ERA
Environment & Resources Authority

Conservation Objectives & Measures

For the Ċirkewwa Marine Park 2026-2030

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Executive Summary

The Ċirkewwa Marine Park Management Plan sets out the first dedicated framework for managing the Ċirkewwa Marine Park over a four-year implementation period, with the goal of conserving its habitats and species while supporting safe, sustainable use by all stakeholders. The plan is built around stakeholder engagement, scientific surveys, and a governance structure involving the Malta Tourism Authority, the Environment and Resources Authority, Transport Malta, and Nature Trust FEE Malta.

Ċirkewwa is a site of high ecological and social value. It includes seagrass meadows, rocky reefs, sandy habitats, and species of conservation interest, while also hosting major recreational uses such as diving, boating and fishing. The area lies within a Special Protection Area and includes the scuttled wrecks of the P29 and the Rożi, which add both ecological and recreational value.

The Management Plan's vision for 2050 is that all natural habitats and marine flora and fauna in the park are sustained in good conservation status, the site is used safely and sustainably, and the park remains visually natural, educationally valuable, and legally protected. To achieve this, the plan sets management objectives focused on mapping and improving habitats, especially seagrass meadows; defining zones for different activities; strengthening enforcement; and developing the park as a hub for education, research, and public awareness.

A central feature of the plan is zonation and codes of conduct, designed to balance conservation with multiple uses. The plan also proposes practical management actions such as habitat surveys, annual monitoring of the Neptune seagrass, improved mooring and anchoring arrangements, night-vision CCTV, enforcement agreements, safety measures for diving, educational signage, a website, and outreach tools such as virtual reality and underwater cameras.

The plan recognises that long-term success depends on cooperation, monitoring, and adaptive management. Progress will be tracked through annual reports, with a full four-year review used to guide the next management cycle and refine actions based on ecological results, user needs, and implementation experience.

1. Introduction

The Ċirkewwa Marine Park is located on the northwestern coast of Malta, within the Mellieħa Local Council administrative area. The Marine Park lies within the MT0000112 (Żona fil-Baħar madwar Għawdex) Special Protection Area (SPA). The SPA was designated under the Maltese Marine Important Bird Area (IBA) inventory, as part of the EU LIFE+ Malta Seabird Project, for its importance for *Calonectris diomedea* and *Puffinus yelkouan* during the breeding season. The Marine Park includes a popular dive site, with two scuttled wrecks (the Patrol Boat P29 and the tugboat Rożi), as well as part of the Gozo Channel Terminal (South Quay) and the Paradise Bay Hotel. The Paradise Bay sandy beach is also located within the Marine Park, as well as the coastal cliffs extending to Rdum il- Qammieħ.

1.1 Biodiversity of the Ċirkewwa Marine Park and the Factors Affecting it

The habitats and species of importance (Annex I, Annex II, Annex IV, and Annex V species) within the Ċirkewwa Marine Park include:

Annex I habitats:

- *Posidonia oceanica* meadows

Annex II species:

- Bottle-nosed Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) and Common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) have occasionally been sighted in the area

Annex IV species:

- Long-spined Sea urchin (*Centrostephanus longispinus*)
- Noble Pen-shell (*Pinna nobilis*) has in the past also been recorded, supported by Posidonia oceanica meadows. However, P. nobilis has in recent years been considered locally extinct following a Mediterranean-wide mass mortality event, which has likely eradicated the entire local population

Annex V species:

- Slipper lobster (*Scyllarides latus*)

Field surveys, desk studies and expert knowledge were applied to evaluate the conservation status of several habitats within the area. The Marine Park is characterised by rocky reefs that are present throughout the area and most rise vertically from sandy bottoms. Large boulders are also present at the foot of the vertical reefs. Extensive *P. oceanica* meadows grow in the northern area of the Marine Park, while several patches occur in the remaining area. The *P. oceanica* beds in the area of the Marine Park have, in the past, been recorded as some of the healthiest and most extensive meadows recorded locally (Borg & Schembri, 2002)[1].

[1] Borg, J.A. & Schembri, P.J. (2002). *Alignment of marine habitat data of the Maltese Islands to conform to the requirements of the EU Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC)*. [Report commissioned by the Malta Environment & Planning Authority]. Malta: Independent Consultants; 136pp + Figs 1-23.

The area around the Marine Park sees a high anthropogenic influence from several different users. Having retained most of its naturalness and being a popular dive site, Ċirkewwa sees an influx of divers on a daily basis, peaking between March and November. The area is also popular with fishermen and boat users, particularly when weather conditions favour the shelter provided by Paradise Bay.

2. Background

The formulation of the Ċirkewwa Marine Park Management Plan is funded by the Malta Tourism Authority and is currently being implemented by Nature Trust FEE Malta. Both entities aim to establish a Management Plan or legal provisions for the newly established Ċirkewwa Marine Park in the North of the island of Malta.

The project started in October 2019, with the initial year being a research year. This project is considered a milestone in the protection of marine ecology in Malta, undertaking the necessary actions in establishing and managing the first marine park of its kind in Malta. This involved gathering of existing information on local and international legislation, carrying out ecological surveys, defining a vision and management objectives with an intensive yearlong 3-stage stakeholder engagement process. This Management Plan does not aim to halt recreational or economic activity within the Marine Park, but rather encourage sustainable practices within the park, supporting the sustainability of the marine natural resources. A 'Vision' has been formulated that describes the ideal condition that the Marine Park would aim to achieve after an interval of management.

While this Management Plan was being drafted, activities in the Marine Park were still ongoing. Over the past years, surveys were undertaken to assess the different habitats and biodiversity in the Marine Park, to determine the health of *Posidonia oceanica* and measure boating impact. A patrolling system was set up to counter illegalities. Several activities were organised, including clean-ups and educational activities. Health and safety at the Marine Park was also improved through the provision of an automated external defibrillator, a spine board, emergency oxygen and first aiders on site. This Management Plan will further build on the work undertaken thus far.

In 2024, a Quadripartite Agreement was signed between the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA), the Environment & Resource Authority (ERA), Transport Malta (TM), and Nature Trust FEE Malta (NTM). A Management Council, with representatives of the MTA, TM, and ERA was set up. This will guide the Managing Body (NTM) in consultation with the Scientific Committee.

The Ċirkewwa Marine Park will help Malta to fulfil its EU and international commitments specifically in reaching the targets set for the protection of the marine environment. The Marine Park will also contribute to fulfilling the EU's goal in establishing larger areas of water to improve the provision of services from European seas, while aiming to contribute to the spillover effect of fish biomass, which would support fisheries outside the sites, while protecting biodiversity inside the sites.

2.1 Management Plan Objectives & Actions

The vision for the Ċirkewwa Marine Park was developed following the evaluation of the features of conservation importance within the site, together with extensive stakeholder participation. The Management Objectives were identified in recognition of the key-steps required to achieve the vision.

One of the most important objectives is to ensure that the habitats of conservation importance are conserved and, where necessary, enhanced. The Management Plan seeks to manage the factors negatively affecting these habitats, ultimately to improve the overall habitat. Species populations and their habitats also need to be conserved or improved, as appropriate. These include the habitat of *Posidonia oceanica*. The Management Plan also seeks to conserve species of national interest, such as endemic species and others listed in the Red Data Book.

The Management Plan seeks to promote and support the responsible management of the Marine Park while raising awareness on the importance of the area. It seeks to manage pressures and potential dangers exerted on the area and its users. Finally, the Management Plan seeks to ensure that no illegal activities take place within the Marine Park and to facilitate the monitoring of the permitted activities, including through amendments to regulations, as necessary.

2.2 Stakeholder Participation

An important component of the Management Plan formulation process was stakeholder participation. The full range of stakeholders, from Government entities to the users of the Marine Park, were key participants in gathering information, in developing the vision statement, and in identifying the Management Objectives, Operational Objectives and Actions required to deliver the vision. Stakeholders working together will be a crucial element in ensuring the successful management of the Marine Park, which recognises the need for their engagement in the formulation of the Management Plan. The majority of the stakeholders consulted agreed with the need for Ċirkewwa to be established as a marine park and to be afforded protection. The stakeholders also highlighted the need for enforcement and for clarity in the regulations established for the Marine Park. Some concerns were raised by anglers, which frequent the area, who noted that the Marine Park should not eradicate this practice but opt to find a balance for all practices. All stakeholders showed a keen interest and agreement to the concept of zonation, which would aim to achieve a balance between all user groups while safeguarding the natural environment within the Marine Park.

2.3 Summary

This Management Plan is the first for the Ċirkewwa Marine Park and the Plan has an implementation timeframe of four years. During the implementation, progress reports will be regularly prepared and submitted to the Management Council. The plan itself is dynamic and may be updated through the implementation timeframe, based on the progress reports and in discussion with the competent authorities, the Management Council and relevant stakeholders.

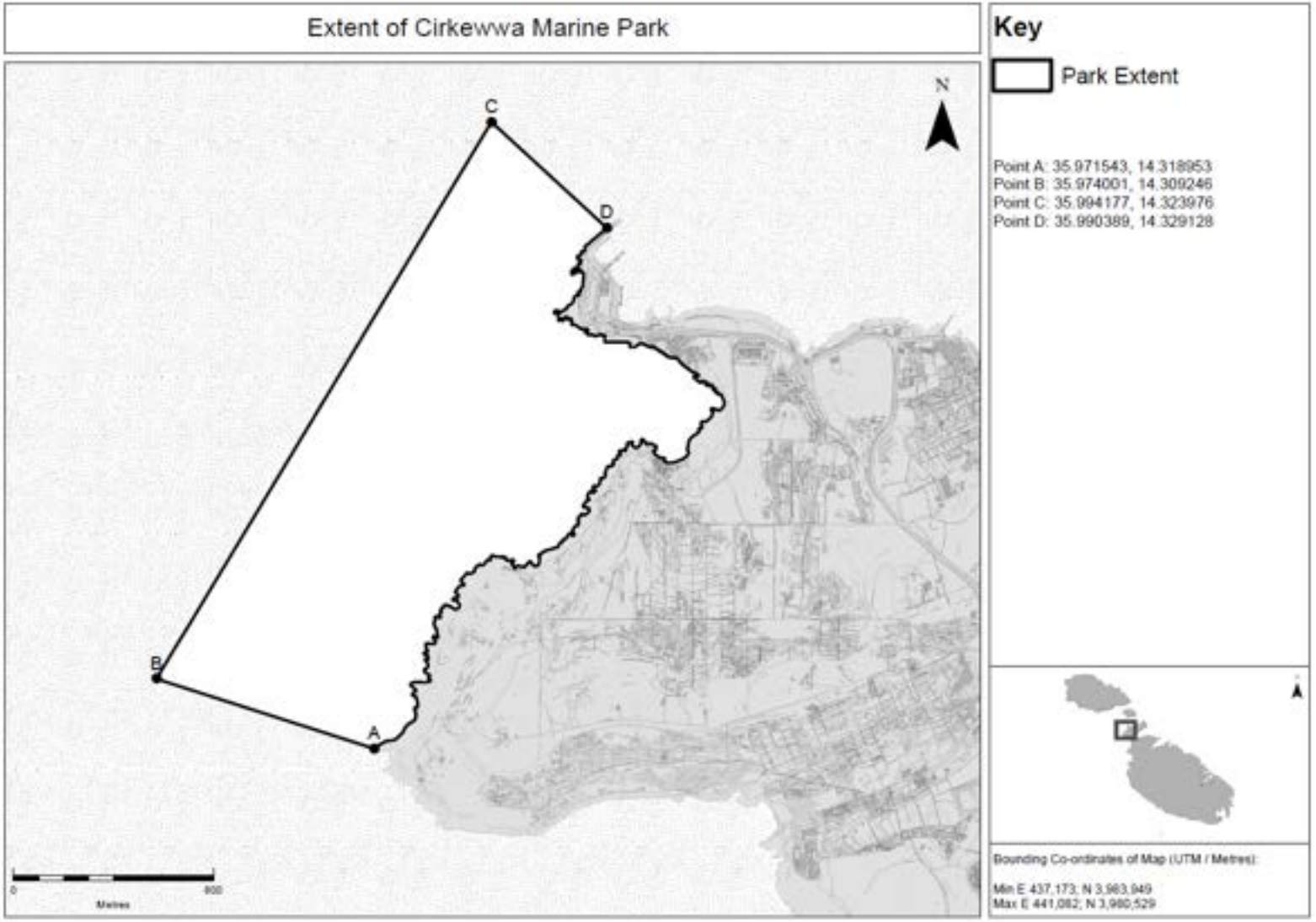

FIGURE 1 MAP OF THE ĊIRKEWWA MARINE PARK'S BOUNDARIES, AS DESIGNATED THROUGH SL 549.181.
DESIGNATION AREA: 235.072 HA (2.35072 KM2)

3. Vision Statement for the Ċirkewwa Marine Park

The vision statement for the Ċirkewwa Marine Park in 2050 is that:

- *All natural habitats and marine flora and fauna within the Ċirkewwa Marine Park are sustained and thriving in good conservation status.*
- *The Ċirkewwa Marine Park is an important site, used for a range of marine-based activities and by different users in a safe, sustainable, and environmentally conscious manner.*
- *The Ċirkewwa Marine Park is of high visual quality, and retaining its naturalness is considered important for sustaining the conservation status and public enjoyment of the Park.*
- *The Ċirkewwa Marine Park serves as an important educational and research resource.*
- *The Ċirkewwa Marine Park is receiving full legal protection, implemented according to national legislation and local policies.*

4. Management and Operational Objectives

The Management Objectives (MO) define the policies by which the vision for the Ċirkewwa Marine Park will be fulfilled. MOs have been defined for each vision statement. MOs for the key features identified for the Marine Park were developed through an analysis of the site's needs and concerns and proposals on how to address these, as highlighted during the Stage 1 stakeholder participation.

For every MO defined, a number of Operational Objectives (OO) were developed to facilitate implementation and achievement of the objective. The OOs are the objectives to which all the management work is directly related, and they lay the groundwork for the specific management actions.

The MOs arising from the Vision Statement and the respective OOs are set out in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1. THE VISION, MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES, AND OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES FOR THE ĊIRKEWWA MARINE PARK FOR THE FIRST FIVE YEARS OF MANAGEMENT AS OUTLINED UNDER THIS SPECIFIC MANAGEMENT PLAN.

These objectives may be adapted as necessary in subsequent Management Plans, following the necessary reviews to establish subsequent Management Plans.

Vision Statement	Management Objective (MO)	Operational Objective (OO)
All natural habitats and marine flora and fauna within the Ċirkewwa Marine Park are sustained and thriving in good conservation status	MO1: To map the habitat types within the Marine Park	OO1.1: To undertake surveys to identify the benthic habitat types present within the Marine Park
	MO2: To expand the spatial distribution of *Posidonia oceanica* within the Marine Park	OO2.1: To undertake surveys annually to assess the changes in the spatial distribution of *Posidonia oceanica* within the Marine Park
	MO3: To enhance and maintain the area, structure, and function of the *Posidonia oceanica* habitat	OO3.1: To undertake annual assessments of the conservation status of the *Posidonia oceanica* habitat
The Ċirkewwa Marine Park is an important site, used for a range of marine-based activities and by different users in a safe, sustainable, and environmentally friendly manner	MO4: To identify the current uses of the Marine Park and identify the potential of different areas as new areas for activity	OO4.1: To identify the uses and their distribution across the different areas of the Marine Park and assess the potential of 'unused' areas as new areas of activity
	MO5: To establish defined areas for different activities within the Marine Park	OO5.1: To spatially define specific areas within the Marine Park and identify the permissible activities within each area
The Ċirkewwa Marine Park is receiving full legal protection, implemented according to national legislation and local policies	MO6: To ensure against illegal activity within the Marine Park and to monitor the impacts of permissible activities for future controls that may be required	OO6.1: To install night-vision CCTV at the Marine Park, to monitor use at night
		OO6.2: To establish an agreement between the enforcement authorities on enforcement powers and responsibilities
The Ċirkewwa Marine Park serves as an important educational and research resource	MO7: To promote the educational and scientific value of the Marine Park	OO7.1: To create a website and social media channels specific for the Ċirkewwa Marine Park
		OO7.2: To create educational material to be available at the Park Office and to be distributed in schools
		OO7.3: To explore the creation of a visitors' centre, with information panels and other activities
		OO7.4: To develop a code of conduct for the Marine Park and to install signage for the different areas and permissible activities within each zone
	MO8: To raise awareness and appreciation of the Marine Park among specific target groups and the general public	OO8.1: To deploy an underwater camera and set up a live feed, which can also be promoted on social media, to create awareness on the different habitats and species
		OO8.2: To set up a virtual reality experience, as a promotional and educational tool
The area around the Ċirkewwa Marine Park is of a high visual quality, and retaining its naturalness is considered important for sustaining the conservation status and public enjoyment of the park	MO9: To enhance the quality of the Marine Park as a dive site through management of the dive area	OO9.1: To explore together with the diving community the facilities needed to ensure safety of diving in the Marine Park, and to identify and implement safety systems as agreed with the diving community
		OO9.2: To identify and implement safety systems as agreed with the diving community, and to engage the diving community and other commercial operators in the area to agree on potential contributions to the management of the Marine Park
		OO9.3: To actively apply for EU and/or other external funding for the long-term management of the Marine Park

5. Management Actions

Following the establishment of the MOs and OOs, this section defines the Management Actions. One or more of the Management Actions are defined for each of the Operational Objective (OO) and the OO is achieved through the implementation of these Management Actions.

5.1 Formulation of Management Actions

A priority ranking was established prior to defining the Management Actions. The priority ranking was assigned to each of the Management Actions, depending on the urgency in implementation of the actions.

TABLE 2. THE PRIORITY RANKS UNDER THE PRIORITY RATING DEFINED, WITH THE DEFINITION AND TIMEFRAME ASSOCIATED WITH EACH.

High	Measures to be addressed in the first three years of the implementation period
Medium	Actions to be dealt with within the implementation period
Low	Actions of complementary importance
Ongoing	Regular maintenance and monitoring is required

Each of the Management Actions is directly related to an OO, and a single action is necessary to achieve the relevant OO. The Management Actions can be categorised as a:

- Measure – a regulation and/or restriction in place, or
- Project – a planned activity having a definite timeframe to accomplish a particular target(s).

The OOs, respective Management Actions, the priority rating, and the action type are defined below. The table also identifies the performance indicators for each Management Action, as well as the monitoring requirements.

5.2 Operational Objectives and Management Actions

For every Management Objective (MO) defined, several Operational Objectives (OO) are assigned. These objectives are directly related to all management work, and lay the groundwork for management actions. The Operational Objectives relate to key issues that need be addressed to achieve the vision, and are derived from the factors that have been identified to affect them. The Management Objectives arising from the Vision Statement and the respective Operational Objectives are depicted in Table 3.

TABLE 3. THE OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES, THE RESPECTIVE MANAGEMENT ACTIONS, THE PRIORITY RATING, AND THE ACTION TYPE ASSOCIATED WITH EACH MANAGEMENT ACTION

Operational Objective	Priority Ranking	Management Action	Code of Action	Action Category	Performance Indicators	Monitoring Requirements
OO1.1: To undertake surveys to identify the benthic habitat types present within the Marine Park OO2.1: To undertake surveys annually to assess the changes in the spatial distribution of *Posidonia oceanica* within the Marine Park OO3.1: To undertake annual assessments of the conservation status of the *Posidonia oceanica* habitat	High	Elaboration of detailed surveying programmes for the surveying of; benthic habitat types within the Marine Park and the spatial distribution and conservation status of the *Posidonia oceanica* habitat	P1	Project	Number of monitoring plans for the benthic habitats and *Posidonia oceanica*	Progress reports on the findings, including maps corresponding to each survey undertaken
OO4.1: To identify the uses and their distribution across the different areas of the Marine Park and assess the potential of 'unused' areas as new areas of activity	High	Assessment of the uses, their distribution and unused areas of the Marine Park and their potential for new areas of activity	M1	Measures	A map identifying the uses and distribution of uses and any unused areas across the Marine Park	Updating of maps with uses in the marine park over the years
OO5.1: To spatially define specific areas within the Marine Park and identify the permissible activities within each area OO7.4: To develop a code of conduct for the Marine Park and to install signage for the different areas and permissible activities within each zone	High	Create a zonation plan for the entire area defined as the Ċirkewwa Marine Park, identifying the activities permissible in each of the zones set up, including a code of conduct. To establish areas for different diving activities (e.g., open water skills training, advanced open water training). To install moorings in the different areas (dive boat moorings and general boating moorings) and define mooring regulations. Establish no anchoring zones to safeguard seabed habitats. To develop a code of conduct for the Marine Park and to install signage for the different areas and permissible activities within each zone.	M2	Measures	Establishment of Zonation Plan for the Ċirkewwa Marine Park with the following indicators; i. Dive site organisation scheme ii. Mooring plan iii. Deployment of Moorings iv. Mooring regulations v. Designation of no anchoring zones vi. Development of a Codes of Conduct Mooring in the marine park is managed sustainably. Formulation and approval of the Ċirkewwa Marine Park Regulations and Codes of Conduct	One full zonation plan with a map of the individual zones and the code of conduct for each of the zones
OO6.1: To install night-vision CCTV at the Marine Park, to monitor use at night	High	Create an on-site monitoring system.	P2	Project	Number of cameras established for monitoring.	Two cameras to be set up on site.
OO6.2: To establish an agreement between the enforcement authorities on enforcement powers and responsibilities	High	Establish an agreement with each of the enforcement authorities defining the responsibilities of each authority in terms of enforcing illegal activity on site.	P3	Project	Number of agreements established to identify and summarise enforcing powers.	Agreements, with each respective authority.

OO7.1: To create a website specific for the Ċirkewwa Marine Park OO7.2: To create educational material to be available at the park office and to be distributed in schools	High	To create a website, which is frequently updated with information on the species, habitats, rules and regulations as well as events and activities occurring in the Marine Park. Set up signs on site, both informative as part of citizen science campaigns and also signs which help divers to plan their dive prior to entering the water. Educational material which can be used for on-site activities and be distributed in schools will also be created. To prepare a tentative programme of events for a number of months or over a calendar year.	P4	Project	Number of signs on species and habitats of importance and the number of signs on alien species. Number of education booklets for primary and secondary students. Number of educational events held throughout the year.	Signs installed at site. The number of booklets printed and distributed.
OO8.1: To deploy an underwater camera and set up a live feed, which can be also promoted on social media, to create awareness on the different habitats and species OO8.2: To set up a virtual reality experience, as a promotional and educational tool	Moderate	Set up an underwater camera and a virtual reality experience will be set up as an educative tool for non-diver visitors.	P5	Project	Underwater camera deployed and live feed available. Virtual reality experience set up.	One underwater camera and one virtual reality experience set up.
OO9.1: To explore together with the diving community the facilities needed to ensure safety of diving in the Marine Park, and to identify and implement safety systems as agreed with the diving community OO9.2: To engage the diving community and other commercial operators in the area to agree on potential contributions to the management of the Marine Park	Moderate	To hold workshops with the diving community to discuss and agree on safety measures to for the Marine Park. To hold workshops with commercial interests to explore contributions to the Marine Park. To explore how to improve emergency first response times to the Marine Park.	P6	Project	Creation of workshops with the diving community, focused on improving safety measures. Creation of workshops with commercial operators, to explore contributions to the Marine Park. Hold meetings with entities and experts relevant to emergency first response.	Number of workshops held with the diving community. Number of workshops held with commercial operators. The number of dive schools and commercial operators attending workshops.
OO7.3: To consider the setting up of a visitors' centre, with information panels and other activities OO9.3: To actively apply for EU and/or other external funding for the long-term management of the Marine Park	High	To explore the creation a visitors' centre in Ċirkewwa and ancillary facilities, including possible bird observation areas. To actively seek out EU and/or other external funding to ensure that the Marine Park and all infrastructure set-up within the Marine Park are sustainable and managed long-term.	P7	Project	Assessment in relation to the establishment of an appropriate visitor centre for the Marine Park. Hold meetings with entities and experts relevant to emergency first response. Apply for EU and/or other external funding streams (e.g. projects and grants) to secure long-term management of the Marine Park	Conclusion of assessment. Number of expert meetings held. Emergency first response protocol developed. Provision of necessary facilities and/or personnel. Number of funding/project applications submitted. Total external funding received.

6. Description of the Management Actions

The following section describes the Management Actions set up under the Management Objectives and Operational Objectives. One or more Management Actions have been defined for each Operational Objective and the fulfilment of these objectives is dependent on the implementation of each action.

For each action referred to in Table 3, the following details are given:

- Code/Title: Each action is given a code number with the initial M or P corresponding to measures or projects as defined in the 'Formulation of Management Actions' section.
- Description: Description of the action to be delivered.
- Expected results: Description of the output (deliverable/s) expected.
- Priority rating: Priority rating relates to the prioritisation assigned to the relevant Operational Objective given in Table X and the time span for the completion of each action is given.
- Constraints: Foreseen constraints to the delivery of certain actions are stated and alternatives are suggested. Reference is made mainly to technical or institutional constraints and drawbacks foreseen.

6.1 Measures

M1: Assessment of the uses, their distribution and unused areas of the Marine Park and their potential for new areas of activity

Description: Within the first year of the implementation of the Management Plan, a full map highlighting all areas being used by the various stakeholders and the use associated with each area will be drafted. The unused area will also be measured and noted.

Expected Results: Mitigation of stressors acting in specific areas and control of activities being carried out in the different areas. Creation of new areas for activity, if possible, without the creation of new stressors.

Priority Rating: High; to be accomplished within the first year from the start of the implementation of the Management Plan.

Constraints: No foreseeable constraints.

M2: Create a zonation plan for the entire area defined as the Ċirkewwa marine park, identifying the activities permissible in each of the zones set up including a code of conduct

Description: Within the first two years of the implementation of the Management Plan, a zonation plan for the various activities carried out within the marine park is drafted, agreed upon with the relevant authorities and is implemented on site. Marker buoys are set up to delineate each of the zones physically and a code of conduct for each of the zones is also drafted and made public.

Expected Results: Mitigation of stressors acting in specific areas, and adequate control of activities occurring therein, allowing for the monitoring and enforcement of illegalities. The results for the zonation plan are further split into the following indicators:

i. Dive site organisation scheme
ii. Mooring plan
iii. Deployment of Moorings
iv. Mooring regulations
v. Designation of no anchoring zones
vi. Development of a Codes of Conduct

Priority Rating: High; to be accomplished within the first two years from the start of the implementation of the Management Plan.

Constraints: Delays in reaching an agreement with the respective authorities and in the installation of the required marker buoys for the different zones.

6.2 Projects

P1: Elaboration of detailed surveying programmes for the surveying of; benthic habitat types within the Marine Park and the spatial distribution and conservation status of the *Posidonia oceanica* habitat

Description: In the course of the preparation of the present Management Plan, a method for the evaluation of the conservation status of species and habitats found within the Ċirkewwa Marine Park, with particular focus on Posidonia oceanica was developed in accordance with the methodology developed (See Annex 1). This is a task to be accomplished within the first period of implementation of the Management Plan.

Expected Results: An assignment of the conservation status of the Posidonia oceanica habitat.

Priority Rating: High; to be accomplished within the first year from the start of the implementation of the Management Plan.

Constraints: No major constraints foreseen.

P2: Installation of night-vision capable CCTV across the Marine Park, to monitor use at night and help enforce regulations

Description: Within the first year of implementation of this Management Plan, a CCTV system is installed on site covering the entire area of the marine park. This will allow the monitoring of the activities in the marine park, when enforcement and/or Managing Body personnel are not on site.

Expected Results: Mitigation and reduction in illegal activities within the marine park.

Priority Rating: High; to be accomplished within the first year from the start of the implementation of the Management Plan.

Constraints: Issues with internet connectivity works are foreseeable constraints.

P3: Establish an agreement with each of the enforcement authorities defining the responsibilities of each authority in terms of enforcing illegal activity on site

Description: Within the first year of implementation of this Management Plan, an agreement with the relevant authorities on the enforcement of regulations in the park will be established. This agreement will highlight the responsibility of the different authorities in terms of which regulations fall under which authority's remit and the enforcing power available to these authorities in light of breaches of the regulations set within the park.

Expected Results: Effective enforcement of illegal activities within the marine park.

Priority Rating: High; to be accomplished within the first year from the start of the implementation of the Management Plan.

Constraints: No major constraints foreseen.

P4: Set up a website and educational material including several different signs on site, both informative as part of citizen science campaigns and also signs which aid divers to plan their dive prior to entering the water. The educational material will also include material which can be used for on-site activities and also distributed in schools will also be created

Description: During the course of the drafting of this Management Plan and throughout the implementation of the Management Plan, signs are to be installed on-site and maintained in good condition for each season. Signs will vary from information signs on the dive site to educational signs on species of importance and 'Code of Conduct' signs. A tentative programme of educational events for a number of months throughout the calendar year is to also be set up.

Expected Results: Efficient dive planning from divers and increased awareness on different species. All visitors will be informed of the activities allowed within the specific zones, based on the code of conduct signs through Managing Body personnel.

Priority Rating: High; to start with the dive-plan signs and educational signs within the first years. Code of Conduct signs to follow (Action M3).

Constraints: No major constraints foreseen.

P5: Set up an underwater camera and a virtual reality experience as an educational tool for non-diver visitors

Description: Within the first years of the implementation of this Management Plan, an underwater camera will be installed on one of the wrecks as an educational tool. A virtual reality experience will also be set up.

Expected Results: Increased awareness on the importance of underwater habitats and species, together with a higher number of non-diver visitors at the marine park.

Priority Rating: Moderate; to be completed within the 5-year time frame covered by this Management Plan.

Constraints: Lack of financial resources for the virtual reality experience to be built and installed.

P6: To explore diver safety, improved first response times and management contributions to the Marine Park

Description: Within the first year of implementation of the Management Plan, a series of workshops will be held with the diving community to explore how safety can be improved in the Marine Park. In parallel, meetings will be held with relevant experts and entities to work towards improving emergency first response times for the Marine Park. Additionally, a series of workshops will be held with the diving community and other commercial operators to explore potential management contributions for the Marine Park.

Expected Results: A detailed plan, including timeframes and associated costs, will be produced to define how diver safety at the Marine Park will be improved during the remainder of the timeframe covered by this management plan. A procurement and/or agreement strategy will be produced, outlining how to achieve identified optimization of emergency first response times. A detailed of inventory of diving sector and other commercial operators that utilise the Marine Park, and to what extent(s) of which time periods, will be created. Such inventory will also help inform potential environmental contributions for the management of the Marine Park.

Priority Rating: High; to be completed within the first year of the timeframe covered by this Management Plan.

Constraints: No major constraints foreseen.

P7: Explore the creation of a visitors' centre which welcomes visitors and has the necessary health and safety infrastructure

Description: Within the first two years of implementation of this Management Plan, an assessment is carried out to explore the possibility of setting up a visitors' centre as part of the Marine Park. This project action will also include actively seeking out EU and/or other external funding to ensure that the Marine Park and all infrastructure set up within it are sustainably managed in the long-term.

Expected Results: An assessment in relation to the setting up of a visitors' centre addressing the marine park.

Priority Rating: High; to be accomplished within two years from the start of the implementation of the Management Plan.

Constraints: Identification of an appropriate area for the visitors' centre.

7. Conclusion

This Management Plan serves as the foundation for setting up the area and operations of the Ċirkewwa Marine Park. It outlines the main actions needed for the site to start functioning as a marine park, based on a robust series of stakeholder engagement processes. A vision has been identified for the marine park, and all actions have been drafted with this vision in mind. At the end of the four-year process outlined in this Management Plan, a report will be prepared as a compilation of deeds and results recorded in individual annual reports, with an in-depth evaluation of the four-year management of the site. The 4-year report will include reporting on the progress of species and habitats within the site. This report will be presented to the Management Council and the competent authorities and will function as the basis for the formulation of the subsequent Management Plan cycle for the Marine Park.