



Terms of Reference

Consultancy to Provide Specialized Support for the Preparation of a Proposal to Designate 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 to be more than USD 4.5 billion, supporting the livelihoods and providing coastal protection to more than 2 million inhabitants in the region (IDB, 2021; 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 the MAR as a PSSA was captured in the ratification of the Tulum Declaration, signed by the governments of Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Belize in July 2006. One of the specific agreements in the updated Declaration is “to jointly request the International Maritime Organization (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 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 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 (CORAL), advanced the elaboration of the proposal, navigation route analysis, consultations with the IMO, and with relevant government authorities from the four MAR countries. As a result, the proposal has been updated and discussed with national and regional authorities, and several supporting documents have been prepared. In parallel, and in order to ensure the legal robustness, institutional alignment, and regulatory coherence of the process, MAR Fund has identified the need to strengthen the legal and policy framework underpinning the proposal, particularly in relation to national and regional governance requirements associated with the designation of a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) under the IMO. To support this effort, from 2025 to 2027, PROCARIBE+, a regional initiative focused on protecting and restoring coastal and marine ecosystems in the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf while promoting climate-resilient, sustainable blue economies through regional cooperation, will contribute to advancing the MAR PSSA initiative. MAR Fund, in coordination with a regional Task Force, will oversee implementation, including activities related to legal analysis, policy alignment, and institutional engagement at national and regional levels.

MAR Fund will hire a consultant to provide specialized support throughout the preparation of a proposal to designate the MAR as a PSSA for submission to the IMO.

2. Objective of the Consultancy

The primary objective of this consultancy is to provide specialized support to the PSSA Task Force on the legal analysis and preparation of a proposal to designate the MAR as a PSSA for submission to the IMO.

This consultancy will build upon previous work undertaken in the MAR region, ensuring continuity and alignment with existing initiatives.

3. Main responsibilities

The consultant shall carry out the following activities and sub-activities:

3.1 Legal Review and Update of the Initiative Dossier for the MAR Region:

- a) Review and analyze the current draft of the initiative dossier from legal and policy perspectives, identifying gaps and areas that require updating.
- b) Collect and analyze relevant legal and public policy information at both national and regional levels to update the draft dossier.
- c) Conduct consultations and seek input from experts and key stakeholders to enrich the dossier and support the regional process.
- d) Incorporate legal feedback received from experts and government agencies of the four MAR countries into the updated dossier and the updated PSSA proposal¹

3.2 Conduct further national and regional consultations in the four countries of the MAR:

- a) Plan, manage, and conduct interviews with key stakeholders in each country of the MAR to drive the initiative forward and seek alliances that strengthen regional collaboration. These consultations may include, but are not limited to, meetings and interviews with maritime transport authorities, port authorities, tourism, environment, international affairs ministries, and other entities relevant to the PSSA process.
- b) Support the planning and development of a multi-stakeholder workshop in each country to conduct consultations and refine the PSSA proposal.
- c) Support the planning and facilitation of a regional multi-stakeholder workshop to present and discuss the full proposal, including the associated measures to be adopted (MTBA).
- d) Develop a proposed timeline for this consultancy, outlining the number of venues (meetings, workshops) to be held, their proposed locations, and the list of participants per organization and country. This information shall be updated on an ongoing basis based on the progress of the consultation process.
- e) Develop at least one document per country to facilitate consultations (virtual and in-person) and document their outcomes, in support of advancing the PSSA proposal.
- f) Review and update the stakeholder and actor map developed in previous years². 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.

¹ The consultant will incorporate the legal sections in the proposal to be updated using the format required by the IMO. A preliminary version of this proposal was last updated in June 2023.

² Last updated in September 2024

- g) **Note:** The workshops described in item **b**, and the meetings in item **c**, are spaces to discuss various aspects of the process and the proposal; therefore, their organization and agenda should be coordinated with the MAR Fund, the Task Force, and the consulting group that will be preparing the technical part of the proposal and the navigation route analysis, the areas to be covered, among other aspects.

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

- a) Contact IMO representatives in each MAR country, in coordination with the Task Force, to obtain their support and feedback in the preparation of the proposal and to ensure governmental involvement.
- b) Identify and contribute to coordination efforts with other regional initiatives to support the inclusion of the MAR as a PSSA.

3.4 Elaboration of key material for the PSSA Initiative and the full proposal package:

- a) Review and update the institutional pathway for submitting the proposal to the IMO, describing the role of each institution at both the national and regional levels.
- b) Develop and update existing presentations (e.g., PowerPoint) and other materials to support the consultation sessions, ensuring alignment with the consultation objectives and expected results.
- c) Support the preparation of the **full proposal package for submission to the IMO** by providing legal inputs and strategic advice for the full proposal³.
- d) Participate in the development of inputs (information, documents, materials, etc.) that facilitate understanding of, and feedback on, the process by key stakeholders in the four countries.
- e) Contribute to dissemination and promotion efforts led by MAR Fund and the project team at the governmental level in support of the PSSA proposal.
- f) Participate in webinars, meetings, or workshops organized by the MAR Fund and the project Task Force to exchange best practices and lessons learned for a successful PSSA proposal submission.
- g) **Note:** Any communication materials to be developed for the consultation process should be discussed with the MAR Fund and the Task Force in advance, to ensure inclusion of required acknowledgements, such as partner and donor logos, among others.

3.5 Other key activities include:

- a) Maintain communication with the Task Force and the technical consulting group.
- 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 and the project Task Force in reviewing the final deliverables, in English and Spanish.

4. Duration of contract

The consultancy is expected to last 18 months, from March 2026 to August 2027.

5. Oversight

³ It is important to note that the Task Force will develop the technical content of the proposal with the support of another consulting group. Both groups (legal-strategic, and technical) must coordinate to include in the proposal the content required by the IMO.

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) Final documents to IMO shall be submitted to MAR Fund in the language required by the IMO for evaluation.
- e) MAR Fund shall create a SharePoint site or shared drive for the consultant to facilitate submission of the deliverables.

7. Deliverables to be submitted and payments

Payment	Deliverables	%
	Signing of the contract	0%
First	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A timeline outlining the key milestones and deliverables to effectively execute the activities of this consultancy. This approach shall ensure structured progress and alignment with the project objectives. 2. A document outlining the consultation approach for each country, including proposed meetings and workshops, their locations, key actors, and other relevant information required to organize the consultation activities. 	30%
Second	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 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. 2. An updated stakeholder map and list of key actors in the MAR region relevant to the PSSA process. This deliverable shall be revised and updated throughout the consultation process, as needed. 3. A document per country documenting strategic stakeholder and institutional engagement summary, including key consultations conducted (e.g., meetings, workshops, interviews, and others), legal and policy feedback received, and recommendations to strengthen the endorsement and institutional alignment for the PSSA process. This document will also include the outcomes from communications with IMO country representatives, as well as other regional initiatives promoting the inclusion of the MAR as a PSSA 4. Workshop materials: minutes, signed lists of participants, pictures, and others. 	40%
Third	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Legal and policy package to support the proposal and its submission to the IMO, including a brief summarizing the 	30%

	<p>international, regional, and national regulatory and policy basis for the PSSA designation.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Incorporated inputs and analysis from consultations, IMO-related institutional processes, legal, and policy review into the updated version of the PSSA proposal. 3. A file of the supporting documents (e.g., letters of endorsement or interest, if available) from the countries accepting to support the PSSA proposal. 4. Incorporated inputs into documents and materials prepared to facilitate the understanding of the process by key stakeholders in the four countries. 5. Final report of the consultancy, including conclusions, legal and strategic recommendations, proposed next steps, and a timeline outlining follow-up actions related to the submission of the PSSA proposal to the IMO. 	
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8. Financial Conditions

1. **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. Fees will include professional fees, applicable taxes, and any banking charges incurred by the consultant.
2. **Payment Terms:** 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.
3. **Travel Expenses:** Travel-related costs will be covered separately by MAR Fund, in accordance with an approved travel plan and budget. It will cover only the consultation group. Plane tickets purchased should be discussed with MAR Fund in advance. Travel expenses should not be included in the financial proposal submitted by the consultant.
4. **Excluded Costs:** Expenses related to workshops, 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

1. Senior professional (or team of professionals) with demonstrated experience providing high-level strategic advice on PSSA designation processes, including preparation of submissions to the IMO is highly desirable, and knowledge of international maritime and environmental regulatory frameworks applicable to the MAR Region
2. Advanced university degree (PhD, Master’s, or equivalent) in a relevant field such as environmental law, ocean governance, maritime administration, environmental policy, international relations, or related disciplines.
3. Solid understanding of IMO conventions, guidelines, and procedures related to PSSA, with demonstrated ability to effectively communicate with IMO officials.
4. Proven expertise in the identification, assessment, and understanding of environmental protection measures.
5. Demonstrated leadership and experience engaging with a diverse range of stakeholders, including governmental authorities, NGOs, and scientific institutions in the MAR region.
6. Strong analytical, synthesis, and drafting skills, including preparing concise briefing documents and technical reports, to enable the preparation of the formal IMO PSSA proposal.

7. Excellent written and oral communication skills in both English and Spanish.
8. Preferably based within the MAR region (Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, Mexico). If based in Mexico, must be in Quintana Roo.
9. Availability and willingness to travel within MAR countries as required.

10. Documentation required

1. Technical Proposal:

- 1.1. Provide a brief overview of the proposed **approach** to this consultancy, demonstrating an understanding of the MAR Region and the international, regional, and national legal frameworks relevant to the designation of a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA). Summarize key strengths and relevant experience, emphasizing the ability in government and stakeholder engagement for the preparation and submission of the PSSA proposal to the IMO.
- 1.2. If additional team members are proposed, provide a list of the proposed members and their respective roles. Include a brief description of each member's relevant experience to **public policy, institutional processes**, and PSSA-related legal frameworks. Highlight complementary skills such as experience in the MAR region, engagement with IMO-related processes, legal drafting, or stakeholder coordination.
- 1.3. Maximum length: **10 pages**, in English.

2. **Financial Proposal:** The financial proposal shall include **professional fees only**, including applicable taxes and bank charges, and must exclude all other costs, such as travel expenses, workshops, or any additional expenses.
3. **References:** Provide at least **three (3) professional references** demonstrating prior experience in the MAR region and in areas relevant to these Terms of Reference, particularly legal advisory services, international maritime or environmental law, and regional governance processes.

11. Application deadline

Send your application and documents described in Section 10 to Claudia Ocaña, cocana@marfund.org and Mari Avila, mjavila@marfund.org, no later than February 25, 2026. COB

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.