

WIO-COMPAS

Western Indian Ocean • Certification of Marine Protected Area Professionals



Certifying Marine Protected Area Professionals: Reflections on the First Generation and Setting a New Course

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Certifying Bodies:



COASTAL RESOURCES CENTER

University of Rhode Island

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This publication is based upon the longer and more detailed internal report entitled “Green Paper: WIO-COMPAS First Generation Review (2005-2012)” authored by Lawrence Sisitka, a major and longtime contributor to the design, development and implementation of the Western Indian Ocean Certification of Marine Protected Area Professionals (WIO-COMPAS) Programme. Sisitka’s paper provided a recap of the programme’s development from its initial design in 2006 through July 2012, when all elements of the programme had been piloted at least once, and in some cases multiple times, and adapted and improved. The paper then served as a background document for a learning workshop in September 2012 that brought together a wide range of stakeholders from the region.

The WIO-COMPAS Programme could not have happened without the generous financial support of donors, including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which was first to encourage and help finance what at the time was a never-before-tried programme to certify marine protected area professionals. Special thanks go to Richard Volk of USAID who had the vision and the willingness to be a partner in what could have been seen as a too-risky venture, but which he — as did others — also recognized was a worthwhile attempt to break from the standard one-off trainings that all too often are considered synonymous with capacity building. Other donors have included the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) and the European Union-funded RECOMAP (Regional Programme for the Sustainable Management of the Coastal zones of the Countries of the Indian Ocean).

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Thanks go as well to endorsing agencies — the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) — World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), the International Ranger Federation (IRF), the Game Rangers Association of Africa (GRAA), the World Wildlife Fund South Africa (WWF-SA) and MPA PROs across six countries. These endorsements have raised the credibility of the programme within both the regional and global MPA and protected area community of practice.

ACRONYMS

CAD	Core Activities Document
CRC	Coastal Resources Center
EU	European Union
GPPPAM	Global Partnership for Professionalizing Protected Area Management
GRAA	Game Rangers Association of Africa
IRF	International Ranger Federation
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
KPA	Key Performance Areas
KWS	Kenya Wildlife Service
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MPA PRO	Marine Protected Area Professional
MPRU	Marine Parks and Reserves Unit
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RECOMAP	Regional Programme for the Sustainable Management of the Coastal Zones of the Countries of the Indian Ocean
RPEL	Recognition of Prior Experience and Learning
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
Sida	Swedish International Development Agency
SUCCESS	Sustainable Coastal Communities and Ecosystems (program)
TOR	Terms of Reference
URI	University of Rhode Island
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WCPA	World Commission on Protected Areas
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WIO	Western Indian Ocean
WIOMSA	Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association

WIO-COMPAS	Western Indian Ocean Certification Programme for Marine Protected Area Professionals
WWF	World Wildlife Fund for Nature
WWF-SA	World Wildlife Fund South Africa
WWF WIOMER	World Wildlife Fund Western Indian Ocean Marine Ecoregion

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2005, the Western Indian Ocean Certification of Marine Protected Area Professionals Programme (WIO-COMPAS) was an embryonic concept sprung from the joint capacity-building efforts of the Coastal Resources Center at the University of Rhode Island (URI) and the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA). These organisations are partners in the Sustainable Coastal Communities and Ecosystems Program funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).¹ The programme was conceived as a response to the pressing need to protect the region's valuable marine assets by ensuring those entrusted with the conservation and management of those assets have the requisite skills to do so. The approach of one-off trainings to try to attain this goal had long proven insufficient as a strategy. Hence the turn to a model of certification — a model in which individuals participate in a rigorous process of professional assessments to prove they have the skills and can meet accepted standards in a range of necessary competence areas. An effectively managed marine protected area (MPA) requires staff with the skills and knowledge to carry out that management.

Today, WIO-COMPAS is a functional, rigorous, highly respected, first-in-the-world certification programme for marine MPA professionals. With no precedents on which to draw, it has overcome conceptual and practical challenges.

By May 2012, WIO-COMPAS had completed a full cycle of its design: piloted all levels of the programme; assembled a skilled cadre of assessors; certified 42 MPA professionals/advocates for the programme; and secured endorsement of well-respected international organisations involved in protected area management (IUCN — WCPA, GRAA, WWF-SA). Also it:

- Set the standard for similar certification and professional development programmes
- Established the standards of professional capacity against which protected area professionals can be assessed and for which training can be developed
- Provided a fully functional model of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)
- Offered opportunities for professional networking
- Strengthened collaboration between partner organisations in the region and beyond

For all of the programme's success, challenges remain. Most critical is persuading management agencies to incorporate the programme and/or its main elements into their human resource

¹ SUCCESS initiated a certification process in East Africa and Latin America with common conceptual components. WIO-COMPAS focused on MPA professionals while Latin America focused on coastal management professionals. The latter did not gain the same traction as did WIO-COMPAS and as of this date remains unimplemented.

systems. While those who have earned certification strongly advocate the programme's value, their employers remain less certain.

Another challenge is reducing costs — which is essential if the programme is to be sustainable. Consistency is another issue. While the goal has always been to gain global reach, if different entities around the world are implementing the programme and adapting it in ways that might not adhere to the standards and expectations of the original programme, consistency in content and delivery could suffer. This could challenge the programme's credibility. That said, weighing the programme's successes against its challenges, the future for WIO-COMPAS remains promising.



INTRODUCTION

In its first seven years, the WIO-COMPAS (Western Indian Ocean Certification of Marine Protected Area Professionals) Programme in the Western Indian Ocean has overcome considerable challenges to become the successful model it is today. While discussions had been ongoing for years, in late 2005/early 2006 the concept of a certification programme for professionals in the coastal/marine field took form and in the seven years since has evolved into what as of 2013 is a fully designed, tested and implemented programme. This accomplishment resulted from visionary insight and determination, extraordinary partnerships, endorsements from key global and regional conservation organisations and generous donor support. The USAID has served as the initial and primary funder, followed by Sida, more modest amounts of European Union-funded project funds and in-kind contributions of many local and regional organisations and agencies.

It was a response to the region's pressing need to protect its highly valuable marine assets by ensuring that individuals entrusted with managing those assets have the skill sets to do the job effectively. It never was conceived as a training programme. Rather, the model was to develop standards in a range of requisite competence areas against which to assess marine protected area (MPA) professionals to determine whether they meet those standards. Certification as an MPA professional could then be earned at one of three levels. The programme would offer employers the assurance that by hiring a WIO-COMPAS certified individual, they know that the individual has the skills and experience to excel.

This report draws upon seven years of experience and the extensive discussions and input from a September 2012 learning workshop attended by a broad range of stakeholders — from programme designers and implementers to conservation agency representatives and alumni of the programme. It captures critical lessons learned in the process of designing and implementing WIO-COMPAS. It also:

- Compares today's programme with the original vision articulated in 2006
- Provides a timeline of critical events shaping the programme
- Summarizes the programme's main achievements
- Analyzes the programme's level of credibility with its constituency
- Describes involvement of regional MPA managing agencies
- Assesses managing agencies' perceptions of the programme
- Discusses the programme relative to regional training available to MPA professionals
- Reviews the potential for the programme to reach beyond the WIO region
- Lays out recommendations for the future direction of the programme

The hope is that what is now a regionally based programme is adopted by other countries and regions around the globe that are struggling to improve the effectiveness of their MPAs. This would acknowledge that achievement of site goals is dependent upon staff management

capacity. If this goal is reached, MPA management can truly be considered a profession. WIO-COMPAS has built upon other definitions of what constitutes a profession to define it as:

“A disciplined group of individuals who adhere to high ethical standards and uphold themselves to, and are accepted by, the public as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognized, organized body of learning derived from education and training at a high level as well as on-the-ground experience and who can demonstrate their competence against standards in the knowledge and skills areas determined as requisite to that profession.”

ORIGINAL CONCEPT AND VISION FOR WIO-COMPAS

Since the day it was formalized as WIO-COMPAS, the goal has been to improve the management of the region’s MPAs by strengthening the professionalism of MPA personnel. However, this was an evolution from the initial strategy of the SUCCESS Program, which was to raise the knowledge and skills of coastal managers to a level of professional standards. Wisely, stakeholders working in the Western Indian Ocean’s coastal and marine environments knew that in their region the job title of coastal manager did not exist. It made more sense to target MPA managers. That is the start of the story that follows.

Having reached agreement that the programme should focus on MPA personnel, it was relatively easy to set objectives that today are only modestly changed: 1) set standards of experience and education for MPA managers (later expanded to three different levels of MPA personnel) that would be recognized by authorities responsible for oversight of MPAs, ranging from central government authorities to non-government organisations to private sector; and 2) recognize MPA managers as professionals who are educated, experienced and ethical, acting in the best interest of society and environment.

Nevertheless, some changes have emerged, including adaptations of the programme design: the outcome of applying what was learned as we moved from concept to real-time piloting of WIO-COMPAS on the ground. Another change is the role that training plays in the programme. Initially, the WIO-COMPAS would be tied to a suite of training interventions that would build competence in specific skill areas. Successful completion of the training would be followed by a workplace-based assignment or practicum, which, if also successfully completed, would lead to the individual becoming certified.

Today’s model is one in which certification is awarded through a process of assessing the individual’s existing competences²— i.e., those already gained through a combination of formal education, previous training and on-the-ground experience. The programme also includes

² These standards are industry-based and geared to what skills and what levels of skills are needed to do an excellent job at various levels within an MPA.

professional development interventions: presentations from experts in the field of coastal and marine management; engaging these experts in the latest thinking on MPA management and coastal governance in thought-provoking dialogue; and networking with fellow alumni post-certification to continue sharing lessons learned and new ideas. Again, no assessment is made of what the individual might have learned in the professional development sessions at the events themselves. Rather, the candidates continue to be assessed only in terms of additional evidence demonstrating that they already meet standards of excellence within the competence areas.

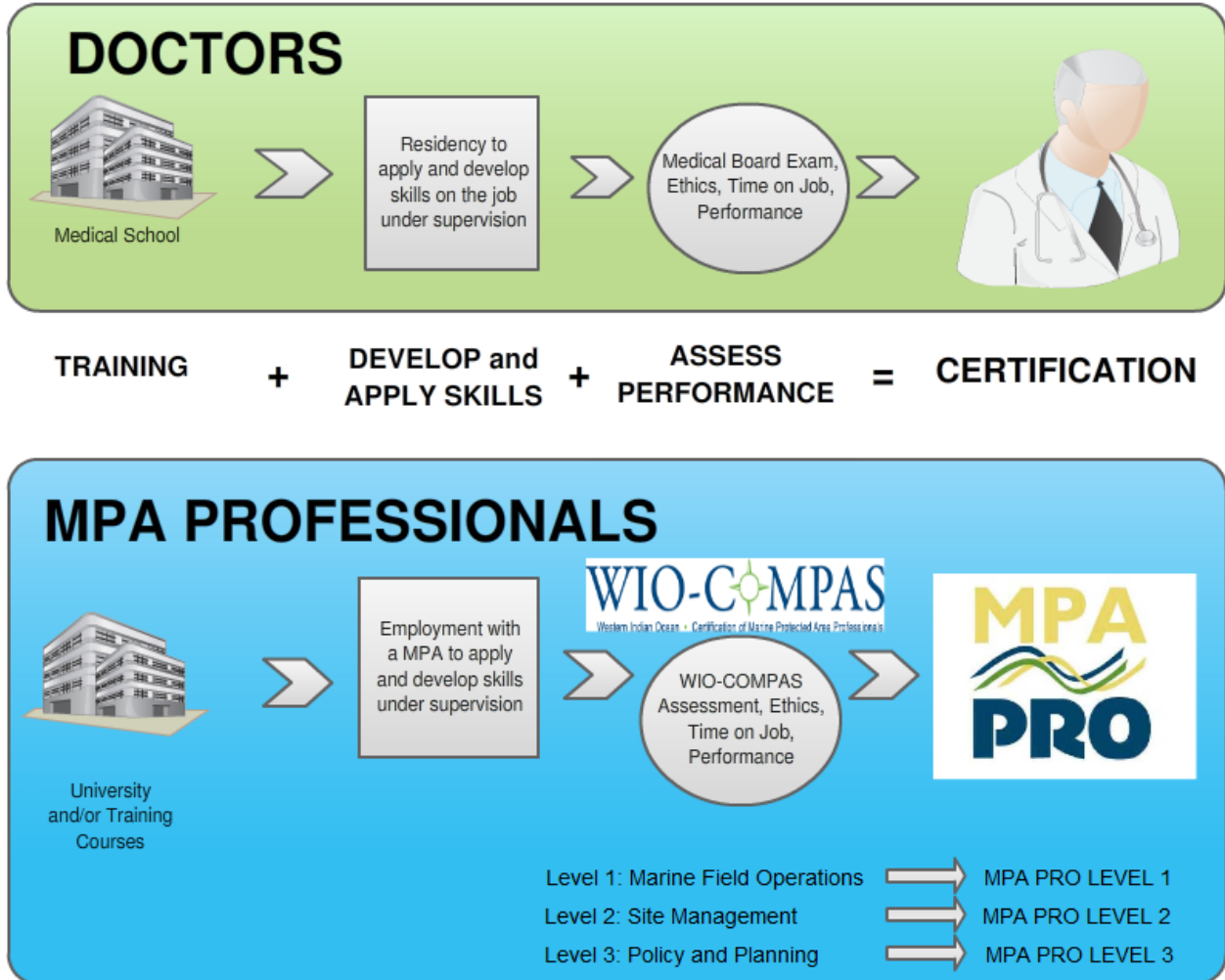


Figure 1. Concept of Certification linked to Training.

TIMELINE: WIO-COMPAS DEVELOPMENT & IMPLEMENTATION

Some dates in the timeline related to the certification programme are tied to specific events and happenings. Others are approximations of when different players were engaged in more general visioning of models for a capacity building continuum.

Visioning a Conceptual Model: Late 1990-2004

During this approximately six-year period in East Africa, Dr. Julius Francis and Dr. Nirmal Shah discussed different approaches to strengthening the management of MPAs in the WIO region, with the initial idea to develop a staff exchange programme initiated at Cousin Island MPA in the Seychelles. Concurrently, CRC and USAID were conceptualizing a new way to address capacity needs and standards for those working in the marine/coastal field and began looking at certification vs. training as one means to this end. Thus, a certification initiative eventually became one element of the larger USAID-funded Sustainable Coastal Communities and Ecosystems (SUCCESS) Program (2004 – 2014) led by URI's Coastal Resources Center (CRC) with the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA) as an implementing partner. As certification was an untried concept in the field of marine and coastal conservation, the team explored certification models from other disciplines. USAID was prepared to fund the experiment, although there was no guarantee of its outcome. Receiving funding was a major boost to the development of what eventually became the WIO-COMPAS programme. This grew to include the elements of ethics, experience and education.

Adapting the Model to the Need: Early 2005–2007

The two- to three-year period of early 2005-2007 was critical in determining if a real need existed for practical application of the certification concept. Was there demand for certification; of what kind; for whom; and to what end/whose benefit? Answering these questions was essential to moving from conceiving a certification programme to designing and testing such a programme. Only stakeholders from the region could reasonably provide the answers.

To properly comply with certification, candidates should enter the programme already equipped with the necessary combination of education, training and hands-on experience that would allow them to perform their job at a certain level of excellence.

First, through a demand survey and then through workshops with stakeholders from the region, it soon became clear that the SUCCESS team's initial concept for a programme that certified coastal managers was not a good fit for the WIO region. Why? The job title of coastal manager did/does not exist there. Stakeholders rightfully pointed out that for any certification programme to be viable and even more important — sustainable — it would need to link to a specific marine/coastal-related job(s) along a specific professional career path. For several reasons, stakeholders identified the MPA manager as the

profession best suited for piloting a certification programme. Other reasons behind this decision included that MPAs are recognized by the governments in the region and by key marine-focused regional organisations. Also, MPAs are highlighted in key regional frameworks, such as the Nairobi Convention, as a critical component of any management strategy for sustainable use of the coastal environment.

While the certification concept initially had been seen as a means to strengthen and formalize training processes for MPA management, it also recognized the shortcomings of one-off trainings.

These shortcomings included:

- A plethora of training courses already was available
- The topics for these trainings were often driven by donor or training-provider interests vs. the needs of practitioners/professionals
- Those individuals selected to attend trainings were often the next in line for a perk vs. the individual most in need of training
- No documented evidence of the training having long-term impacts on job performance existed

It became clear that to properly comply with certification, candidates should enter the programme already equipped with the necessary combination of education, training and hands-on experience that would allow them to perform their job at a certain level of excellence. This meant meeting certain standards of performance in specific professional, technical and managerial areas. The certification process, rather than training individuals in these competence areas, would assess individuals against established standards that MPA professionals need in order to carry out their job. Certification would be a means of verifying that individuals meet or exceed these standards. Equally important, certification would be a way to formally recognize such competent individuals. It also would provide a professional network of sorts — not unlike other professional associations that link certified individuals with others who share similar professional qualifications, experience and interests.

WIO-COMPAS does see value in linking to training programmes in some instances. It sees the benefit of working with training providers to influence what programmes are available in the region. This includes helping ensure that offerings include skills building in the WIO-COMPAS competence areas. In this way, the assessment team could direct to training opportunities those applicants not accepted into the programme because they were weak in certain competences. This could both increase their chances for future acceptance into the programme and could improve the skills needed to be an effective MPA management professional.

In summary, the two early objectives of WIO-COMPAS were to:

- Set standards of skills and knowledge for MPA managers that would be recognized by authorities responsible for management of MPAs — from central government authorities to non-government organisations (NGOs) to the private sector
- Recognize MPA managers as professionals who are educated, experienced and ethical, and who act in the best interest of society and environment

Even at this early stage of designing the certification programme, stakeholders believed in the potential benefits to any employer that hired an individual who successfully completed the certification process and earned designation as an MPA PRO. Employers would gain an individual who already had demonstrated the ability to meet a high standard of practice and professionalism.

Various aspects of the governing structure and format of the programme were discussed and evolved significantly over time. This paper focuses less on how the programme was initially conceived and more on its evolution through years of stakeholder input and trial-and-error to become the model it is today.

Early elements that were abandoned because they either did not fit clients' needs or were out of sync with the evolving programme design included:

- A two-week training element embedded within the programme
- A written examination
- A practicum either before or after the certification event
- The option for individuals who could document that they met the standards in all competence areas to be awarded certification without attending the programme

Elements that remain include:

- Requirements for acceptance into the programme
- Four-pronged focus on education, examination, experience and ethics
- Endorsement from professional bodies
- Efforts to get MPA management agencies to establish the programme as part of their human resource systems

Socializing and Refining: Early 2007-2008

FEBRUARY 2007 CONSULTATIVE MEETING

With a draft programme framework in hand — developed with stakeholder input — it was time for a consultative meeting with MPA practitioners, leaders and decision-makers to further discuss and refine the framework and to bring it a step closer to pilot-testing. This led to the February 2007 Consultative (or socialization) workshop in Mombasa, Kenya. Along with representatives of CRC and WIOMSA, the meeting brought together 25 individuals from Kenya, Madagascar, United Republic of Tanzania, Mozambique, Seychelles and South Africa and included representatives from regional organisations, including the World Conservation Union (IUCN) Eastern Africa Regional Office, World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) WIOMER and Mozambique Country Office, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), the Secretariat of the Nairobi Convention and a number of MPA management experts from within and outside the region to refine:

- Entry qualifications, competence areas, standards within those areas, examination (later termed assessment), practicum (soon thereafter eliminated), the three tiers (known as levels) that target a different level of job responsibilities related to MPA management, programme cost/fees and certificate renewal guidelines
- Programme management structure, including the roles of a Board³, Secretariat, Programme Coordinator, etc.
- An implementation plan for the initiative

Participants openly discussed both possible benefits (e.g., an increased understanding of the profession, a set of defined core competences for different jobs within the profession, the creation of a career path for practitioners/professionals) and potential challenges (e.g., the high cost of developing, updating and maintaining the programme; and the financial expense and time away from the job incurred by participants and their organisations/agencies).



³ This was later changed to an Advisory Committee vs. a Board.

From this meeting some key decisions emerged, including the need to:

- Broaden the programme scope to target not only MPA managers, but a range of jobs within MPAs. For example, rangers and those with enforcement duties. This required segmenting the programme into different levels targeting different job types and refining entry-level requirements and the standards within each competence area
- Change the minimum entry-level requirement to be a high school certificate/ diploma with three years' experience in a supervisory role within an MPA. This required rethinking the documentation that could serve as evidence of competence
- Focus on four core competence areas: 1) legal and institutional framework; 2) operations; 3) communication and stakeholder engagement; and 4) marine and coastal ecology. It was then necessary to clearly define the standards differentiated by the three different levels of MPA PRO. Focusing solely on core competences as opposed to a broader list of possible competence areas was critical. That decision ensured the programme did not duplicate existing certifications nor try to certify standards for every possible skill an MPA manager might need. The core areas defined those for which each and every professional working in an MPA needed to meet a certain standard of competence relative to the job each held

The last task of the February meeting was to develop a short-term action plan for the next six to nine months. This included hiring a consultant to build on the input to date who would: 1) develop a definitive list of MPAs in the region; 2) conduct a demand survey to identify the number of individuals potentially eligible for certification at the three levels; 3) establish the core skills that would fall within each competence area at each level; 4) propose assessment tools; 5) draft an Evidence and Testing paper; and 6) develop a process for certification.

THE DEMAND SURVEY AND LIST OF MPAS IN THE REGION

This survey verified the number of MPAs in the region and the potential number of individuals (700) eligible for a specific programme level. It was estimated that half of these might apply.

Findings from the consultancy solidified parameters for the programme. It would admit only those individuals who could demonstrate a level of knowledge, skills and workplace experience in the programme's competence areas to the extent that they would be likely to earn certification. If admitted to the programme, these individuals would attend a multi-day formal programme event, at which a suite of assessment instruments would be used to more rigorously assess whether the individuals met the standards in each of seven competence areas (see below). The programme would *not* provide training to bring applicants' or candidates' knowledge and skills up to standard. A training-oriented model for WIO-COMPAS was determined to be inappropriate for multiple reasons:

- Many professionals, especially those likely to seek certification, would already have most or all the required competences and would not need, nor agree to attend, a full training course
- The types of competences needed to earn certification are likely to have been developed not through training alone, but through a combination of training/education and experience
- The wide range of competences required (Appendix 1), especially at higher levels, could not be covered adequately in any one training course
- MPA professionals, especially highly experienced ones, have little time to devote to training and generally are unable to be absent from job responsibilities for two weeks or more

Based on the consultant's findings, the WIO-COMPAS development team agreed that any training elements of the programme would focus on building upon candidates' existing competences. A professional development approach would engage programme candidates in dialogue and critical thinking on pressing MPA management and development-related issues. The certification event would create a space for such discussion and thinking, which could continue and expand through the MPA PRO network and website. Thus, the programme would expand on the skills and experience participants brought to the table.

The next step was to determine how to rigorously assess potential candidates' existing competences using a suite of tools and approaches. These included having each applicant submit evidence to demonstrate that they had the skills and job performance to qualify for entry into the programme. Trained assessors would review the applications and, where necessary, ask probing questions in telephone interviews with each applicant. If the material and the interviews supported acceptance into the programme, the applicant gained entry into WIO-COMPAS as a candidate.

The consultancy also highlighted several other programme needs:

- A Capacity Development Coordinator responsible for planning and implementing programme activities; establishing efficient fiscal, administrative, marketing and information management systems; and promoting the growth of the programme
- Assessors, initially one and eventually a cohort from each of the main official language groups (French, Portuguese and English) also fully literate in English, would be required. The assessors must have relevant experience to: 1) evaluate applicants' evidence to determine if he/she meets the competence standards for admission to the programme; and 2) make recommendations for certification of successful candidates to the Certification Advisory Committee.
- How to identify guest speakers for certification events; roles that key partners might play; the need for further deliberation of core competences; the need to focus on programme Level 2 (MPA Managers); and the costs associated with certification events.

- Developing an ethical code of conduct to guide how MPA PROs carry out their professional duties.

Outputs of the consultancy helped shape subsequent consultative meetings.

CONSULTATIVE MEETING: JANUARY 2008

In this two-day meeting in Zanzibar, participants used the consultancy report as a basis for dialogue on refining the programme, and agreement was made to retain certain original elements and to change others.

Original elements to retain:

- Programme name of WIO-COMPAS
- Three levels of certification
- Same number of competences

Refinements from original design:

- One event (no use of the term seminar or similar terms to avoid having WIO-COMPAS misperceived as a training)
- Telephone interviews with applicants prior to acceptance as candidates
- A workplace case study in place of a practicum; with the case study submitted prior to the event
- Assessments to include a face-to-face interview to allow for in-depth questioning of candidates' competences in areas not fully covered by other assessment instruments

The meeting confirmed the overall programme design would require:

- A thorough application process and screening that ensured only those truly qualified and with a high chance of being certified were accepted into the programme
- Candidate portfolio emphasizing written products developed as part of their work
- Candidate workplace case study

Attendance of the multi-day event to include:

- Portfolio assessment
- Presentation of workplace case study
- Observation of candidate during event field activity
- Written assessment
- Face-to-face interview
- Professional development sessions

Going Live with Level 2: August 2008

Malindi, Kenya, was the site of the first WIO-COMPAS certification event (L201; for Level 2). This event was eight days long, with assessors arriving earlier to attend training in assessment techniques. In this first event, the consultant — a longtime partner in the WIO-COMPAS experiment and a trained and skilled assessment expert — served as lead assessor and trained two other individuals as assessors. This highlighted the need for more assessors and led to more formalized recruitment and training of them.

The thorough applicant screening process proved its merit in the lead-up to the event. Of 36 applicants, just 14 were accepted. Of these, three subsequently dropped out. Of the 11 remaining candidates, nine achieved the required score for certification and earned the MPA PRO designation. Certification was deemed pending for two others, who needed to provide additional evidence of their competence in certain areas. One individual submitted additional evidence that was insufficient to earn certification. The second individual elected to re-apply to the programme at a later date.

EVALUATING AND REFINING

While assessors and participants considered the event a success — and an important milestone — refinements and improvements were suggested:

- Improve training and orientation of new assessors, including better guidance on the scoring process.
- Provide candidates with professional development input
- More clearly describe the competences to ensure little or no overlap, provide better range statements and better examples of relevant evidence for each competence
- Provide clearer guidance to candidates on portfolios, case studies, etc.
- Use a single language for any one event
- Improve the assessment tools: record sheets, scoring matrices, etc.
- Assess leadership specifically rather than as an integrated part of the other competences
- Formalize instruction of Level 2 MPA PROs to serve as assessors for WIO-COMPAS level 1 (and possibly even level 2) events

Initially, feedback sessions between assessors and candidates were not part of the event. However, during the course of L201 it became evident that such feedback changed the entire dynamic of the event and was essential to reinforce candidates' understanding of the programme's rigor and the high standards for certification. In most cases, sessions were conducted after candidates' portfolios and case study presentations were scored. Candidates then had another opportunity to provide their assessor with additional evidence of their competences. The sessions also raised candidates' awareness of competence areas in which they were weak. This helped guide them in preparing for the written assessment. They knew to

spend more time on the exam questions focusing on competence areas in which they were weaker and needed to provide more evidence of ability. More importantly, feedback sessions enabled candidates to prepare for the face-to-face interviews customized to meet each candidate's particular needs.

Training the Assessors: June 2009

A June 2009 assessors' training was the first step in building a cohort of assessors in the region. This approach addressed our strategy to reduce costs by having local assessors who understood the local context and management systems. The next step would be to ensure all new assessors were mentored by a more seasoned/lead assessor during the first training.

Becoming an event-ready assessor required:

- Being certified as a Level 2 (or 3) MPA PRO (highly recommended but not required)
- If not certified, having direct experience in MPA management
- Being trained through a formal assessment programme or by the programme's lead assessor
- Having observed an assessment while shadowing an experienced assessor
- Being mentored by an experienced (lead) assessor or moderator through the first assessment event
- Being recognized by the Advisory Committee as a fully qualified WIO-COMPAS assessor



Level 3 candidates are evaluated by an assessment panel rather than an individual assessor assigned to an individual candidate. The rationale is that no one assessor is likely to have all the experience required to assess another individual at this high level. At least one member of the panel must have direct protected-area management experience and other substantial assessment experience. The remaining assessors must have experience in related fields (e.g., marine biology, natural resources management).

Level 2, Second Time Around: July 2009

Antananarivo, Madagascar, hosted the second Level 2 event (L202). (This improved Level 2 certification offering was shorter — six- days rather than eight. Of the 12 applicants, six were accepted and three received certification. Three others had certifications pending. Of these, two submitted sufficient evidence for certification, while one candidate failed to submit the required additional information. These results implied that the already-rigorous application process needed even more rigor.

The event was considered a success, but it highlighted a number of issues requiring closer attention, including:

- Need for a Level 1 option: Several applicants were clearly more qualified for a Level 1 offering, and a few candidates at this event would have been better starting at Level 1
- Portfolio size: In some cases, the overwhelming size of portfolios challenged assessors' ability to complete the assessments during the first few days of the Event
- Leadership competence: Several assessors were challenged to credibly define leadership and to identify and quantify appropriate evidence of this quality. It was the first time this competence area had been included (10% of a candidate's overall score)

Another Round of Evaluation: November 2009

This second round of evaluation included statements from Level 2 MPA PROs on the impact of certification on their professional careers. Although anecdotal, their testimony helped confirm that the programme was headed in the right direction. A few of the comments follow:

- “An acknowledgement from the Head of Human Resources went into the performance records in my personnel file” (*toward institutionalizing the certification concept into organisations' human resources management systems*)
- “I am in the process of adapting the Certification Competence areas to develop a marine rangers training curriculum for our national agency” (*toward strengthening support for the programme and its potential contributions to further an organisation's professional development goals and systems*)
- I'm networking with fellow MPA PROs, and that's helping me achieve more within my areas of operation” (*toward building a profession from a practice and encouraging the sharing of what is being learned on what works, what does not and why*)

Program Review and Developing Level 3: February 2010

Experts convened in Dar es Salaam to develop the following:

- The programme's Level 3 design
- To explore necessary synergies between the competences required at the three levels
- To review regional training opportunities (for those needing to improve competences in order to qualify for programme admission)
- To discuss other related topics, including options for linking certification of MPA staff with certification of MPA sites and strategic marketing of the programme

Discussions led to the following decisions:

- Use a team of assessors —not just one assessor — to evaluate each candidate
- Identify potential assessors and potential Level 3 candidates
- Include theory, principles and practices of assessment as well as training in how to conduct WIO-COMPAS-specific assessments in training of Level 3 assessors
- Link the certification event to a regional forum or meeting for senior MPA professionals

LINKS TO TRAINING

Resume efforts to link with training providers in the region:

- Approach both those already offering training linked to one or more of the WIO-COMPAS competences as well as those that might be persuaded to do so. Eventually, WIO-COMPAS could endorse those trainings that build skills in the programme's competence areas.

LEADERSHIP

Assess competence against six qualities and give sample indicators for each:

- Initiative and self-motivation
- Adaptability
- Innovation
- Support and encouragement for others
- Commitment and passion
- Ethics

MARKETING AND ENDORSEMENT OF WIO-COMPAS

Develop an effective marketing strategy that requires a clear definition of what the product is; a clear outline of the tangible benefits to individuals, their organisations and the MPA management field; and who comprises the target audience. The limited size of the target market in the region might be a major constraint to the development and marketing of the programme. The strategy must emphasize that quality management of any MPA is dependent on the qualifications of its personnel.

CERTIFICATION OF MPAS

Any expansion of the WIO-COMPAS concept should consider linking staff and site certifications. As IUCN continues to attempt the latter, the WIO-COMPAS team will continue discussions with them about such possibilities.

REGIONAL NETWORKING

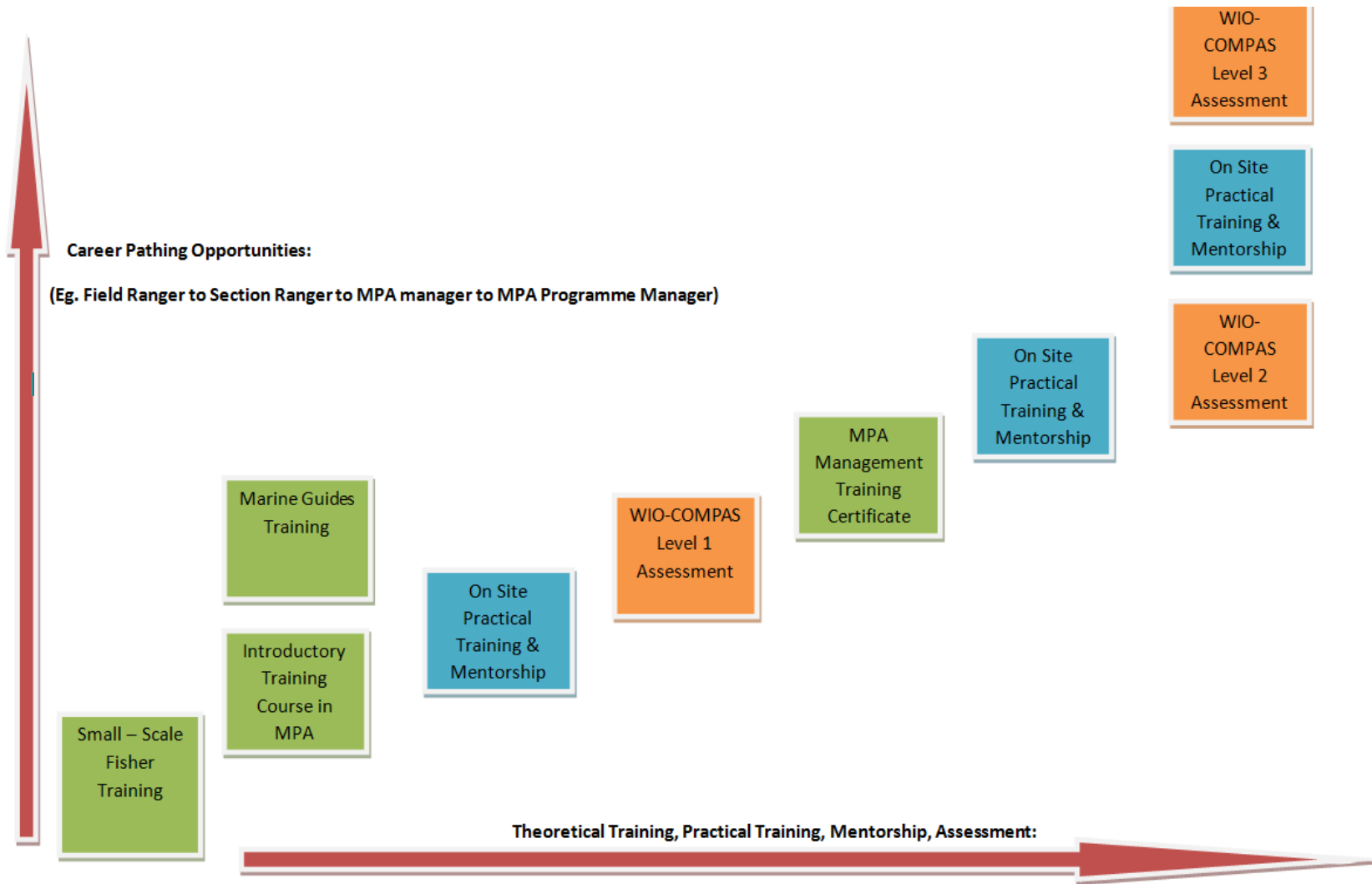
The cost of intra-region travel precludes regular face-to-face networking. An electronic forum was suggested and made sense because MPA-Pros were already encouraged to share their work, questions and insights on the programme website.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

A visual graphic (Figure 2, next page) illustrates the role WIO-COMPAS plays and/or could play as a central connector of interventions tied to strengthening MPA management.



Figure 2. Schematic Representation of MPA Capacity Development to Enhance Skills and Career Pathing.



Going Live with Level 1: July 2010

Tsitskamma National Park, South Africa, hosted L101, the first WIO-COMPAS Level 1 offering. It used some instruments of assessment from Level 2, but replaced the Workplace Case Study instrument with Core Activities Document (CAD) and added a scenario instrument, which was designed as a simulation of real-life situations during which assessors observe and question candidates as they address the situation.

Of the 19 potential candidates, most fell far short of the admittance requirements. In the end, the event had just eight candidates. Six earned MPA PRO status and two had status pending. While this poor showing was disappointing, more troubling was an instance in which a candidate failed to prepare either a portfolio or a CAD. The candidate failed to produce the missing documents despite being allowed additional time and was then removed from the programme.

In another case, a candidate submitted a document that had, in fact, been developed a few years earlier by one of the assessors. The candidate agreed to disqualify one of his documents, even while denying the charge of plagiarism, and then continued with the assessment, scoring a pending grade. This person never tried to dispute the charges of plagiarism nor did he resubmit for recertification. Situations of suspected cheating present a challenging situation during an assessment event. The above-mentioned instances only emphasize the need for clear statements on the programme's policies and systems for addressing cheating of any kind. These standards must be articulated at the earliest stages of the application process and reinforced throughout the programme and the event. Such unethical behavior has no place in a professional initiative.



EVALUATION AND DEBRIEFING

Several observations emerged from the Level 1 certification event, which led to changes in the programme structure. Level 1 was found to be a rigorous and appropriate starting point for even some relatively senior MPA staff. It also became clear that many candidates had a limited understanding of marine ecology and coastal dynamics — two topics for which competence should be considered fundamental at all levels. Lastly, for all levels, the six leadership competences were reduced to four and examples provided for each.

The scenarios instrument, used here for the first time, was adjusted for the next Level 1 event to ensure a consistent approach in evaluation of the candidates' handling of the scenarios.

Also noted was the need for improved pre-event communications among applicants, assessors and the WIO-COMPAS Secretariat. In addition, the sheer volume of written application materials presented a challenge for Africans whose culture does not emphasize reading and writing.

A Second Try at Level 1: September 2010

The L102 event in Mombasa, Kenya, benefitted greatly from lessons learned at the South Africa event. Of the 15 applicants, eight became candidates. The emerging pattern appears to be that roughly 50 percent of applicants meet the programme entry requirements. Of these eight, six were certified as MPA PROs and two ended with certification pending. The MPA PROs expected the programme to prove highly useful to them.

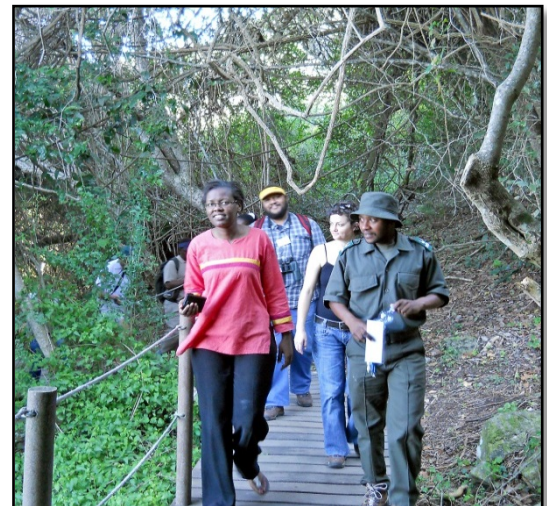
Evaluating the Assessment Process and Instruments: April 2011

The WIO-COMPAS team hired Qalanet Consulting, South Africa-based experts in evaluating assessment processes and instruments, to review the WIO-COMPAS assessment instruments, tools and process. Qalanet's report states: "The current Level 2 assessment process has been developed in a manner that reflects best practice in assessment, ensuring that candidates are only accepted once they have a good chance of success, and that each candidate is given optimum opportunities to demonstrate competence in whatever way suits his or her individual strengths. The certification process serves the needs of the sector, where it is essential to recognize professionals at all levels who can meet the prescribed minimum standards without necessarily having undergone extensive formal higher education."

Despite Qalanet's initial concerns about the large number of assessment instruments, the firm ultimately agreed with the need for a variety of instruments and focused the evaluation more on refinement and standardization of processes and instruments.

The evaluation's one recommendation was to drop the scenario observation instrument and replace it with a written assessment. The scenario had never been part of the Level 2 process but was an important part of the Level 1 process. This recommendation was not accepted and observation remains an important assessment instrument used in Level 1.

Qalanet also suggested an alternative instrument for Level 3: an open debate/forum involving all candidates and the assessment panel (including the moderator). One aspect adopted was use a panel of assessors to judge Level 3 candidates rather than a single assessor. The Qalanet review team drafted an Assessor Framework, which details the roles and responsibilities of an



assessor at each level. The framework stresses the need for the assessment team to always include an experienced moderator at every event to ensure:

- All events follow common processes and procedures
 - The processes and instruments are fair to all candidates
 - Assessment instruments are valid
 - Assessment judgments meet the agreed-upon standard
- Issues arising from the assessment process or between assessors are mediate

Third round of Level 1 and Level 2 Events: June – August 2011

Mombasa, Kenya, and Mafia Island, Tanzania, hosted L203 and L103 events, respectively, with local institutions providing significant cost-sharing, which remains vital to helping make the programme a more sustainable model. The event drew only 16 applicants, of which 12 were certified. One candidate dropped out after submitting an existing government document as his own Workplace Case Study. This ratio of accepted candidates to applicants suggests that applicants better understood the requirements for acceptance into the programme, and those unlikely to meet the requirements were able to assess their shortcomings ahead of time. Also, MPA PROs helped colleagues to assess their suitability for the programme and to provide more complete applications.

Patterns were emerging:

- Despite the rigorous application screening process, one or more candidates in almost every event did not earn certification. This raises the issue that some individuals with highly specialized jobs within an MPA might have limited competence in some areas.
- When an individual's scores barely met the minimum required, assessors needed to make careful decisions on whether to award certification based on marginal scores or to issue the individual pending status until the candidate provided further evidence that he or she met the competence standard. A paper trail of documentation to support the final decision on certification is essential in case the decision is challenged.

Although the team feels confident that the full suite of instruments suffices, for individuals with marginal scores in some areas, increased weight seems to fall to the final instrument: the face-to-face interview.

Training the Assessors: February 2012

Qalanet conducted training for Levels 1 and 2 assessors. Previous training had focused on use of the instruments and scoring systems, with little emphasis on the theory that underpins assessment principles. Qalanet covered both theory and practice, and this training became the basis for a WIO-COMPAS in-house Train-the-Assessor programme.

Qalanet sees WIO-COMPAS as a prime example of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and suggests promoting this aspect of the model in marketing the programme to management agencies. While the Qalanet training reiterates the importance that WIO-COMPAS assessors have tacit knowledge of the field of MPA management, this might not be a requirement for the moderator, whose primary role is focused on the assessment process.



Debut of Level 3: May 2012

Six candidates attended the first, long-awaited Level 3 Policy, Strategy and Planning (L 301) Certification Event in Johannesburg, South Africa. Of these six, two were already certified Level 2 MPA PROs and had been actively engaged as assessors at prior events. Five of the six were certified and one individual was asked to submit additional evidence.

The event used only three assessment instruments: an electronic portfolio of five documents; a Key Activities Presentation; and a panel interview. While applauding the programme, these MPA PROs recommended improvements, including:

- Ensuring a similar skill level among the assessors
- Allowing more time for review of portfolios
- Providing applicants with better guidance on how to highlight specific competences in their portfolios

A post-event debriefing also led to agreement that at Level 3, poor submissions should not be tolerated. In this inaugural event, too much leeway might have been granted to some applicants/candidates.



TODAY'S PROGRAMME

After much trial and error today's program can best be summarized by figure 3 below which highlights the three Levels of Certification offered based on competence across seven core areas. In addition to the certification aspect WIO-COMPAS also offers services in professional development, leadership, ethics and networking. Overtime WIO-COMPAS aspires to support national governments in the region to incorporate certification as part of a larger professional development system that retains staff through motivation and recognition of skills.

**WIO-COMPAS assesses and certifies MPA professionals in the WIO Region
based on recognized standards of excellence.
It promotes competence, professional growth, leadership, innovation & ethical conduct.**

Three Levels of Certification are offered:

- *Level 1~ Marine Field Operations:* professionals performing the daily duties of an MPA ranger or other marine field operators, conducting maintenance and habitat management activities, engaging communities and enforcing laws

- *Level 2~ Site Management:* professionals at a site with supervisory responsibilities, similar to MPA manager, warden or section leaders

- *Level 3~Strategy, Policy & Planning:* professionals involved in higher-level management, strategy, planning and policy development, beyond the boundaries of individual MPAs, and often across international boundaries

Core Competence Areas of the Programme

The Programme has identified seven core areas of competences needed by a range of individuals working at different levels within an MPA. The competences and standards vary for each Level.

Seven Core Competence Areas

- MPA Governance
- Marine Conservation: MPAs and other approaches
- Communication and Stakeholder Engagement
- Human and Financial Resources Mobilization and Management
- Management Implementation and Effectiveness
- Biophysical and Social Environment Context
- Leadership, Ethics and Innovation

As the following evaluation excerpts show, MPA PROs are the best spokespersons for today's WIO-COMPAS programme:

"...a large number of the MPA PROs have significantly changed their approach to MPA management as evidenced by their greater confidence in tackling management issues; encouraging stakeholder collaboration and community-based management; assessing their staff performance; and better handling of park visitors."

Those MPA PROs who greatly agree with this statement include:
Owen Govender, Tsitsikamma National Park, South Africa
Vuyani Mapiya, Mkabathi Reserve, Pondoland MPA, South Africa
Mwanapili Hamisi, Mombasa Marine Park, Kenya

"...many of the graduates stated the certification process greatly enlarged their understanding of community issues in conservation practice and improved their abilities to communicate with stakeholders."

Those MPA PROs who greatly agree with this statement include:
Bethar Msumange, Mafia Island Marine Park, Tanzania
Mohamed Said Shee, Watamu Marine Park and Reserve, Kenya
Isaia Raymond , Sahamalaza National Park, ANGAP, Madagascar

"...MPA PROs ... give better presentations and are writing and sharing articles for publication.... MPA PROs see the bigger picture— helping ensure important aspects of their job do not slip. They are more organized and appreciate their work more... and are receiving greater recognition as leaders from their peers."

Those MPA PROs who greatly agree with this statement include:
Owen Govender, Tsitsikamma Section, Garden Route National Park, South Africa
Ntindi Kassim Mwabilo, Kisite/ Mpunguti Marine Protected Area, Kenya
Odile Venty, Kirindy Mite Mite, Madagascar

"...the programme is seen as having a very important role to play in defining a career path for MPA professionals... something that has been missing in MPA management practice"

Those MPA PROs who greatly agree with this statement include:
Keith Spencer, Goukamma Nature Reserve, Cape Nature, South Africa
Sylvester Kazimoto, Marine Parks and Reserve, Tanzania Marine Parks

From an organizational perspective of the 10 marine and coastal management organisations asked to comment on the programme, six indicated that WIO-COMPAS had, to some degree, contributed to modest improvements in MPA management. Currently, no yardstick exists to measure such improvements. However, MPA PROs and their organisations cite other benefits of the programme. These include: helping to define the standards that can be expected from individuals operating at different level positions within an MPA; providing a method for identifying individuals' skills deficiencies that can be improved through training, experience or other professional development activities; and offering a tool to help MPA management agencies in the hiring, training and promoting of staff.



Photo. Candidates completing a written assessment in Kenya.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

WIO-COMPAS has:

- Grown into a fully credible, tested and proven certification programme for MPA professionals — the first in the world for any protected areas
- Set the standard for similar programmes proposed for other regions in the world
- Developed competences and standards for three levels of protected area professionals against which to assess such professionals working anywhere in the world
- Designed a fully functional model of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) — a model more often theorized than practiced
- Enhanced the professional standing of more than 40 MPA professionals by 2012 (51 as of 2013) in the region — a standing increasingly recognized by conservation agencies and others in the field. This is an estimated 8% of total MPA personnel in the region eligible for certification.
- Provided MPA PROs with increased professional networking opportunities
- Received endorsements from IUCN–WCPA; WWF-SA; International Ranger Federation (IRF); Game Rangers Association of Africa (GRAA)
- Gained recognition at a global level with potential for similar programmes elsewhere
- Strengthened collaboration between partner organisations in the region and beyond

TOTAL NUMBER OF CERTIFIED MPA PROs (as of August 2013)			
(with percentages of overall staff estimated at that level within the region)			
Total Level 1 29 (6.5%)	Total Level 2 17 (12%)	Total Level 3 5 (7%)	Total MPA-Pros 51 (8% of total MPA staffing in WIO region)
Estimated number 440	Estimated number 140	Estimated number 70	Total Estimated number 650

KEY CHALLENGES

Lack of Precedent Meant High Development Costs:

- WIO-COMPAS was developed with few precedents on which to draw. The fact that every element had to be developed from scratch, which significantly increased the research and development costs phase of the programme
- WIO-COMPAS sprang from a strong collective understanding of the practical realities of MPA management and did not initially have a particular assessment theory in mind. As a result, time was lost developing an appropriate assessment model
- The assessment process needed to be consistent and credible across both assessors and those being assessed, and competences needed to be weighted to indicate their level of importance within the suite of required professional competences. Again, with no precedents model upon which to build, this was a time-consuming exercise

Broad Yet Measurable Competences:

- The competences had to be identified and described in a way that reflected the broad range of skills needed at the different levels and needed to be clear to both applicants and assessors and to be accurately measurable
- Matching each competence with the most appropriate assessment was an iterative process that required initially testing and then refining the instruments based on what was learned
- Adjustments to the competences will be needed as the field of protected area management changes
- At the field evolves, it will be critical to ensure consistent quality of the programme's content and process
- The array of questions for the Level 2 written test, which is one of the assessment instruments for Level 1 and 2, provided an opportunity for candidates who scored poorly in other competence areas to improve their scores
- The challenge in face-to-face interview assessments was to develop a wide enough range of questions to allow candidates who were weak in one or more competencies to provide evidence that they had in fact achieved the required standard
- The question remains: Do the individual competences, assessed through a suite of instruments, equal adequate performance on the job? (Emerging stories of the professional progress of some of the MPA PROs suggest that it does in some cases, but more detailed analysis is needed.)

Simple Tools:

- Again, with no precedent upon which to draw, the tools, scoring processes and assessment documents had to be developed empirically
- Managing the paperwork and accurately transferring scores into score-sheet records is time intensive. This leads some assessors to forgo entering notations on a candidate's evidence. Those notations could help in justifying a score and could be critical information if a candidate challenges an assessment outcome. The use of an electronic scoring system in Excel has mitigated this to some extent, but more focus is needed on providing supporting comments for the scores.

Assessor Availability:

- No pool of individuals with the requisite experience in both assessment and subject matter (MPA management) existed from which to recruit ready-made assessors. Hence, the lead assessor had a full burden of duties and had to train and mentor individuals with MPA expertise to serve as assessors.
- Initially, no strategic process was in place for recruiting assessors. In the end, the decision was made to recruit Level 2 or 3 MPA PROs and provide them with intensive training. They would then serve as an observer/assessor in training at an event under the guidance of an experienced assessor. An experienced assessor also would mentor them during their first assessment event.
- The initial scoring process needed to be clarified. It needed to define the competences with added range statements and examples and to define the kinds of evidence necessary for scoring at different Levels. This has been done to a large degree, but it remains subject to constant review, as with the rest of the programme.

Programme Cost:

- The completed seven-year research and development phase of the WIO-COMPAS programme cost approximately \$1.4 million. This phase included all the time and effort involved from the initial conceptualization and planning through design, implementation, review and modification of at least one assessment event at each of the three levels. These costs would be greatly reduced for countries around the world that adopt or adapt the programme because all aspects — from identifying the competences to conducting the events — have been vetted. Going forward, costs would include implementing the model and components of a working programme.
- Yet, the costs of administering the programme remain high and occur at every step: from processing applications, to qualifying individuals as candidates, to recruiting and training assessors, to holding events. The original goal was to

initiate the programme with heavy investment from external donors. Gradually, candidates and their management agencies would pick up a substantial portion of the costs related to individuals' attendance at the events, which is the most costly part of the programme. To date, the agencies usually cover the registration fees and sometimes provide contributions in-kind. However, the majority of the costs remain subsidized by the donors. This is a fundamentally unsustainable and undesirable model. Steps have been taken to address costs. First, the length of the events was reduced (cutting accommodation and assessor expenses), but no further time reductions can occur without compromising programme effectiveness and credibility. Level 1 events will be offered only on a country or sub-regional basis to save on travel costs. Level 2 events might be offered only a sub-regional basis. Currently, the costs for Level 1 and Level 2 assessment events are generally on par with training courses of similar duration in the region.

Institutional Commitment:

- Individuals and institutions in the field are more familiar with training than certification. Hence, even after five years of marketing WIO-COMPAS and what it is and is not, most institutions do not fully understand the programme. Some exceptions include Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) in Kenya, Marine Parks and Reserves Unit (MPRU) in Tanzania, Cape Nature in South Africa and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) in Madagascar. At those organisations the idea of institutionalizing the programme (or aspects of it) into their agencies is gaining some traction⁴. But again, these are the exception.
- It is becoming clear that institutionalization of the WIO-COMPAS programme within an agency will succeed only if one or more senior-level staff members of that agency spearhead the effort. This is a challenge because the programme is mostly driven by those in middle management.
- The cost might limit the ability of some agencies to institutionalize the programme, even if the desire to do so is there. As discussed above, however, the costs are comparable with similar training. Perhaps the key is to help

⁴ For example, KWS in Kenya and South Africa managing agencies are discussing having competences written into job descriptions and KPAs for MPA personnel; providing training to staff who need to improve competences; and having certification seen as a pre-requisite for recruitment or advancement.

institutions understand the real value of the programme when compared to training courses.



Photo. Level 3 Certification Assessment Event with Candidates, Assessors, Secretariat and Observers.

LESSONS LEARNED

Following are summations of key lessons learned that are covered in more detail earlier in this document:

There Are No Short Cuts

Research and development initiatives usually involve more time, effort and money than initially conceived. WIO-COMPAS was no exception. At each step of the way the principals reflected to ask: “Is this step in the process achieving what it meant to achieve?” “Is it as efficient as possible?” “Do we need changes, and if ‘yes’ then what changes and how?” The return on investment of such an iterative approach, however, is a well thought out and vetted programme that is ready-to-go when adopted by other regions around the world. Such a reflective approach continues to be pursued with detailed evaluations of each event.

Focus is Critical

Initially, the plan was to launch the programme on all three levels. It soon became clear that it was preferable to focus on completing and adjusting *all* aspects of *one* level before turning to another. Level 2 was selected as the first and most-critical level. This approach allowed for the testing and adaption of a microcosm of the larger programme. Lessons learned and the resulting adaptations to the process, materials or design could then be applied to the next level(s). In the end, this strategy enabled a far earlier launch of the programme than would have been possible had development of all three levels been attempted in parallel.

All Levels Are Not Created Equal

Each programme level shared some common elements, and also had unique aspects. Level 1 targeted predominantly hands-on professionals engaged with the day-to-day practicalities of MPA operations. As they would be unlikely to produce many written documents in the normal course of their work, less focus was placed on written evidence of their competence. Instead, their assessments included practical demonstrations (or simulations) and discussions. In contrast, candidates in Level 2 and Level 3 work at the managerial level and the policy level respectively, and more likely would be required to produce many written documents. Thus, their assessments include a greater emphasis on written evidence, presentations and interviews with no practical demonstrations.

Collaboration: Essential, Slow and Worth It

In retrospect, it is highly unlikely that a single organisation could have developed WIO-COMPAS. The collective of individuals and organisations supporting the certification idea — whether initially or more recently — is at the very heart of the programme's success. This collective brought to the programme more experience, expertise, skills and networks than any one organisation ever could. Collaboration, however, slows the process. Issues around ownership or feelings that not all viewpoints are adequately considered might occur. Yet, when collaborators trust one another, these hurdles can be reconciled.

Financing the Programme: Thinking Creatively

There are ways to help reduce costs until management agencies have the political will and the budget to more fully support the programme. In-kind contributions of services, venues, local transportation, etc., are often available when requested. Travel costs are being minimized by offering more events at the country or sub-regional level. Developing local assessors is a core strategy of controlling costs. Moving forward, assessors could be encouraged, as leaders in their profession, to volunteer some of their time, which many government-employed assessors do. Events can be timed to piggy-back with other conferences, workshops, etc., so travel costs are paid by a donor, project or organisation/agency. However, it is unlikely agencies will ever pay the full programme fee, making it likely that the programme will always need some external funding.

Putting Assessment Theory into Practice

While WIO-COMPAS always had competence assessment at the core of its design, it did not have a particular assessment theory or approach in mind. Rather, WIO-COMPAS started with the goal of meeting the needs of MPAs in the region, of which having highly competent staff is just one ingredient. It created an assessment model that would help define the competences needed at different levels of MPA career levels, set the standards for these and assessed individuals against those standards. In the process, WIO-COMPAS has made a major contribution to the broader field of professional assessment through its demonstration of a functional and credible RPL model — one of the programme's positive returns on investment. If the programme is shared with the assessment field, it could add assessment practice into existing theories.

Assessor Qualifications

WIO-COMPAS determined that assessors must already possess extensive knowledge of MPA management so that they could then be trained and mentored in the specifics of conducting an assessment. This requirement derived from the belief that both candidates and their organisations need to know that the individuals are being assessed by recognized experts in marine conservation and MPA management. Such need for tacit knowledge by assessors is well recognized in contemporary assessment theory.

Assessment Instruments and Scoring

Qalanet's initial concern regarding the number of different assessment instruments and the complexity of the scoring and weighting gave way to recognition that this arrangement provides candidates the greatest opportunity to demonstrate their competence through a variety of means. WIO-COMPAS has since struck a balance among the issues of complexity, workability and rigor of these instruments and scoring.

The Challenge of Promoting the New

After years of marketing WIO-COMPAS as a certification programme rather than a training programme, the difference is most clearly understood by those directly involved, especially the MPA PROs. While their roles as programme ambassadors are important, the MPA PROs' supervisors and those at the highest levels of MPA management need to be convinced of the merits of certification. However, reaching those decision makers might come only when there is a critical mass of MPA PROs, especially those at Levels 2 and 3, who can demonstrate that the programme clearly strengthens MPA management.

MPA PROs Helping Others

A pattern is emerging of MPA PROs recruiting colleagues to apply to WIO-COMPAS and tutoring them in how to improve their applications and materials. The result is a marked improvement in the completeness and quality of the applications. What is now an informal process of helping could potentially be formalized by matching up an applicant with an MPA PRO who serves as mentor.

Leadership

Initially, the programme's definition of leadership was unclear, and candidates were uncertain how they were being assessed on this competence. Because the conventional business model of leadership did not fit well, the programme developed four leadership elements relevant for MPA professionals:

- Leading by example
- Self-motivation
- Ethical approach (see below)
- Innovation.

Having these four focuses has enabled greater rigor and consistency in assessing this competence. The scoring weight of this competence also was increased from 4 at Level 1 to 8 at Levels 2 and 3.

Ethics

While MPA PROs sign a Code of Ethics, it is extremely difficult to articulate what constitutes a fitting manner for candidates to provide evidence of ethical conduct and to assess this. This issue is yet to be resolved, although each subsequent event provides new and valuable examples of ethical behaviour to inform the programme's understanding of the competence.

Endorsements

WIO-COMPAS would benefit from endorsements from additional regional and international agencies working in protected areas. However, for those currently providing endorsement and those considering future endorsement, it would be valuable to have the relationship made more formal, with clear roles and responsibilities and a clear statement of what endorsement means to each side.

Credibility

Countries in Africa that are interested in adopting certification seem inclined to adopt the WIO-COMPAS model as developed rather than translating materials into another language. However, taking the programme global has always been an objective, and it is one that involves some risk. As others take the key concepts of WIO-COMPAS and adapt the process and materials into their own programmes, it is possible to end up with multiple versions of what was intended as a universal programme. Uniformity with the WIO-COMPAS model requires a consistent set of competences and standards as the benchmark for MPA professionals around the world. It is possible that the recent IUCN initiative to develop global standards for training and certification will provide the framework necessary to ensure consistency.

Professional Association

WIO-COMPAS was conceived as a professional association model that included certification as an important, but not sole, element of the model. The goal is to create a community of certified MPA PROs to network with fellow MPA professionals; to participate in post-certification activities/services (including serving as assessors); and to promote the programme to management agencies and fellow colleagues. Toward this end, a professional organisation/association would emerge that could take on the lead role that WIO-COMPAS currently serves. While the programme's certification element is fully developed, its professional association element is not.

LOOKING AHEAD

Almost universally, those involved in WIO-COMPAS believe in the importance of continuing to promote certification and the MPA PRO model more widely, while also considering:

- Revisiting ways to better link with trainings/training providers that can offer skills-building in WIO-COMPAS competence areas
- Widening the geographical scope and proactively marketing the programme to the whole of Africa
- Translating the MPA PRO model into the terrestrial protected-area context
- Developing a component for community-managed marine reserves
- Linking with those trying to promote accreditation of MPA sites
- Suggesting that human resource administration departments use MPA PRO competences for hiring, promotions, performance reviews and career development and to guide existing training programmes
- Providing post-certification services, such as an exchange programme

For now, the goal is to consolidate what has been done in the region to seek ways to make WIO-COMPAS sustainable. While dialogue with interested parties globally should continue, it should not be at the expense of strengthening what already has robust support in the region.



Photo. First Certification Assessment Event in 2008 with Candidates, Assessors and Secretariat.

APPENDIX 1: COMPETENCES AND STANDARDS

Cross Comparison of Certification Levels 1, 2, 3 (as of October 2013)

Competences and Standards (level of understanding or ability) with points for each are noted in parentheses.

LEVEL 1		LEVEL 2		LEVEL 3	
1. MPA Governance (including Policy, Strategy, Legislation and Compliance)					
	Sound understanding of regulations and bylaws related to the MPA (4 points)		Thorough understanding of a range of compliance approaches (4 points)		Thorough understanding of the range of compliance options available in their area of operation (4 points)
	Basic understanding of national legislation for sectors related to marine areas (2)		Sound understanding Of relevant national legislation and policies pertaining to MPAs (4)		Thorough understanding of the national legal requirements and processes as pertaining to the marine and coastal environment and resources, with a specific focus on MPAs. (4 - points)
	Basic understanding of the key species or habitat protected by international conventions (2)		Basic understanding of international legal and policy context for MPAs (2)		Sound understanding of the regional and international legal and policy contexts for the marine and coastal environment, with a specific focus on MPAs (4)
			Sound understanding of the implications for MPA management of weaknesses in policy and legislation (2)		Sound understanding of appropriate institutional governance structures and processes for effective management of MPAs (4)
			Thorough understanding Of legal enforcement requirements and processes (4)		

	Ability		Ability		Ability
	To follow correct legal processes associated with enforcement activities (4)		To pursue correct legal processes associated with enforcement activities (4)		To influence and provide critical input into national legal requirements and processes pertaining to the marine and coastal environment with specific focus on MPAs. (4)
	To introduce ideas for improving compliance and enforcement (2)		To introduce ideas for improving compliance and enforcement (2)		To develop guidelines and sanctions for a compliance strategy (4)
	To conduct surveillance patrols and record detailed observations (4)		To contribute to legal and policy development for their MPA (2)		To influence and provide critical input into strategies to meet national and international conservation obligations (2)
					To engage in and deliberate international policy through international conventions/task teams and work groups (2)
					To develop and implement organisational strategies and policies consistent with national legislative framework (4)

2. Marine Conservation: MPAs and Other Approaches

	Sound understanding of their organisation's structure, mandate and function and own roles and responsibilities within the MPA (4)		Thorough understanding of own organisation's structure, mandate and function. (4)		
	Sound understanding of the MPA's history, objectives and current priority issues (4)		Basic understanding of large-scale approaches to marine conservation and how their MPA fits into this (2)		Thorough understanding of large scale approaches to marine and coastal conservation (4)

	Basic understanding of different institutional models for MPA management (2)		Sound understanding of different institutional models for MPA management (4)		Thorough understanding of the purposes, values, principles, critiques, and benefits of MPAs and criteria for selection/proclamation of MPAs (4)
	Basic understanding of the benefits and challenges of MPAs as a management tool (4)		Challenges to establishment and management of MPAs (4)		
			Sound understanding of different categories of MPAs, regional/national (2)		
			Sound understanding of criteria for selection, establishment and delineation of MPAs (2)		
	Ability		Ability		Ability
			To support the establishment and enhancement of decision-making bodies affecting their MPA (2)		To scale up the experiences and practices gained at local and national levels to regional and international levels. (2)
			To engage/influence decision-making bodies towards fulfilling MPA goals (4)		To contribute substantially towards large-scale marine and coastal conservation initiatives (4)
					To contribute substantially towards identification of and motivations for proclamation of MPAs (4)
					To influence and contribute to planning processes for terrestrial areas adjacent to MPAs (2)

3. Communication and Stakeholder Engagement (including networking, liaison, advocacy, negotiation)

3.1 Communication

	Sound understanding of different means of communicating within the context of MPAs (2)		Sound understanding of a range of communication approaches appropriate to the MPA (4)		Sound understanding of the role of effective communication with appropriate audiences in support of marine and coastal conservation, with a particular focus on MPAs (4)
					Sound Understanding of the role of advocacy in promoting marine and coastal conservation and the appropriate advocacy processes to be followed (4)
	Ability		Ability		Ability
	To communicate effectively with various audiences (4)		To communicate effectively (4)		To communicate and negotiate effectively with a wide range of different audiences at a decision-making level (4)
	To use electronic communication media and information technology (2)		To use electronic communication media and information technology (4)		To maintain a high positive profile for marine and coastal conservation using appropriate methods (4)
			To contribute to development of effective written communication materials (4)		To contribute to the development and engage in the dialogue of a strategic network for marine conservation at national and regional levels (2)
					To contribute towards the development and implementation of a communication strategy for promotion of marine and coastal conservation at a national level (2)

3.2 Engaging Stakeholders

	Sound understanding of how local stakeholders use and perceive resources (4)		Sound understanding of importance of effective and positive engagement with stakeholders to build a support base (4)		Sound understanding of the key stakeholders in marine and coastal conservation at a national, regional and international level (4)
			Sound understanding of diverse techniques for ensuring participation of stakeholders (2)		Sound understanding of a range of methods for the engagement of key stakeholders (4)
	Ability		Ability		Ability
	To engage stakeholders in a socially and culturally appropriate manner (4)		To engage stakeholders in a socially and culturally appropriate manner (2)		
	To engage stakeholders to address minor conflicts in an effective manner (4)		To engage stakeholders to address conflicts (4)		To mediate conflicts between key stakeholders (2)
			To contribute to the building of partnerships and a broad support base for the MPA (4)		To develop and maintain effective and productive relationships and partnerships with key stakeholders (4)
			To profile and describe stakeholder perceptions and interests (4)		

4. Human and Financial Resources Mobilization and Management

	Sound Understanding		Sound Understanding		Thorough Understanding
	Sound understanding of the MPA's operating costs and financial system for their area of operations (4)		Sound understanding of financial processes as operated by the MPA organisation (4)		Thorough understanding of the range of instruments available for accessing and mobilizing resources for MPA management (4)
			Sound understanding of a range of appropriate alternative financing mechanisms for the MPA (4)		Thorough understanding of the human capacity requirements at all levels for effective management of MPAs within their national context (4)
					Sound Understanding of regulatory frameworks concerning financial regulations and processes from a national and institutional perspective (4)
	Ability		Ability		Ability
	To follow the MPA's financial management processes within their area of operations (4)		To write funding proposals for the MPA (4)		To define and strategize for resource requirements through the development and implementation of strategic and business plans (4)
	To develop a simple budget for their own activities (2)		To develop and manage budgets associated with MPA management operations (4)		To effectively identify, access and allocate essential resources (4)
	To identify and recommend potential sources of revenue generation (2)		To assess the viability of alternative financing mechanisms for their MPA (2)		To provide effective support for MPA personnel at all levels (4)
					To provide and define the TORs/KPAs/Training requirements for MPA personnel (2)

5. Management Implementation and Effectiveness

5.1 Planning and Reporting

	Basic understanding of logistical, infrastructure and Human resources requirements for management of the MPA (4)		Thorough understanding of logistical and infrastructural requirements for management of own MPA (4)		Thorough understanding of appropriate planning processes for MPA management and marine conservation (4)
	Basic understanding of how their role/position contributes to meeting the MPA's objectives (4)		Sound understanding of the principles and practice of management planning (4)		Thorough understanding of reporting processes and protocols for key national and international stakeholders in MPA management & marine conservation (2)
			Sound understanding of safety and security issues associated with the MPA (4)		
	Ability		Ability		Ability
	To develop one's own work plan (4)		To make substantial contribution to the development of their MPA management and business plans (4)		To develop or contribute significantly towards the development of MPA management plans, and broader scale marine conservation plans (4)
	To implement one's work plan (4)		To develop and implement monthly and annual work plans (4)		To ensure the effective implementation of management plans by MPA personnel (4)
	To ensure proper maintenance of the MPA's infrastructure and equipment (4)		To ensure proper maintenance of the MPA's infrastructure and equipment (4)		To produce accurate, informative and accessible reports for key stakeholders (4)
	To follow general health and safety procedures (4)		To identify appropriate infrastructure, equipment and materials for effective		

		management of the MPA (4)	
To physically perform on the water (4)		To develop and implement contingency planning processes (4)	
		To produce coherent progress reports (4)	To ensure effective implementation of reporting processes within the organisation (2)
5.2 Monitoring, Evaluation and Research			
Basic understanding of the purpose and outputs of monitoring, evaluation and research (2)		Sound understanding of information needs for MPA management (4)	Thorough understanding of appropriate management effectiveness review and monitoring and evaluation processes for MPAs and marine conservation initiatives (4)
			Sound understanding of current research related to MPA management and marine conservation in their region and globally (2)
Ability		Ability	Ability
To conduct basic monitoring protocols in the field (bio and social) (4)		To contribute to the development of monitoring, evaluation and research programmes drawing on appropriate principles and practices (4)	To facilitate management effectiveness reviews and evaluations (4)
		To contribute to the analysis and interpretation of monitoring, evaluation and research outputs (4)	To guide and ensure adequate response and adaptation in relation to review and evaluation outcomes (4)
		To apply monitoring, evaluation and research outputs towards adapting implementation actions/strategies (4)	To identify critical research needs for MPAs within their area of jurisdiction (2)
			To ensure incorporation of research outcomes in planning and management processes (2)

5.3 Human Resources

		Sound understanding of human resource and skills requirements for effective management of the MPA (4)		
		Sound understanding of appropriate techniques for measuring and assessing staff performance (4)		
		Sound understanding of the recruitment and retention processes applicable to their organisation (2)		
	Ability	Ability		
	To supervise volunteers, researchers and contractors, and to mentor junior personnel (4)	To undertake staff appraisals using agreed performance indicators (4)		
		To manage effective recruitment and retention processes for MPA staff, where required (2)		
		To supervise, mentor and provide leadership for MPA personnel and volunteers (4)		
		To identify training needs and coordinate implementation of training activities for MPA (4)		
		To write terms of reference and oversee the work of external service providers (2)		

6. Biophysical and Socio-Economic Context

6.1 Marine and Coastal Ecology

	Basic understanding of the ecosystems and species within the MPA and the interactions between them (4)		Thorough understanding of the principal ecosystems and species within their MPA and the interactions between them (4)		Thorough understanding of the bioregions and ecosystems within their area of jurisdiction (4)
	Basic understanding of the key threats to the ecological processes and species in the MPA's area and the implications for management (4)		Thorough understanding of the key threats to the ecological processes and species in their area and the implications for management (4)		Thorough understanding of the key threats to ecosystem processes within their area of jurisdiction (4)
	Basic understanding of the oceanography influencing the MPA (2)		Sound understanding of the oceanography influencing the MPA (2)		Thorough understanding of the oceanographic processes within their area of jurisdiction (4)
			Sound understanding of the potential impacts of climate change on the MPA (2)		Sound understanding of emerging issues, including climate change, and potential adaptations to these in their area of jurisdiction (4)
			Sound understanding of the interactions between marine and terrestrial ecosystems and species impacting on their MPA (4)		

6.2 Fisheries					
	Basic understanding of the local fishing sector in and around the MPA (4)		Sound understanding of local fishing sector in and around the MPA (4)		Sound understanding of fisheries activities within their areas of jurisdiction (4)
			Sound understanding of target fisheries species & their life histories (4)		
			Sound understanding of the principles of sustainable fisheries (2)		
6.3 Tourism					
	Basic understanding of the local tourism sector (2)		Sound Understanding of the local tourism sector (4)		Sound understanding of tourism activities within their area of jurisdiction (4)
			Sound understanding of visitor needs and expectations (2)		
6.4 Socio-economic and Cultural Context					
	Sound understanding of the role and contribution of the MPA to the livelihoods of local communities (4)		Sound understanding of the role and contribution of the MPA to the livelihoods of local communities (4)		Thorough understanding of the socio-economic and cultural context within their area of jurisdiction (4)
	Basic understanding of the historical, cultural and spiritual values of the MPA (where relevant) (2)		Basic understanding of the historical, cultural and spiritual values of the MPA (where relevant) (2)		Thorough understanding of the socio-economic and cultural implications of marine and coastal conservation initiatives in their area of jurisdiction (4)
			Basic understanding of the ecosystem services provided by the MPA (2)		

7. Leadership, Ethics and Innovation

Demonstrates:

Leading by example (4)

Self-motivation (4)

Ethical approach (4)

Innovation (4)

GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING STANDARDS

THOROUGH – comprehensive understanding and how it can be applied in diverse contexts

SOUND – detailed understanding and how to apply to their place, context

BASIC – general recognition (cite examples)

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