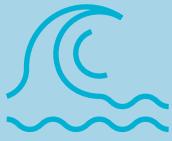


Ocean Country  
Partnership  
Programme (OCPP)  
Interim Evaluation  
**Sri Lanka**  
**Case Study - summary**

Department for Food,  
Environment, and Rural Affairs  
June 2024

## About the OCPP



**The Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP)** The Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) is a bilateral technical assistance and capacity building programme that provides tailored support to countries to manage the marine environment more sustainably, including by strengthening marine science expertise, developing science-based policy and management tools and creating educational resources for coastal communities. The OCPP delivers work under three thematic areas: biodiversity, marine pollution, and sustainable seafood. Funding is provided through the overarching Blue Planet Fund (BPF) by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). The programme has been engaged in Sri Lanka since FY2021/22.

NIRAS is the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) supplier contracted by Defra. Their work under the banner of OCPP-MEL covers a broad range of activities including process and impact evaluations, MEL system strengthening, support for communications, learning and monitoring throughout the lifetime of the programme, as well as conduct of ad hoc evaluation assignments at the request of Defra.

This document is one of five result summaries based on country case studies conducted as part of the interim evaluation. The others include Belize, Ghana, the Maldives, and Mozambique.

## OCPP Delivery Partners in Sri Lanka

OCPP's bilateral partnerships are delivered by three British government Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs):  
Centre for the Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas)  
Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)  
Marine Management Organisation (MMO).

Together, they are partnering with the Government of Sri Lanka to support effective management of their marine environment with a focus on providing technical capacity around the three key themes of OCPP: marine biodiversity, marine pollution and sustainable seafood. Universities in Sri Lanka are also engaged in OCPP scholarship activities and local partners support the ALBs in technical delivery of some of the work in-country.

## Acknowledgements

This case study was prepared by Valerie McDonnell-Lenoach and Aruna Wanasinghe. They would like to acknowledge and thank the Delivery Partner organisations, Cefas, JNCC and MMO, as well as the British High Commission in Colombo for their support and assistance in arranging the field mission to Sri Lanka and in the provision of programme documentation, as well as feedback on emerging findings. The NIRAS MEL team would also like to thank all those that were interviewed as part of this case study assessment for their time and feedback.



Marine  
Management  
Organisation

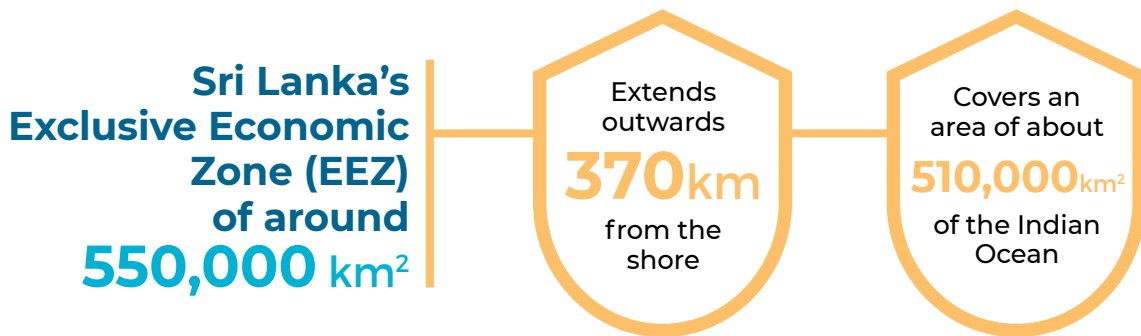


## Findings at a glance



- OCPP is building strong relationships with a range of key institutions and ministries in Sri Lanka and is addressing important capacity and technical gaps that might otherwise remain without their support.
- The programme is beginning to show some promising signs of effectiveness, with some important results likely leading to impact.
- The programme is successfully supporting government bodies, NGOs and universities gain the technical capacity needed to tackle critical issues concerning the marine environment and biodiversity.
- So far, there has been little focus on poverty and gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) in OCPP’s work in Sri Lanka. While there are plans to address these gaps, there is a concern that the programme may not fully incorporate these considerations in the current financial year (2024/25).
- Stakeholders in Sri Lanka are concerned by the lack of a clear, holistic strategy guiding OCPP’s work in Sri Lanka.
- The programme must prioritise sustainability moving forward. Approaches such as training the trainers and developing strategies for gathering and sharing data can help mitigate associated risks.

## Sri Lanka’s marine environment



Sri Lanka is home to



**15**  
species of seagrass



**>20**  
mangrove species (one-third of global true mangrove species)



**209**  
hard coral species



**29**  
marine mammal species

**1/3**  
of Sri Lanka's population of **22 million people** live in coastal areas (WB 2017).



**34%**  
of them rely only on **coast related activities**.



Fishing supports the livelihoods of around **3,6 million** Sri Lankans.



## Seeking long term change to Sri Lanka's marine environment



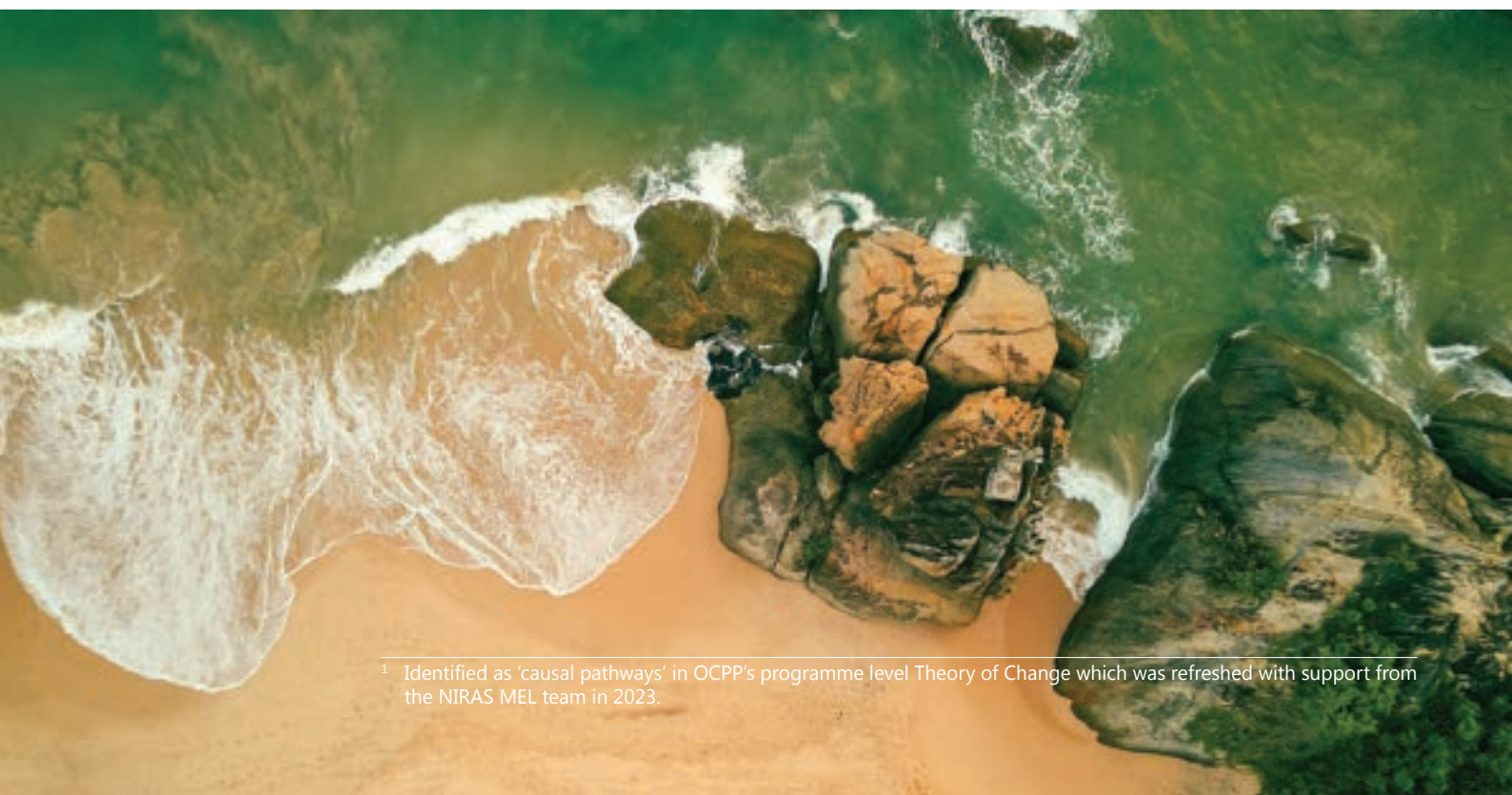
Sri Lanka is facing significant challenges in terms of its marine ecosystems. Climate change is leading to coral bleaching and habitat loss, while overfishing and ecosystem damage is resulting in declining fish stocks. The recent economic crisis and COVID-19 have dealt further blows, weakening the country's fishing industry and reducing exports.

Against this backdrop, government departments struggle with resource and capacity constraints. Meanwhile, shortcomings in co-ordination with research organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) limit the generation and use of scientific knowledge, data and practical resources, essential for effective policy making and practice.

OCPP's ambitions lie in addressing these issues by improving policies and regulations before moving towards enhanced collaborative action by stakeholders to manage and protect their marine environments effectively and sustainably. The long term outcome of OCPP in Sri Lanka is that partners can better address the challenges to their marine environments and biodiversity, enhance marine dependent livelihoods, and the wellbeing of those that depend on them, sustainably, equitably and inclusively.

The Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) has identified four pathways through which the programme can deliver change in the way these issues are addressed in Sri Lanka through the generation and use of scientific knowledge to better inform policymaking and action.<sup>1</sup>

- **Capacity building and technical assistance:** Providing expertise towards sustainable marine ecosystem science and better marine environment monitoring.
- **Governance and regulation:** Supporting the creation of evidence-informed policies, improving frameworks and plans for sustainable marine ecosystem management, governance and budgeting.
- **Science, education and knowledge exchange:** Conducting study pilots and environmental and needs assessments and facilitating cross-sector collaboration to enhance knowledge sharing, learning and innovation.
- **Value chain and market access improvements for seafood:** Fostering market linkages for sustainable seafood.



<sup>1</sup> Identified as 'causal pathways' in OCPP's programme level Theory of Change which was refreshed with support from the NIRAS MEL team in 2023.

# Key findings



The interim evaluation of Sri Lanka involved a deep dive investigation into the design and implementation quality of the programme between March and June 2024. Evaluators focused on the extent the programme was meeting Sri Lanka’s needs, likelihood of the programme achieving its intended outcomes and impact and additionally explored ways of working, sustainability and coherence with interventions of other development partners.

## Meeting Sri Lanka’s needs



### Successes and strengths

- Overall OCPP’s support is meeting the needs of in-country stakeholders, particularly the Government of Sri Lanka, its agencies and universities, and helping them to address marine challenges.
- OCPP has strengthened relationships with key stakeholders and agencies initially developed by its predecessor, the Commonwealth Litter Programme (CLiP).
- The programme is adapting to external demands having successfully expanded its scope to include sustainable aquaculture and marine biodiversity, as well as marine pollution.
- Stakeholders are happy with the training and capacity building support offered by the programme and have asked to help identify future training topics and design.



The Marine Litter Database, developed by CLiP and OCPP and now managed by the Industrial Technology Institute (ITI), contributes to the evidence-base for policymakers on the composition of marine pollution including plastics content.



### Areas for improvement

- OCPP has had to navigate a complex system of organisations and regulations for marine environment governance which has resulted in coordination challenges.
- The programme team recognise the need to better embed gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) in its programming and have put plans in place to do so.





Coherence with others working in the same space



Successes and strengths

- There are some useful examples of the programme supporting the work of others, including fostering links between regional stakeholders on maritime disaster readiness.
- The OCPP Coordinator is connecting the programme with other marine initiatives in Sri Lanka including the Sri Lanka Coral Reefs Initiative, managed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and funded by the Global Fund for Coral Reefs (GFCR) and in part by the Blue Planet Fund (BPF).



Areas for improvement

- The programme appears somewhat disjointed, with delivery partners focussing on different areas of work. It is unclear how their efforts align or complement each other.
- Stakeholders want better coordination between the delivery partners and clearer communication about their activities.



Use of resources



Successes and strengths

- Engagement with government ministries, agencies and universities is good. The programme is recognised by these stakeholders for its knowledge and practical expertise.
- OCPP works well with local delivery partners, increasingly relying on them to provide support on the ground. For example, community engagement is often carried out through local suppliers collecting data and conducting surveys on issues such as beach pollution and household waste.



Areas for improvement

- Almost one fifth of activities for the current financial year are reported as delayed, raising concerns about the timely and efficient delivery of support.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is confused by the number of activities and institutions involved in the programme. Better communication between the Ministry and the programme will help keep them informed.



OCPP is contributing to the evidence base on the scale of plastics featured in marine pollution by gathering beach survey data and providing key institutions with laboratory equipment to analyse marine litter.





## Meeting programme objectives



### Successes and strengths

- OCPP's work in Sri Lanka is showing signs of higher level change, with potential to positively impact the country's marine environment.
- Several factors are positively influencing effectiveness, particularly the strength of relationships developed with key partner institutions and the presence in country of the OCPP coordinator.



### Areas for improvement

- Given time, outputs such as the OCPP scholarships and data and evidence activities have potential to mature into results. The latter is more likely to happen with better coordination and connections to decision making and marine governance structures.
- The economic crisis in Sri Lanka is limiting the extent to which OCPP can build capacity in governmental institutions that face resource constraints or where there are coordination and communication challenges between stakeholders.

### A number of scientific publications have been produced in collaboration with Sri Lankan scientists and researchers:

- [Seagrass Beds May Act as a Trap of Microplastics: A Case Study at Puttalam Lagoon, Sri Lanka | Proceedings of International Forestry and Environment Symposium \(sjp.ac.lk\)](https://www.sjp.ac.lk)
- [Water | Free Full-Text | Microplastic Contamination in Shrimps from the Negombo Lagoon&mdash;Sri Lanka \(mdpi.com\)](https://www.mdpi.com)
- [Abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear \(ALDFG\) in Sri Lanka – A pilot study collecting baseline data - ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com)
- [Creation of an international laboratory network towards global microplastics monitoring harmonisation | Scientific Reports \(nature.com\)](https://www.nature.com)
- [Microplastic contamination in selected commercial fish species in Negombo Lagoon, Sri Lanka \(kln.ac.lk\)](https://www.kln.ac.lk)
- [Project MUSE - Microplastics in Lagoon Ecosystems: A Review on Occurrence and Methods for Microplastic Detection \(jhu.edu\)](https://www.jhu.edu)



### Marine pollution: emergency response

OCPP has Strengthened capabilities to improve effectiveness and coordination of marine pollution emergency responses. Emergency Response training was delivered to over 70 delegates and 28 agencies in November 2023 by OCPP. Sri Lanka has established a Command Unit and has started staking steps towards ratification of 10 conventions.

This led onto the preparation of a report setting out "Recommendations for Better Readiness in Marine Pollution Emergency Response" (2024). The report was submitted to MEPA and, if suggested recommendations and identified knowledge gaps are addressed, then OCPP will have made a valuable contribution to improving Sri Lanka marine pollution incident response. There are plans for the better readiness report to be shared at Ministerial level which should strengthen its impact. The course training manual is regarded by MEPA as a sustainable resource amenable to future use when training is rolled out.



### Marine biodiversity: assessments for marine protected areas (MPAs)

Three of the five MPA assessments prepared by OCPP will be taken forward by the Sri Lanka Coral Reef Initiative. OCPP supported stakeholders in completing the METT-4 assessments<sup>24</sup> of five of its MPAs to better understand the current management effectiveness of each MPA. Three MPAs have been selected for inclusion in the Sri Lanka Coral Reef Initiative (SLCRI)<sup>25</sup>, which IUCN acts as a convening agent for – namely Kalpitiya Bar Reef Marine Sanctuary, Kayankerni Marine Sanctuary and Pigeon Island Marine National Park.



**Programme impact**



**Successes and strengths**

- There are grounds for optimism that OCCP will make a contribution towards improving the sustainable management of the country's marine environment. However, the programme in Sri Lanka needs more time to deliver envisaged impacts, as well as stronger influencing and advocacy efforts to support Sri Lankan partners in delivery of changes to marine environment policies and practice.



**Marine pollution: plastics ban**

Sri Lanka has made progressive steps in recent years to ban plastics. Using a phased approach, non-biodegradable plastic bags have been banned in Sri Lanka since 2017, and the import of cutlery, cups and food packaging has also been banned since 2021. Additional plastics and single use plastic items were banned in 2022 and 2023.

The programme developed a Marine Litter Database, which has contributed to building the evidence base for policy makers on the composition of marine pollution including plastics content.

The OCCP has supported all multi-media campaigns to raise public awareness of these bans – to date OCCP supported TV, newspapers, radio etc campaign in 2022 and 2023 on marine litter awareness, with an additional campaign planned in 2024 focused on seven specific single use plastic items. Although a survey on the effectiveness of these campaigns to assess their impacts on behaviour change has not yet been commissioned (although "reach" reports were commissioned), it is plausible since OCCP financed all of these multi-media campaigns that OCCP made a contribution to public adherence to the bans introduced by government.



**Areas for improvement**

- The extent and nature of OCCP's socio-economic impacts, for example on women and marginalised groups, is hard to unpack due to the absence of coverage of poverty and GESI dimensions in OCCP programming in Sri Lanka.



**Marine pollution: responding to oil spills**

Oiled Wildlife response training provided by the OCCP has led to OCCP supporting the Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) in developing an Oiled Wild Life Response Plan. OCCP's partner, the South African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB), delivered in February 2024 a three-day Oiled Wildlife Response training to 30 frontline responders across Sri Lanka in collaboration with the Government of Sri Lanka. The course was designed to equip participants with the skills to respond to an initial phase of an oil spill and attend to affected wildlife before specialist responders arrive at the scene. This training has in turn led to the development by the ALBs of the Oiled Wild Life Response Plan - currently in draft form.

If approved the Oiled Wild Life Response Plan will feed into the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan.



**Caption:** Example poster developed with OCCP's support to raise awareness on the plastic ban.





## Delivering lasting benefits



### Successes and strengths

- There are some positive examples of sustainability being considered in OCPP’s work in Sri Lanka. For example:
- Ensuring activities are aligned with national plans is central to ensuring sustainability. Therefore, OCPP’s work on plans such as the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan is likely to be sustainable.
- OCPP is expanding its engagement with NGOs, academics, and others to build capacity in the broader marine environment.
- OCPP is working with government agencies, for example CEA, to develop business models for laboratories to generate revenue to help them cover their running costs.
- The development of resources such as the Sri Lanka MPA Implementation Best Practice Toolkit<sup>2</sup> is designed to ensure the sustainable use of the information presented at an MPA workshop in August 2023. Sustainable development is also one of the social management principles enshrined in this document.



### Areas for improvement

- Sri Lanka’s ongoing economic crisis is making it difficult, at this time, to effectively build and maintain the skills and resources in key ministries and institutions supported by the programme. OCPP needs to be mindful of these challenges as it moves forward with delivery.
- There are some concerns that recipients of laboratory equipment procured by the programme might face challenges in maintaining the equipment once the programme has ended.



<sup>2</sup> JNCC, May 2024



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs



UK International  
Development  
Partnership | Progress | Prosperity

**NIRAS**