KEY MESSAGES

SOUTH WEST INDIAN OCEAN REGIONAL PROGRAMME • DECEMBER 2025

BUILDING THE CASE FOR THE NORTHERN MOZAMBIQUE CHANNEL "BLUE HUB"

The Northern Mozambique Channel (NMC) – a recognized ecologically or biologically significant area – has long been a haven for biodiversity. Here, mangrove forests and sea-grass beds act as nurseries for fish, some of the world's most climate-resilient coral species are present, and deeper offshore seamounts and currents provide refuge for species such as whale sharks, dugong and green turtles.

The NMC is also home to about 10 million coastal residents whose well-being and livelihoods depend on healthy ecosystems, which provide food, building materials, income from tourism and protection against climate-related impacts such as storm surges. The NMC also supports substantial fisheries and lies along key international shipping routes.

The region's critical ecosystems are in decline due to the combined impacts of climate change, population growth, coastal infrastructure development and various extractive industries. The discovery of offshore oil, gas and mining reserves has triggered the need for coastal governments to urgently develop legislation to guide their countries in seizing the economic opportunities embedded in the region's rapidly growing blue economy in a way that benefits all parties – while maintaining the health of marine ecosystems.

NATURAL CAPITAL ASSESSMENT: KEY FINDINGS*

US$277 BILLION

The total value of the region's natural capital (based on discounted ecosystem service flows at a 2% social discount rate). This is equivalent to **17% of the average portfolio managed by the world's top 60 asset managers.**

US$5.7 BILLION PER YEAR

The value that the NMC's ecosystem services provide each year. This is equal to **about 49%** of the NMC region's gross domestic product (GDP) of **US$11 billion per year** – one of the highest known ratios globally. Of this value, **US$5.1 billion** is not currently included in the region's GDP because they form part of the informal sector or are unmonetized due to the absence of markets.

US$16 BILLION PER YEAR

If the Northern Mozambique Channel's ecosystem services were included, the region's **GDP would increase by 34% to US$16 billion per year**, making a strong case for investing in the conservation of the NMC's natural capital.

MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING:

A TOOL TO BALANCE ECOLOGICAL HEALTH, ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND INCLUSIVENESS

The complexity of overlapping uses and pressures within the NMC underscores an urgent need for integrated, anticipatory planning to ensure the long-term sustainability of the region's marine and coastal resources.

Marine spatial planning (MSP) offers a structured, future-oriented framework for facilitating the rational allocation of marine resources by identifying responsible actors, clarifying spatial and temporal uses, and accounting for the cumulative impacts of human activities.

By balancing the competing objectives of economic development, environmental protection, and social equity, MSP promotes a transparent, inclusive and scientifically grounded process that supports both current and future needs and equity. In this way, MSP forms the basis for sustainable blue economic development.

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PROGRESS TO DATE:

VISION AND ROADMAP FOR MSP IN THE NMC

Under the Integrated Management of the Marine and Coastal Resources of the Northern Mozambique Channel (NoCaMo) Project, a key initiative co-led by WWF and the Nairobi Convention, NMC countries – with the support of regional experts, research institutions, and international conservation partners – have come together to collaboratively develop a shared Vision and Roadmap for MSP in the NMC region, complemented by a set of MSP technical guidelines to support a transition toward a harmonized, ecosystem-based shared governance approach.

The Vision sees an NMC that benefits from:

A sustainable future where healthy ecosystems support – and are supported by – thriving local communities and a vibrant blue economy which optimizes the value of ocean resources within the NMC over the long term without jeopardizing the use for future generations.

The Roadmap sets out five objectives:

1. **Harmonized governance**
2. **Harmonized MSP processes and approaches among NMC countries, including data considerations**
3. **Integrated ocean management**
4. **Poverty reduction through an inclusive and sustainable blue economy**
5. **Capacity building.**

The total cost required to effectively implement the NMC Roadmap and increase the extent and condition of natural capital is estimated at US$18.6 million per year. This includes US$5.2 million per year for in-country institutional strengthening, which covers staffing, infrastructure, governance and enforcement, as well as US$13.4 million per year for operational expenditure associated with a proposed Blue Economy Technical and Investment Hub.

The technical guidelines build on the regional MSP strategy for the Western Indian Ocean and reflect relevant international frameworks, including the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention on Biological Diversity's Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Crucially, the guidelines lay the institutional and technical foundations required for coordinated and inclusive marine governance, serving as the basis for the establishment of comprehensive integrated ocean management in the region.

NEXT STEP:
ESTABLISH THE NORTHERN MOZAMBIQUE CHANNEL BLUE HUB

Most of the NMC's natural assets are far removed from major government centres. This, combined with the chronic underfunding of conservation that is common in many financially challenged African countries, creates the need to invest significantly in strengthening the ability of NMC countries' institutions to engage in effective natural resources governance.

The next step towards achieving this objective is to establish an independent technical advisory entity, provisionally called the **Northern Mozambique Channel Blue Economy Technical and Investment Hub (NMC Blue Hub).** Doing so will be a critical contribution towards the Nairobi Convention's recently adopted Western Indian Ocean (WIO) Regional Ocean Governance Strategy (ROGS), which proposes the establishment of a Blue Finance Platform for the WIO region.

The NMC hub will consist of a small, dedicated team of experts whose job it is to provide NMC countries with the following cross-cutting services:

Scientific advisory services and data support to fast-track MSP development and support the implementation of the Roadmap while establishing the foundations for long-term collection and monitoring of scientific data.

Policy development and legal support services to enable transboundary governance between member countries.

Active development of a pipeline of investable blue economy projects.

Establishment of a nature-based solutions incubator.

Establishment of an investment de-risking facility.

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THE NMC BLUE HUB WILL BE STRUCTURED AS A SPECIAL PURPOSE VEHICLE (SPV) TO ALLOW FOR BLENDED FINANCIAL FLOWS.

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OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP BANKABLE BLUE ECONOMY PROJECTS

WWF's natural capital assessment has identified at least eight areas of interest for blue economy investment.

These include:

- MARICULTURE
- ECOTOURISM
- CARBON MARKETS
- WOODLOTS OR AGROFORESTRY
- BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION
- HOUSEHOLD ENERGY
- INSURANCE-RELATED SERVICES
- FISHERIES COLD CHAIN

The total investment market is estimated at US$6 billion. If fully implemented, this would increase the contribution of the blue economy sector to regional GDP by about US$1 billion per year – in effect increasing the current official GDP of the NMC by 8.5%.

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* WWF and UNEP-Nairobi Convention. 2025. Assessing the Value of the Northern Mozambique Channel: Developing the economic case for integrated ocean governance and ecosystem investment in Africa's most biodiverse oceanic region. Antananarivo, Madagascar: WWF-SWIO.

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