

Waves of change: A holistic Management Plan to shape the future of the Namaqua National Park Marine Protected Area

Text by Ané Oosthuizen & Alison Kock
Photo by Alison Kock

Management plans are crucial in effectively and efficiently managing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). They establish a framework for balancing conservation objectives with sustainable use, ensuring the long-term health and vitality of marine ecosystems and their services to nature and society.

In August 2019, SANParks acquired three new MPAs as part of the 20 new Operation Phakisa* MPA declarations in that year. Ideally, each new MPA should have a management plan drafted within a year of declaration. However, the outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020 and 2021 hampered the immediate development of management plans because in-person stakeholder engagements could not take place.

Nonetheless, the Namaqua National Park MPA management plan process was initiated in June 2022 and completed in March 2023. This is SANParks' first stand-alone MPA management plan, as previous plans were incorporated into respective park management plans. SANParks follows a strategic adaptive management planning framework, traditionally used for National Park management plans, to develop MPA plans. The first step in stakeholder consultation was to host two workshops, in Hondeklipbaai and Kamieskroon, during June 2022. These 'desired state workshops' engaged local community members, farmers, tourism operators, NGOs, and local and national authorities. During these workshops, stakeholders envisioned the desired future state of the MPA on which the management plan's objectives would be based.

During the June meeting, the Hondeklipbaai community raised several concerns, which could not be addressed at the workshop. The SANParks team, supported by WWF, returned to Hondeklipbaai in August 2022 to clarify the community's concerns, which related mostly to land tenure and the implementation of the national government's poverty alleviation program.

The SANParks team developed five high-level objec-

THE NEW MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR NAMAQUA NATIONAL PARK'S MARINE PROTECTED AREA CONSIDERS COMMUNITY CONCERNS AND PROMOTES THE SUSTAINABLE USE AND PROTECTION OF MARINE BIODIVERSITY

tives in order to achieve the MPA's vision: biodiversity and ecosystem benefits, communication, tourism and heritage, effective management, and regional integration. These objectives, with their supporting programs and activities, support the realisation of the gazetted purposes of the MPA. The MPA management plans differ from the National Park management plans in that

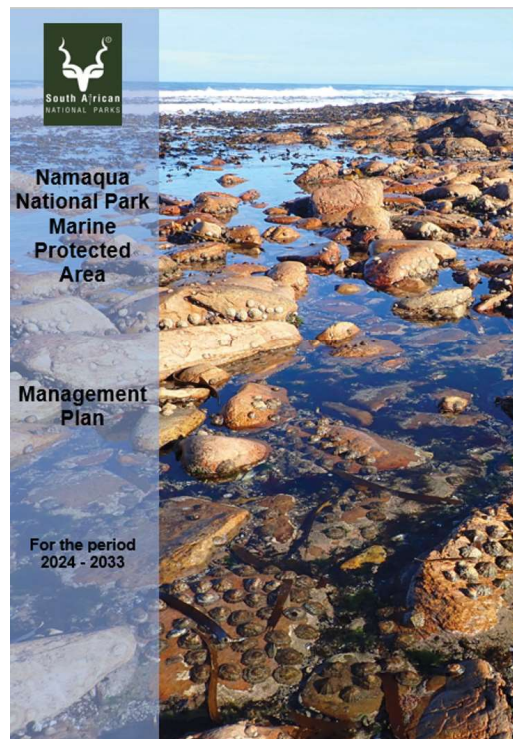
they may not contradict or change national gazetted MPA zonation or regulations. Furthermore, MPA plans must be closely aligned to the respective National Park plan to which it is adjacent. Thus, the Namaqua MPA and Park plans were developed during the same year to ensure integration and alignment between objectives and programs.

The draft plan was completed in January 2023 and made available for public comment for 30 days from early February. In February 2023, SANParks returned to Hondeklipbaai and Kamieskroon for public days, where the park manager presented the Management Plan to the communities. A comments and response report was drafted, and comments were incorporated into the management plan.

The draft Namaqua National Park MPA management plan was submitted to the Department of Fisheries, Forestry and the Environment (DFFE) for technical review at the end of March 2023 before final approval and submission to the minister.

The development of the Namaqua National Park Marine Protected Area management plan represents a significant step in safeguarding marine ecosystems, preserving biodiversity, and promoting sustainable use of resources in the region. It demonstrates SANParks' commitment to effective conservation and sets the stage for the long-term health and vitality of the marine environment in Namaqua National Park.

*Operation Phakisa is an initiative of the South African government designed to fast track the implementation of solutions on critical development issues - operationphakisa.gov.za



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