



Terms of Reference for the consultancy

Technical and Strategic Advisory to Propose the MAR Region as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA)

1. Introduction

The Mesoamerican Reef (MAR) is the largest coral reef system in the Atlantic Ocean, stretching more than 1,000 kilometers along the coastline of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras. The MAR's economic value is estimated at more than USD 4.5 billion, supporting the livelihoods and providing coastal protection to more than 2 million inhabitants in the region (IDB, 2021¹; WTW, 2020).

The Mesoamerican Reef Fund (MAR Fund) is a regional environmental fund established to contribute to the protection of the MAR Region. MAR Fund implements the Reef Rescue Initiative (RRI), whose primary goal is to increase the resilience and ability to recover of the Mesoamerican Reef, and of the environmental services it provides, through capacity building, financial sustainability, and more effective instruments to establish an enabling environment for the sustainable use of the MAR.

The strategic importance of designating PSSAs in the MAR was captured in the Tulum Declaration, signed by the governments of Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Belize, *“to jointly request the IMO to declare the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA), to contribute to the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable development of the region”*. In support of this effort, in 2020, MAR Fund, through the RRI, commissioned a consultancy to analyze the processes required by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to propose the MAR region as a PSSA. Further, from 2022 to 2024, MAR Fund hired an expert in public policy and coastal marine management to update the technical proposal elaborated in 2020 and analyze the navigation maps and coral reefs correlated with shipping routes. During this period, the expert, in coordination with MAR Fund and key partners, such as CORAL Reef Alliance, advanced in elaboration of the technical proposal, navigation route analysis, consultations with the IMO, and with relevant government authorities from the four MAR countries. As a result, the technical proposal was updated and discussed with authorities, and several supporting documents were prepared. To further support this work, from 2025 to 2027, PROCARIBE+ will contribute to the ongoing efforts to develop a proposal for the IMO. MAR Fund, in collaboration with a Task Force, will oversee the implementation of these activities.

To that end, MAR Fund will hire a consultant to provide technical and strategic support to build on the initial analysis and consultations carried out for the development of a proposal to be submitted to the IMO for the designation of the MAR region as a PSSA.

¹ Economic Valuation of the Ecosystem Services of the Mesoamerican Reef, and the Allocation and Distribution of these Values, which was prepared by Metroeconomica, World Resources Institute-Mexico, and the Ocean Foundation, for the Inter-American Development Bank. The full report was published in 2021 and can be accessed at: <https://publications.iadb.org/en/economic-valuation-ecosystem-services-mesoamericanreef-and-allocation-and-distribution-these>

2. Objectives of the consultancy

The primary objective of this consultancy is to provide technical and strategic support in the processes required to update and submit a proposal to the IMO for the designation of the MAR Region as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA).

3. Main activities

The consultant shall conduct the following activities and sub-activities:

3.1 Review and update the PSSA technical proposal elaborated between 2020 and 2024 ²:

- a. Review and update the current draft-proposal, adding updated and most recent information in all the sections of the proposal, and its Annexes.
- b. Gather and analyze the information to update the proposal, through desk reviews and interviews, among others.
- c. In coordination with the project Task Force, lead the analysis and discussions of the *associated protective measures to be adopted* (MTBA), for their validation with relevant authorities in the MAR.
- d. Collaborate with the project Task force and the GIS specialist³ to identify and assess the maps and nautical charts required to support the proposal.

3.2 Conduct consultation with national and regional authorities in the MAR:

- a. Review and update the stakeholder and actor map developed in previous years. The map shall describe the key stakeholders involved in advancing the PSSA process. This activity shall be conducted in coordination with the Task Force, based on previous consultation efforts and taking into account the potential impact of institutional or personnel changes within the respective jurisdictions.
- b. Conduct further national and regional consultations, through workshops and working meetings (in person and/or virtual), with relevant authorities of the MAR countries (e.g., maritime transport agencies, port authorities, ministries of transport, tourism, environment, and other entities relevant to this process), as well as with IMO representatives. The purpose of these meetings shall be to consult, analyze, and validate the proposal; review and validate GIS products and the institutional process; and discuss the measures to be adopted.
- c. Organize a timeline outlining the number of meetings to be conducted, their locations, and the list of participants per organization and country. This information shall be updated on an ongoing basis.
- d. Assist MAR Fund and the project Task Force in organizing workshops and events⁴, including planning, documentation, and follow-up activities to ensure effective participation and collection of feedback.

3.3 Articulation with other initiatives that seek the inclusion of the MAR as PSSA:

- a. The consultant shall contact IMO representatives in each MAR country, in coordination with the Task Force, to obtain their support and feedback for the preparation of the proposal and for ensuring governmental involvement.

3.4 Elaboration of the material for the project and the full proposal package:

- a. Update the institutional route for submitting the proposal to the IMO and describe the role of each institution at both the national and regional levels.
- b. Develop and update existing presentations (e.g., PowerPoint, Google Slides) and other materials to support consultation sessions, ensuring alignment with the consultation objectives.
- c. Support the preparation of the proposal package for submission to the IMO, including the full proposal, a summary or brief, maps and navigation charts, a short video, a PowerPoint presentation, and an

² MAR Fund will provide the draft proposal and support documents once the consultancy is confirmed.

³ A GIS specialist will be hired to guide the development and acquisition of GIS material and nautical charts. **The GIS specialist may be contracted directly by MAR Fund or proposed as part of this consultancy team.**

⁴ MAR Fund may directly contract services for workshops, such as venues, simultaneous interpretation, transportation, and other related services. The consultant shall coordinate this process with MAR Fund.

elevator pitch.

- d. Assist the Task Force in updating existing communication material and developing new ones (e.g., project briefs, fact sheets, informative notes detailing process and results), a video kit, webinars, and meetings to exchange best practices and lessons learned for a successful PSSA submission.
- e. The consultant shall coordinate with MAR Fund and the Task Force regarding the content of communication materials before their distribution.

3.5 Other key activities include:

- a. Develop a timeline to complete the tasks and deliverables described in this ToR.
- b. Submit preliminary results of the consultancy as required by MAR Fund and the Task Force.
- c. Prepare a final report of the consultancy, including results, conclusions, and proposed next steps with an associated timeline.
- d. Hold coordination and follow-up meetings with MAR Fund.
- e. Participate in all meetings related to the project, as required by MAR Fund and the project Task Force.
- f. Collaborate with MAR Fund in the preparation of project reports.
- g. Collaborate with MAR Fund and the project Task Force in reviewing the final deliverables translated into Spanish.

4. Duration of contract

The consultancy shall have a duration of one year, with the possibility of contract extension based on budget availability, project needs, and the performance of the consultancy.

5. Oversight

MAR Fund and the project Task Force shall review the deliverables and provide feedback. Overall coordination and supervision of the consultancy shall be the responsibility of MAR Fund.

6. Submission of deliverables

- a. All deliverables shall be submitted in electronic format only, via email to the MAR Fund-RRI Coordinator (cruiz@marfund.org) with a copy to mjavila@marfund.org
- b. All deliverables shall be submitted in editable formats to facilitate review (Word, Excel, PowerPoint). PDFs will not be accepted.
- c. All deliverables shall be prepared in English.
- d. Maps, diagrams, and images shall be submitted separately in JPG format. Photographs must be at 300 dpi.
- e. All shapefiles shall be delivered in a specific format, to be agreed upon with MAR Fund.
- f. Final IMO proposals shall be submitted to MAR Fund in the language required by the IMO for evaluation.
- g. MAR Fund shall create a SharePoint site or shared drive for the consultant to facilitate submission of the deliverables.

7. Deliverables and payments

Payment	Deliverables	%
	Signing the contract	0%
First	1. A detailed timeline outlining the key milestones and deliverables, along with a proposed methodology to effectively execute the activities of this consultancy. This approach shall ensure structured progress and alignment with the project objectives. 2. A document describing the consultation approach, including the anticipated meetings and workshops, their location, a list of participants, and other relevant details necessary to organize the consultation activities.	30%
Second	1. An updated stakeholder map and list of key actors in the MAR region relevant to the PSSA process. This is a living deliverable and shall be revised throughout the consultation process as needed. 2. An updated institutional pathway (route) for the submission of the proposal to the IMO, including a description of the role of each institution at the national and regional levels. This deliverable shall remain dynamic and be updated as required during consultations. 3. Meeting minutes, supporting documents, and presentations demonstrating coordination with national and regional authorities, as well as communications with IMO country representatives. 4. Reports and supporting documents (e.g., letters of endorsement or interest, if available) demonstrating high-level engagement with national and regional authorities. 5. An updated version of the technical proposal for review by the Task Force and MAR Fund 6. A section within the proposal identifying the associated protective measures to be adopted (MTBA), once approved and discussed with the relevant country authorities. 7. PowerPoint presentations containing preliminary consultancy deliverables for discussion with MAR Fund and the Task Force. 8. Preliminary communication deliverables to promote the initiative, including fact sheets and informative notes (1 or 2 indicating process and results), a video kit, a webinar, and meetings to exchange best practices and lessons learned for a successful PSSA submission.	40%
Final	1. A proposal package for submission to the IMO, including a summary or brief, maps and navigation charts, a PowerPoint presentation, and the elevator pitch. 2. The final version of the proposal to present to the IMO, incorporating updated information, including key inputs from discussions with national and regional authorities, IMO representatives, and regional initiatives, as	30%

	well as maps and MTBA 3. The final project brief and fact sheet presenting the results of the project for distribution to a wider audience. 4. The final report of the consultancy, including conclusions, proposed next steps, and a timeline for follow-up actions related to the submission	
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8. Financial conditions

- a. **Professional Fees:** The consultant's professional fees will be negotiated and agreed upon based on their qualifications, relevant experience, availability, and the overall project budget.
- b. **Payment Terms:** Payments will include professional fees, applicable taxes, and any banking charges incurred by the consultant. Disbursements will be made according to a pre-established delivery schedule, contingent upon the **satisfactory submission and approval of each deliverable**, accompanied by the corresponding invoice.
- c. **Travel Expenses:** Travel-related costs will be covered separately by MAR Fund, in accordance with an approved travel plan and budget. These expenses should not be included in the financial proposal submitted by the consultant.
- d. **Excluded Costs:** Expenses related to workshops, translation of the final deliverables, diagramming and layout, simultaneous interpretation services, and participant travel will be managed independently by MAR Fund and should **not** be considered within the consultant's financial proposal.

9. Key Qualifications

- a. Senior professional (or team of professionals) with demonstrated experience providing high-level technical and strategic advice on PSSA designation processes, including preparation of submissions to the IMO, and knowledge of international maritime and environmental regulatory frameworks applicable to the MAR Region.
- b. Advanced university degree (PhD, Master's, or equivalent) in a relevant field such as marine science, ocean governance, maritime administration, environmental policy, international relations, law, or related disciplines.
- c. Solid understanding of IMO conventions, guidelines, and procedures related to PSSA, with demonstrated ability to effectively communicate with IMO officials.
- d. Proven expertise in the identification, assessment, and management of sensitive marine ecosystems and environmental protection measures.
- e. Demonstrated leadership and experience engaging with a diverse range of stakeholders, including governmental authorities, NGOs, and scientific institutions in the MAR region.
- f. Strong analytical, synthesis, and drafting skills, including preparing concise briefing documents, technical reports, and the formal IMO PSSA proposal.
- g. Excellent written and oral communication skills in both English and Spanish.
- h. Preferably based within the MAR region (Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, Mexico). If based in Mexico, must be in Quintana Roo.
- i. Availability and willingness to travel within MAR countries as required.

Note: The professional interested in applying for this consultancy may propose a team, including a specialist with proven experience in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and a solid understanding of nautical charts. All professionals included in the proposed team must possess the necessary knowledge and experience to effectively carry out the responsibilities outlined in these Terms of Reference. Additionally, it is required that all team members be based in one of the countries of the MAR region.

10. Required documentation

1. Technical proposal:
 - a. Provide a brief overview of your approach to this consultancy, highlighting your understanding of the MAR Region. Summarize your key strengths and relevant experience, emphasizing your ability to prepare the PSSA nomination for submission to the IMO.
 - b. If proposing additional team members, please provide a list of the proposed members and their roles. Provide a brief description of each member's **relevant experience**, particularly in PSSA, GIS, management of sensitive marine ecosystems, and maritime policy. Highlight complementary skills such as experience in the MAR region, IMO communication, technical writing, or stakeholder coordination.
 - c. Maximum of five pages in English.
2. Financial proposal: The financial proposal should include **professional fees only** and must **exclude all other costs**, such as travel, workshops, or any additional expenses. See information in Section 8 of this document.
3. References: Provide at least three professional references demonstrating prior work experience in the MAR Region and in the topics of these Terms or Reference.

11. Application deadline

Send the required documentation to Claudia Ocaña at cocana@marfund.org, including a copy to mjavila@marfund.org, no later than **December 10, 2025, COB (5 pm)**

Considerations

- Proponents are responsible for all costs associated with the preparation and presentation of proposals submitted to MAR Fund for evaluation on the framework of this request for proposals, and therefore there is no obligation on behalf of MAR Fund to cover such costs – either in whole or in part – or to provide any advance or compensation if their proposal is not selected.
- Proponents acknowledge and accept that the preparation of the proposal(s) does not constitute a financial obligation on behalf of MAR Fund, and therefore the economic and financial responsibility for the preparation of the proposal(s) is exclusive of the proponent(s), regardless of the selection process outcome.
- The selection process will be carried out in accordance with MAR fund's internal evaluation guidelines and the result will be final.
- Only proponents who advance to the next stage of the selection process will be contacted.