.1 To conserve and manage the biodiversity patterns and ecological processes in the MPA to ensure their long-term persistence 2.2 To facilitate species management by protecting an area of importance for fish, seabirds, turtles and sharks
Theme 3: Socio-economic benefits Goal: To ensure sustainable social and economic benefits (Purpose c)	3.1 Protect the fossilised yellowwood heritage feature 3.2 To allow for controlled resource use in a manner and in areas permitted by the regulations and in a way that does not compromise the biological integrity of the MPA
Theme 4: Compliance and Enforcement Goal: To ensure adherence to the regulations of the MPA (Purpose a-d)	4.1 To develop, implement and maintain an effective enforcement capacity that minimizes illegal activities and negative impacts in the MPA and deters transgressors 4.2 To develop an effective vessel tracking capacity and reporting protocols 4.3 To promote compliance among stakeholders and users of resources adjacent to the MPA
Theme 5: Disaster Management Goal: To provide for the safety of the biodiversity and human elements, and the continued functioning of the ecological processes of the MPA in the face of any environmental crisis (Purpose a-d)	5.1 To establish and maintain effective disaster management planning to minimise risk of pollution and other disaster events in the MPA and its vicinity and provide for the persistence of the biodiversity and ecological processes of the MPA in the event of an environmental crisis

Theme 6: Planning Goal: To integrate the management of the MPA with external developments, processes and impacts to ensure that the MPA objectives are not compromised by these issues (Purpose a, b, c)	6.1 To co-operate with relevant international and national government structures, RFMOs (IOTC, CCSBT, SEAFO), industries, NGOs and communities insofar as their activities affect the MPA and to keep track of issues affecting the MPA and its proximity to ensure functional ecosystems are protected. RFMO: Regional Fishery Management Organisation IOTC: Indian Ocean Tuna Commission CCSBT: Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna: SEAFO: South East Atlantic Fisheries Organisation NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation
Theme 7: Engagement, Education and Public awareness Goal: To engage resource users, stakeholders and the general public on the attributes, function and benefits of the MPA including its contribution(s) to marine conservation (Purpose d)	7.1 To raise the profile of MPA and increase appreciation of its attributes, functions and benefits including its contribution(s) to marine conservation and sustainable use, with a focus on improving voluntary compliance with regulations
Theme 8: Monitoring, Research and Information management Goal: To realise the potential of the MPA for enhancing scientific knowledge and increasing the evidence base to inform ecosystem-based management (Purpose d)	8.1 To support research and monitoring that increases understanding of the ecosystems, biodiversity and benefits of the MPA including research on climate change and resilience to climate change 8.2 To develop and maintain a monitoring programme that provides managers with accurate and timely information on the state of the MPA, the potential threats to meeting the MPA purposes, and which provides scientific reference points for management of ecosystem types 8.3 To collate and adequately manage data and information on the MPA, ensuring ease of access to support research and management decisions

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROCESS AND TIMELINE

PURPOSE OF THE PROCESS

Interested and Affected Parties (I&APs) are being consulted to assist with identifying key issues, gaps and concerns regarding the Namaqua Fossil Forest MPA Draft Management Plan, including, its defined management objectives, actions, implementation, timeline, assessment of current and future exploitation threats/activities and therefore sustainable use of its natural resources over a ten-year time horizon, as well as providing input into the vision for the MPA (the purpose for proclaiming this an MPA has already been gazetted).

In addition to the information provided in this Background Information Document (known as the BID), stakeholders are encouraged to review the full Management Plan to gain a comprehensive understanding and to contribute insights on the “**Key elements requiring input**” as outlined below. Where relevant, the sections in the Management plans where certain information can be found are indicated in brackets, although some of the information may be distributed throughout the Management Plan.

KEY ELEMENTS REQUIRING INPUT:

- The draft vision of either/both MPAs (*Section 5.2: Draft Vision for the MPA*).
- The composition (both abiotic (non-living) and biotic (living) components), functioning, importance, and state of each MPA, including the underlying ecological processes and drivers. This includes the listed data sources assessed in the draft management plans (*Section 5.3: Key Determining Factors*).
- The assessment of the impacts/threats to either/both MPAs that may inhibit the achievement of its management objectives (*Section 5.4: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats*).
- Identified user/activities permitted for exploitation of living resources and/ or mineral resources in either/both MPA (*Section 8: Access and Facilities*).
- The plan for awareness, public engagement and raising and involving stakeholders in the development of the Management plans, in such a way as to ensure inclusive engagement and effective input from affected stakeholders (*Section 4: Consultation; Section 11: Strategic Plan – Theme 1 and Theme 7*).
- Management objectives, strategic plan and implementation framework of the management plans for each MPA (*Section 11: Strategic Plan*).
- Management actions, targets and Key Performance Indicators for each MPA (*Section 11: Strategic Plan*).
- Implementation time frames (*Section 11: Strategic Plan*).
- The socio-economic context of either MPA, and the level/s of dependence of local communities on either/both these MPAs (*Section 11: Strategic Plan – Theme 3*).
- Identified key stakeholders in either/both MPAs (*Annexure 1*).
- Other gaps or omissions from either draft Management plan

METHOD FOR PROVIDING INPUT

1) REGISTER AS I&AP AND FOR THE WORKSHOPS

I&APs are hereby invited to register to receive further updates on the project and to participate in the online and/or in-person workshop.

Please note that I&APs who do not register will not receive further communications or updates on the process. However, registration will remain open throughout the project, and those who register will resume receiving updates. Prior to each public participation period, a registration reminder will be sent out.

You can register through one of the following methods:

- Fill out the registration form using the link: <https://forms.cloud.microsoft/r/npmE7t3LFg>
- Get in touch with the “Contact person” below through email, post, or telephone.

2) ATTEND ONLINE STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP #1 - 10TH JUNE 2026

I&APs are invited to attend Stakeholder Workshop #1 online. Please remember to register using the methods mentioned above. The purpose of these workshops is to present the draft Management Plan to I&APs, giving them multiple opportunities to provide their comments and input, and to voice any concerns for consideration.

Online Workshop

Registration required. MS Teams invite will be sent after registration.

Date: 10th June 2026

Time: 11 am – 1 pm

Please RSVP using the link above or with the contact person below.

3) REVIEW DOCUMENT AND PROVIDE COMMENT

Please review the BID (this document) and Preliminary draft desktop MPA Management Plans and submit any comments, questions and input to assist in the updating of the management plans. Comments/ input can be submitted using this link: <https://forms.cloud.microsoft/r/2kuCnnS5ZQ>

- Or via the “Contact person” below through email, post, or telephone.

CONTACT PERSON

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SOURCES

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- ^b DEA (Department of Environmental Affairs), 2016. National Protected Areas Expansion Strategy for South Africa 2016. Department of Environmental Affairs, Pretoria, South Africa. [National Protected Areas Expansion Strategy 2016 of South Africa \(dffe.gov.za\)](http://dffe.gov.za)
- ^c CBD, 2011. Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and the Aichi Targets: “Living in Harmony with Nature”. UNEP, Montreal, Quebec, Canada [Aichi-Targets-EN.pdf \(cbd.int\)](http://cbd.int)
- ^d CBD, 2022. Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Draft decision submitted by the President. Fifteenth meeting – Part II of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. 7-19 December 2022, Montreal, Canada. CBD/COP/15/L.25. Available at: [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](http://cbd.int)
- ^e Government Gazette No 42478 of 23 May 2019, Volume 647. [Government Gazette No 42478 MPA declarations \(cer.org.za\)](http://cer.org.za)
- ^f Cowan, G.I. and Nobusika Mpongoma, 2011. Guidelines for the development of a management plan for a protected area in terms of the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act, 2003. Unpublished document, Department of Environment Affairs, Pretoria. 17pp. [Guidelines for the development of a management plan for a protected area \(iucn.org\)](http://iucn.org)
- ^g Government Gazette (GG) 42478, Notice No. 773 [National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act: Declaration of Southeast Atlantic Seamount Marine Protected Area \(www.gov.za\)](http://www.gov.za)
- ^h Government Gazette 42479, Notice No. 795 [National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act: Regulations: Management of Southwest Indian Seamounts Marine Protected Area \(www.gov.za\)](http://www.gov.za)
- ⁱ GG 42479, Notice No. 792 [National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act: Regulations: Management of Southeast Atlantic Seamounts Marine Protected Area \(www.gov.za\)](http://www.gov.za)