



Ocean Country Partnership Programme

Sri Lanka

Achievement Report

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Programme:

The Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) is a 5 year (2021-2026) 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, management tools and creating educational resources for coastal communities. The OCPP delivers work under three thematic areas: biodiversity, marine pollution, and sustainable seafood. OCPP was delivered by three British Government Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs): the Centre for the Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas), the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), and the Marine Management Organisation (MMO). Other components of OCPP were delivered by the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership (GOAP) and the Friends of Ocean Action (FOA) and those elements are not covered in this report. More information on OCPP can be found at: [DevTracker Programme GB-GOV-7-BPFOCPP Documents](#)

Document Purpose:

This Achievement Report presents a summary of the activities undertaken and the achievements obtained as a result of cooperation between countries for this partnership. This document does not cover the multilateral components of the programme and this report only covers achievements by the end of the programme. A range of further achievements are expected as recommendations from the OCPP are adopted by partner countries in the preceding period post-programme closure.

All OCPP Achievement Reports have been authored by the ALBs and therefore key achievements and impacts of collaboration reflects individuals own perspectives. Independent evaluation by the OCPP MEL provider verifies outputs and outcomes against the programme logframe, the findings of which can be viewed in the programme's annual reviews and closure report on Dev Tracker.

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Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
ACU	Association of Commonwealth Universities
ALB	Arm's Length Body
ALDFG	Abandoned, Lost and Discarded Fishing Gear
BHC	British High Commission
BPF	Blue Planet Fund
BRT	Blue Resources Trust
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CEPA	Centre for Environmental and Population Activities
CEA	Central Environment Authority
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
DAP&H	Department for Animal Production & Health
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (UK)
DFAR	Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources
DWC	Department of Wildlife Conservation
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EFL	Environmental Foundation Limited
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FTIR	Fourier Transform Infrared (Spectroscopy)
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GD-PAME	Global Database on Protected Area Management Effectiveness
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GIS	Geographic Information System
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IUU	Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (Fishing)
JNCC	Joint Nature Conservation Committee
METT-4	Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (Version 4)
MMO	Marine Management Organisation
MoE	Ministry of Environment
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MSP	Marine Spatial Planning
NAQDA	National Aquaculture Development Authority
NARA	National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency
NCPC	National Cleaner Production Centre
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCPP	Ocean Country Partnership Programme
PET / PETS	Protected, Endangered and Threatened (Species)
PSA	Productivity and Susceptibility Analysis
SOMER	State of the Marine Environment Report
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VMS	Vessel Monitoring System
WDPA	World Database on Protected Areas
WNPS	Wildlife and Nature Protection Society of Sri Lanka

Executive Summary

The Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCP) has delivered focused, outcome-level improvements to Sri Lanka's marine and coastal governance, scientific capacity, and pollution response preparedness. Working with national institutions and regional partners, the programme has strengthened the systems, evidence, and skills needed to manage marine resources more sustainably amid economic recovery and increasing climate risk.

OCP has embedded improved governance frameworks, supporting more effective Marine Protected Area (MPA) management, strengthened fisheries compliance, enhanced protected species response readiness, and practical foundations for Marine Spatial Planning. These interventions have improved coordination, accountability, and alignment with international commitments.

A key legacy is the expansion of Sri Lanka's marine evidence base and technical capability, including the first national seagrass habitat map, harmonised marine spatial datasets, strengthened aquaculture and fisheries diagnostics, and supported the establishment of the country's first microplastics laboratory. Together, these provide critical baselines for policy, conservation, pollution control, and climate resilience.

OCP has also improved pollution management and emergency response, enhancing preparedness for marine pollution incidents, strengthening regional coordination, and supporting public awareness and climate literacy. Complementing this, targeted education and skills investments have built national expertise through postgraduate research and technical training.

Overall, OCP has left a durable legacy of stronger institutions, better data, and improved preparedness, positioning Sri Lanka to protect marine ecosystems while supporting livelihoods and sustainable ocean-based development.





SRI LANKA
STATE OF MARINE ENVIRONMENT REPORT

Context

Sri Lanka, an island nation in the Indian Ocean lying south of the Indian subcontinent, separated from India by the narrow Palk Strait. Despite spanning only about 65,000 square kilometres, it is home to a diverse population of around 22 million people and boasts a landscape rich in cultural history, ecological variety, and maritime significance. Its strategic location has long connected it to wider trade routes across South Asia, with maritime borders extending toward both India and the Maldives.

Sri Lanka's identity is deeply intertwined with the ocean. Its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) covers an area roughly eight times larger than its landmass—around 517,000 square kilometres—granting it rights over extensive marine resources in the water column, seabed, and subsurface. This vast maritime area shapes the country's economy, environment, and long-term development potential.

While the island is endowed with extraordinary natural richness, it has also faced significant economic challenges in recent years. The severe economic crisis of 2022 exposed longstanding economic vulnerabilities and resulted in rising poverty, food insecurity, and reduced household incomes. Though forecasts suggest gradual stabilisation beyond 2024, recovery will take time as the impacts of the crisis continue to shape economic conditions, real incomes, and labour dynamics.

Against this backdrop, Sri Lanka's natural assets—particularly its marine environment—represent both a vital responsibility and a future opportunity. The country is increasingly engaged in advancing sustainable fisheries, protecting marine biodiversity through conservation measures, promoting eco-friendly tourism, and strengthening coastal resilience in the face of climate change. Its commitment to global frameworks such as UNCLOS, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Paris Agreement, and various Sustainable Development Goals underscores the importance of the ocean to Sri Lanka's identity and future prosperity.

Coastal and Marine Pressures

Sri Lanka's coastal and marine zones are central to the country's social and economic wellbeing, with 14 of its 25 districts hosting key coastal ecosystems and roughly a quarter of the population living within just one kilometre of the shore. These environments support livelihoods, provide critical food resources, and underpin national industries, making the island particularly vulnerable to pressures affecting the health and stability of its coasts. Fisheries play an essential role in national food security, supplying around 50% of the country's protein intake. While fisheries management and trade dynamics remain, the dominant factors shaping fisheries stock health, emerging research highlights the growing influence of climate-driven changes such as warming seas and ocean acidification on future productivity.

The fisheries sector extends far beyond food provision, generating direct and indirect employment for approximately 583,000 people and sustaining the livelihoods of over 2.5 million coastal residents. With three major subsectors—coastal, offshore, and inland—this industry is deeply embedded in coastal communities, where many low-wage and low-skill positions are predominantly held by women. Changing ocean conditions and temperature rises are expected to reshape coastal shelf fisheries, heightening the vulnerability of those who rely on them most, increasing the need to integrate aquaculture into Sri Lanka's approach to ensuring long term, sustainable food security.

Coastal regions also support much of the nation's physical infrastructure and economic output. They are home to four commercial ports, major railway routes, and 22 fisheries harbours—facilities that collectively contribute to 65% of industrial production, 80% of tourism infrastructure, and the vast majority of fish landings. This concentration of development amplifies exposure to coastal hazards, including erosion, storm surges, and sea-level rise. In response, national climate adaptation priorities focus on strengthening technical skills, data systems, and forecasting capabilities to better monitor climate-driven risks. These efforts include developing sea-level rise monitoring



tools, updating vulnerability and hazard maps, improving shoreline management, and enhancing conservation in high-risk coastal zones.

Beneath the surrounding waters, Sri Lanka's seabed resources remain largely unexplored, representing both an opportunity and a potential source of future pressure. The country has begun opening its Exclusive Economic Zone—one of the largest relative to land area in the region—for offshore oil and gas exploration. A new licensing framework has been prepared to allow international companies to explore nearly 900 offshore blocks, with particular interest in the Mannar Basin, thought to hold sizable hydrocarbon reserves. While exploration could provide economic benefits, it also introduces new environmental risks to an already sensitive marine environment.

Altogether, Sri Lanka's coasts face a complex mix of ecological, climatic, and economic pressures. These challenges underline the importance of safeguarding coastal ecosystems while supporting the millions of people who depend on them for food, income, and security.

Poverty and Climate Change

Sri Lanka faces acute climate vulnerability, with environmental risks increasingly affecting human wellbeing, economic stability, and the country's rich natural heritage. Ranked among the top 30 most climate-affected countries globally, the island experiences a combination of rising temperatures—averaging 27–30°C—and highly variable monsoon patterns that drive frequent droughts, flash floods, and landslides. These climate stresses directly disrupt lives and livelihoods, particularly in communities reliant on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, forestry, energy, manufacturing, and tourism. Food, water, and health systems are already under strain, and intensifying heat and erratic rainfall are expected to further challenge these sectors in the years ahead.

Despite being a low greenhouse gas emitter, Sri Lanka remains highly exposed due to its limited adaptive capacity, ranking 104 out of 185 on global adaptation indices. Climate change compounds existing environmental pressures such as deforestation, soil erosion, and biodiversity loss, all of which diminish ecosystem services that millions depend on for daily survival. Natural disasters linked to extreme weather—especially prolonged droughts and severe floods—continue to damage homes, displace families, and undermine economic opportunities across both rural and urban areas.

These climate risks intersect sharply with poverty and social vulnerability. Over half of the population—around 55.7%—is considered multidimensionally vulnerable, facing disadvantages in education, health, and living conditions. The recent economic crisis has further deepened inequality. Nearly half of all Sri Lankans are both vulnerable and unprepared for climate-induced shocks, leaving households with few buffers against escalating hazards. This is particularly critical in coastal regions, where 25% of the population lives within one kilometre of the shore and faces increasing exposure to sea-level rise, coastal erosion, and saltwater intrusion.



Sri Lanka’s extraordinary biodiversity adds another dimension to its climate challenge. Home to globally significant mangroves, seagrasses, coral reefs, and numerous marine species, the island is recognised as one of the world’s biodiversity hotspots. Yet only a fraction—0.33%—of the marine area within its EEZ is formally protected, and many species remain at risk due to habitat loss, invasive species, over-extraction, pollution, and climate-driven ecosystem change. Strengthening conservation remains difficult: funding for biodiversity protection has not kept pace with the needs identified in national action plans.

Tourism, a vital economic sector employing around two million people, is also highly climate exposed. Much of the industry is concentrated along the coastline, where resorts, beaches, and infrastructure face mounting risks from erosion, storms, and rising seas. Adaptation measures—such as beach nourishment and coastal protection—are already demanding significant financial investment, and further costs are expected as climate impacts intensify. At the same time, Sri Lanka is exploring opportunities to shift toward more sustainable and resilient forms of tourism, including ecotourism and nature-based initiatives that could enhance both environmental and economic outcomes.

As climate extremes grow more frequent and intense, the country’s most vulnerable communities—those with the fewest resources and greatest dependence on natural systems—face the greatest risks. Strengthening resilience, expanding protection for ecosystems, and building climate-smart livelihoods will be essential for reducing poverty and safeguarding Sri Lanka’s future.

Gender Equity & Equality

Sri Lanka faces notable development challenges in terms of gender equality and is ranked 92 out of 170 countries on the United Nations Gender Inequality Index (GII) (UN, 2023). While progress has been made in addressing inequality, gender-based violence remains an issue, and women are underrepresented in various sectors, including the national parliament, where only 5% of seats are held by women.

Around 7% of the marine fishing sector’s workforce consists of women, and they represent about 5% in inland fisheries and aquaculture ([World Aquaculture Society](#), 2024). Women’s roles in fisheries often extend to value-added activities, including fish processing tasks such as gutting, drying, salting, and smoking and ornamental fish breeding, which has become an income source for some communities. Women also engage in fish marketing, selling fresh or processed fish in local and regional markets. These activities are often carried out in coastal villages and contribute significantly to the economic stability of fishing households. Children’s involvement, however, is not prominently highlighted, as attention is focused on improving education and alternative livelihood opportunities for fishing communities ([FAO Home](#), 2014) Sri Lanka has achieved near gender parity when it comes to enrolment in education. Women have particularly high levels of tertiary education, accounting for over 60% of university students. Despite advancements in educational attainment for women, gender disparities remain when it comes



to enrolment in training and skills development programmes, contributing to particularly low levels of female labour force participation. Additionally, rural women are less likely than urban women to have a secondary or university education.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is an ongoing problem in Sri Lanka, occurring in households, communities, and workplaces. One in four women (24.9%) report having experienced physical or sexual violence at some point in their lives.

Sri Lanka Timeline & Approach

Figure 1 provides an overview of OCPP's activity in Sri Lanka. OCPP's engagement in Sri Lanka began ahead of the first scoping visit undertaken in March 2022 and concluded in March 2026.

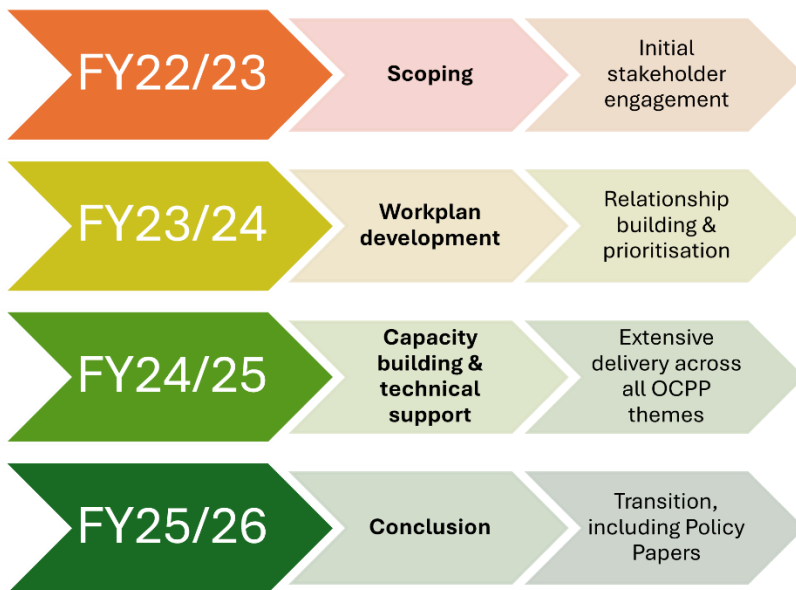


Figure 1: Timeline of OCPP's delivery in Sri Lanka

The scoping exercise involved engagement with a wide range of Government, Non-Government Organisation (NGO), academic and industry stakeholders. The aim of the scoping was to develop an understanding of Sri Lanka's current and future priorities, and where OCPP's support could be most impactful and add the most value. The scoping identified the following overarching challenges, which formed the basis of the programme of work developed with Sri Lanka.

1. **Coastal communities face increasing and interconnected threats from unsustainable use of the marine environment, climate impacts, and environmental hazards impacting food security and livelihoods.** Threats include overfishing, destructive and Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing as well as poorly planned and implemented coastal development, including tourism, urbanisation, and aquaculture, leading to habitat modification and degradation. This is being further exacerbated by climate driven impacts, including ocean warming, acidification and

increased frequency and intensity of storms, reducing health and resilience of marine habitats, particularly coral reefs and seagrass beds.

2. **Pollution threats to marine environments and public health.** Sri Lanka faces a range of types and sources of pollution includes litter and plastics arising from improper waste disposal and management - both land and sea - and a wide range of contaminants, eutrophication, noise and pollution spill events from shipping. Currently Sri Lanka does not have a fully developed monitoring programme or action plan for Water Quality and/or Marine Litter.
3. **Expansion of marine industry without coordination and a structured framework.** Sri Lanka has ambitions to improve protection and sustainable use of the marine environment, including expansion of Marine Protected Areas, aquaculture, marine renewables, and ecotourism. However, currently there is no coordinated approach to progress these plans, such as Marine Spatial Plan, causing conflicts between stakeholders, unsustainable expansion and negative impacts to marine ecosystems.
4. **High social and economic reliance on the fisheries sector – both wild caught fisheries and aquaculture.** Over 60% of the population relying on fish for their main source of protein (NARA, 2019). With three main subsectors – coastal, offshore, and inland fisheries – the wild caught industry sustains the livelihoods of over 2.5 million coastal residents across the country. After a major disease outbreak, the aquaculture sector is struggling to reduce large losses during their production cycles, specifically within the shrimp farming and mud crab aquaculture.

Foundations and scoping (Financial Year (FY)22/23 – FY23/24)

The early stages of OCPP's work in Sri Lanka focussed on establishing relationships with key ministries and technical agencies, understanding institutional frameworks, data availability, and capacity gaps across marine pollution, biodiversity, fisheries, and emergency response. The scoping exercises revealed strong demand for support across almost all areas of OCPP's programme scope, which resulted in an expansive programme of work spanning over 120 activities across 16 individual workstreams (Figure 1). All work packages were co-developed and co-delivered in collaboration with respective Sri Lankan stakeholders, ensuring alignment with Sri Lanka Government's priorities and ambitions (Figure 1).

Table 1 provides a summary of the workstreams developed and delivered in Sri Lanka under OCPP. A detailed breakdown of what has been delivered under each workstream can be found in the Delivery Summary hosted on the OCPP Online Repository (see Workstreams below for further information).

Some delivery was also undertaken in early stages of the programme, with baseline studies (e.g. marine litter, plume modelling, climate risk scoping) initiated, and technical scoping for cross-cutting areas such as marine spatial planning (MSP), Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and emergency response. Early wins included the start of beach litter monitoring, policy engagement on

plastics, initial plume modelling, and preparation for larger capacity-building interventions.



Figure 1: Diagram illustrating how OCPP’s activities, workstreams and themes nest together to support Sri Lanka in achieving their ocean ambitions

	<i>Marine Biodiversity</i>	<i>Marine Pollution</i>	<i>Sustainable Seafood</i>	<i>Climate Change</i>
<i>Workstreams</i>	Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)*	Abandoned, Lost & Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG)	Aquaculture	Climate Change*
	Marine Spatial Planning (MSP)	Marine Litter*	Fisheries Compliance & Enforcement	State of the Marine Environment (SOMER)*
	Mangrove Restoration	Microplastics		
	Seagrass*	Marine Pollution Emergency Response*		
	Protected, Endangered & Threatened Species (PETS)	Solid Waste Management*		
	Sharks & Rays, CITES	Underwater Noise		
		Water Quality*		



Evidence generation and capacity building (FY23/24 – FY24/25)

Delivery expanded significantly, with a strong emphasis on generating high-quality national evidence and building technical capability (Figure 2). Studentships were also developed and awarded through the Association of Commonwealth University scholarship programme (see ‘Education for Future Leaders’ and Annex I for further information).



Integration, policy influence and legacy (FY24/25 – FY25/26)

The final phase focused on consolidation, integration and sustainability. National systems were updated (WDPa, GD-PAME), toolkits and databases finalised (MPA Best Practice Toolkit, mangrove and seagrass databases), and advanced training delivered. OCPP’s MSP outputs were integrated into UNDP’s MSP work, which included a framework for a pilot MSP exercise in northwest Sri Lanka. Regional leadership was strengthened through SACEP emergency response work, train-the-trainer models, and continued collaboration beyond Sri Lanka.

Towards the end of FY25/26, OCPP entered a dedicated transition period, which focussed on maximising opportunities for uptake, implementation and long-term sustainability of OCPP’s outputs (Figure 3). OCPP engaged with various international donors to seek out opportunities for them to continue to build upon OCPP’s work, including presenting at UNDP’s Climate Change Working Group. OCPP also developed a series of policy papers for key work areas, which highlight the opportunities for OCPP work to be integrated into policy going forward (see Workstreams below and Table 1). Finally, in February, OCPP hosted a series of events in-country to showcase, promote and celebrate OCPP’s delivery in Sri Lanka, including specific events for Government partners, a wider stakeholder celebration event and closing events with the programme’s academic partners.

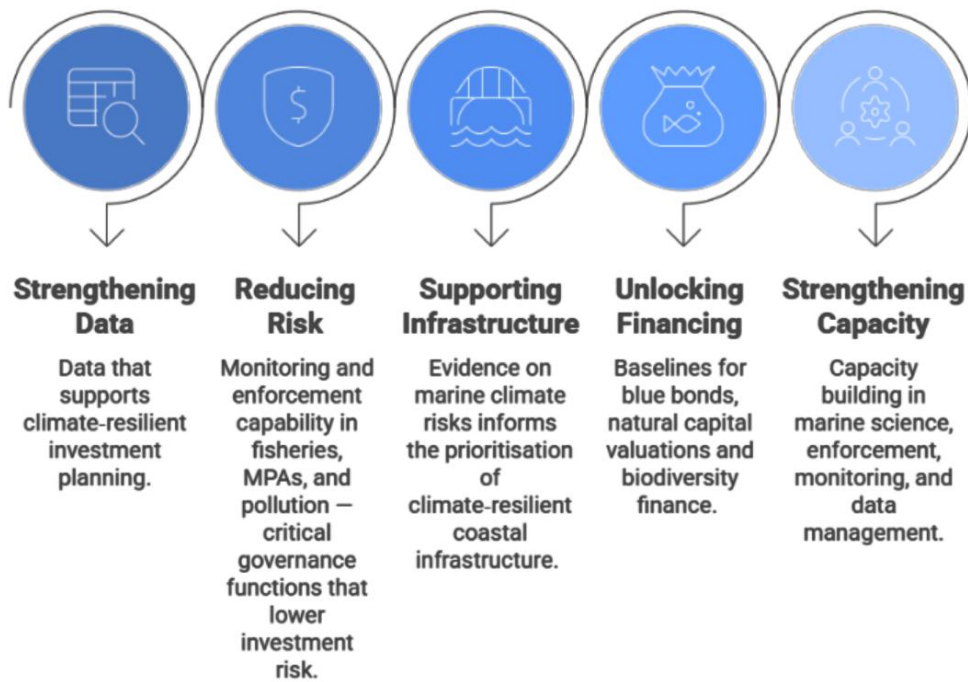


Figure 3: Overview of how OCPP’s work in Sri Lanka will continue to yield impact beyond the life of the programme

Stakeholders

With support from the British High Commission (BHC) team based in Colombo, OCPP developed a strong network of collaborating partners across all OCPP themes. A comprehensive list of OCPP’s stakeholders in Sri Lanka are provided in Annex I.

The Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) in Sri Lanka worked through a broad and interconnected stakeholder base spanning government, academia, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), communities, and the private sector.

OCPP’s primary **Government** stakeholders in Sri Lanka were Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and the Ministry of Environment (MoE). Workplans were developed and agreed with MoFA and MoE, in doing so ensuring OCPP listened and responded to current and emerging Sri Lanka Government priorities. The Ministries then facilitated engagement with the respective Government Departments through whom the majority of the delivery was implemented. Over the course of the programme, OCPP developed very strong, collaborative relationships, often with a single department being involved in multiple streams of work (see Annex I for details). With these bodies, OCPP supported policy review, regulatory strengthening, enforcement capacity, environmental monitoring, compliance with international commitments (e.g. CBD 30x30, CITES, counter-IUU fishing), and preparedness for pollution and marine mammal strandings.

Academic and research institutions play a critical role in building national scientific capability in Sri Lanka, and OCPP worked closely with the University of Peradeniya, University of Kelaniya, University of Wayamba and the Veterinary Research Institute. These collaborations have supported long-term skills development through equipment provision, specialist training, postgraduate scholarships, joint research,

peer-reviewed publications, and applied science in areas such as microplastics, water quality, aquaculture health, mangrove restoration, seagrass mapping, underwater noise, and fisheries stock assessment.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were key delivery and engagement partners, particularly at the science–policy–community interface. Organisations such as Blue Resources Trust (BRT), Environmental Foundation Limited, Centre for Environmental and Population Activities (CEPA), Oceanswell, Wildlife and Nature Protection Society (WNPS), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Sustainable Clean Lanka, and MAS Foundation have supported field implementation, stakeholder engagement, education, community outreach, and translation of evidence into practice. NGOs also brought long-standing local knowledge and trust, particularly in sensitive areas such as MPAs, species conservation, citizen science and marine litter reduction.

Private sector and social enterprises were engaged where solutions require market or operational uptake. Examples include Lanka Upcycles (fishing gear recycling), MAS Foundation (river litter interception), Inbound Hype (communications, digital platforms and outreach), DMS Electronics (technical equipment), and other service providers. These partnerships help connect policy objectives with practical delivery, innovation, and behavioural change.

International partners such as United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the British Council, SACEP, IWC, FAO reference centres, and universities in the UK and Australia complement national delivery by supporting coordination, regional alignment, training, and knowledge exchange.





Impact

Strengthened Marine Governance and Institutional Capacity

OCPD has helped embed internationally recognised management frameworks into national institutions, particularly through its work on Marine Protected Area (MPA) governance. The Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT-4) is now being used by the Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) to inform draft management plans for several MPAs, marking a substantial shift toward more evidence-based and accountable conservation management. These assessments—completed through collaborative workshops, technical training,

and field verification—have since been incorporated into Sri Lanka’s reporting to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), demonstrating their alignment with international commitments and supporting progress against Global Biodiversity Framework Targets 20 and 21.

Governance capacity has also strengthened through efforts to enhance Sri Lanka’s ability to manage protected, endangered, and threatened (PET) marine species. Through a partnership with the International Whaling Commission, OCPP supported the creation of national protocols, standard operating procedures, reporting forms, and practical training for wildlife rangers, veterinarians, and conservation officers responsible for responding to stranding events. Although the opportunity to apply these procedures in real-time did not arise during the reporting period, the systems and training are now fully established, representing a durable improvement in state preparedness.

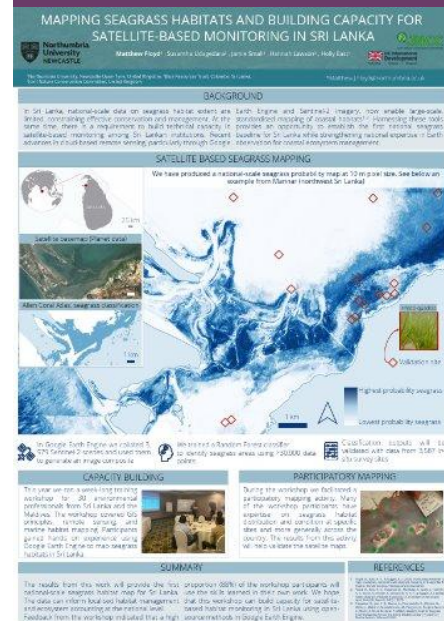
Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) represents another major area where governance has advanced. Prior to OCPP intervention, MSP remained conceptual and lacked a clear pathway for adoption. Through national workshops, bilateral meetings, and the development of a pilot proposal for the northwest region, OCPP has helped Sri Lanka define an MSP approach grounded in strategic environmental appraisal and cross-government collaboration. This work has strengthened relationships between ministries, clarified roles, and positioned the country to move toward a nationally coordinated MSP framework for future marine development and conservation.

Institutional strengthening also extended to fisheries governance. Through a detailed review of the National Plan of Action on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing and targeted engagement with the Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) and Fisheries Monitoring Centre, OCPP has improved DFAR’s readiness to update enforcement protocols, refine training requirements, and strengthen compliance with international fisheries obligations. This directly supports Sri Lanka’s efforts to maintain access to export markets and meet obligations under the FAO’s International Plan of Action to prevent IUU fishing.

Expanded National Evidence Base & Scientific Capability

A major legacy of the programme has been the dramatic expansion of Sri Lanka’s marine evidence base. Prior to OCPP involvement, many critical marine datasets were incomplete, fragmented, or unavailable in usable formats. Through the programme’s investment in data generation, harmonisation, and technical assistance, Sri Lanka now possesses a more comprehensive foundation for marine policy and planning.

One of the most significant achievements is the development of the national seagrass habitat map. Produced through a combination of remote sensing analysis, ground-truthing, and methodological training, this map provides Sri Lanka with its first national-scale assessment of seagrass extent and condition. Draft outputs have already been incorporated into CBD reporting, and the data will serve as a baseline for future blue carbon assessments, MPA expansion, and coastal climate resilience planning.



Similarly, the creation of harmonised GIS maps of all marine protection regimes—including MPAs, Fisheries Management Areas, and Sanctuaries—has filled a longstanding national data gap. Environmental Foundation Ltd., supported by OCPP, digitised and standardised datasets from multiple government departments, enabling network analysis and identification of spatial overlaps, gaps, and opportunities. This work strengthens national capacity for marine spatial planning, protected area expansion, and monitoring of management effectiveness.

Scientific capability has also improved through OCPP support for pollution monitoring. The establishment of Sri Lanka's first microplastic laboratory, equipped with micro-Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR) technology and linked to an international network of laboratories, represents a substantial national leap in analytical capability. The new facility allows polymer identification and microplastic analysis within Sri Lanka, reducing reliance on overseas laboratories and enabling long-term monitoring, research, and policy development. Further capability-building has been delivered through training on water quality analysis, plume mapping, and nutrient sampling, supporting evidence generation for pollution and coastal ecosystem health assessments.

In addition, OCPP support for aquaculture research and diagnostics has strengthened national expertise in shrimp disease analysis, mud crab stock assessment, and aquatic animal pathology. Positive reference materials, diagnostic training, and MPhil student support have improved the capacity of universities and government agencies to undertake molecular, histopathological, and ecological assessments. Although extreme weather events disrupted some planned activities, the underlying diagnostic capability developed through OCPP continues to support national aquaculture management.

Enhanced Biodiversity Conservation & Species Protection

OCPP's interventions have also contributed to measurable improvements in Sri Lanka's ability to conserve marine species and ecosystems. The METT-4 assessments, MPA network analysis, and updated entries in global databases such as World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) and Global Database on Protected Area Management Effectiveness (GD-PAME) have strengthened the visibility and accountability of Sri Lanka's protected area system. Outputs such as the translated MPA Best Practice Toolkit, ranger-focused outreach materials, and METT-4 summary products help ensure that improved management approaches are disseminated at operational levels across the country.

Significant progress has also been made in species conservation. The revision of the National Plan of Action for sharks and rays, the production of a national elasmobranch identification guide, and training for fisheries, customs, and coastguard officials have collectively improved compliance with CITES requirements and strengthened enforcement capacity. Deep-water camera deployments, species illustration updates, and capacity-building workshops all contribute to a stronger baseline for monitoring and managing vulnerable species in Sri Lanka's waters.



The national Protected, Endangered and Threatened Species (PETS) protocols, combined with necropsy training and provision of veterinary equipment, have further strengthened wildlife response readiness. These systems enhance Sri Lanka's ability to protect marine megafauna, including whales, dolphins, turtles, and other endangered species, and reinforce established commitments under international conservation frameworks.

Reduced Pollution, Improved Emergency Response & Public Awareness

Progress in pollution management and emergency response represents another major area of outcome-level change. OCPP supported baseline data collection on abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear (ALDFG), beach litter, and national waste systems. These datasets are now informing policy development and supporting more targeted responses to the sources and flows of marine plastic pollution. Partnerships with CEPA, Lanka Upcycles, MAS, and NARA have enabled community engagement, harbour-level awareness campaigns, and the deployment of litter booms and ocean strainers—each helping quantify and reduce pollution entering coastal ecosystems.

Emergency response capability has strengthened significantly through regional and national trainings delivered in collaboration with the International Maritime Organization, SACEP, Maldives Coastguard, and Sri Lankan government agencies. Through multi-level training, updated dispersant guidelines, provision of post-spill sampling kits, and plume modelling workshops, Sri Lanka is now better equipped to prepare for and respond to marine pollution emergencies. The development of an updated regional contingency plan under SACEP, supported by OCPP, further enhances Sri Lanka's ability to coordinate within the wider South Asian region.

Public understanding of climate and pollution risks has also improved through national awareness campaigns in multiple languages, school-based educational materials, and a dedicated national climate literacy programme. These interventions, delivered in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the British Council, aim to embed long-term behavioural change and informed environmental stewardship across the population.

Education for Future Leaders

OCPP supported fourteen scholars at two universities in Sri Lanka; eight at the University of Kelaniya and six at the University of Peradeniya. Scholars at both institutions encountered delays due to the nationwide university administration strikes from May to July 2024. As a result, a three-month course extension was approved by Cefas for University of Kelaniya to July 2026 and the University of Peradeniya to June 2026.

Scholars studied for MPhils under the following:

- MPhil in Aquatic Animal Health
- MPhil in Wetland Restoration/Ecosystem Restoration
- MPhil in Inland Water Resource Management

- MPhil in Fisheries Management

Topics selected by the students for their research projects covered:

1. Aquaculture Health, Disease, and Biosecurity
2. Aquatic Pollution, Water Quality, and Plastics
3. Marine and Coastal Ecosystems, Biodiversity, and Fisheries
4. Coastal Habitats, Spatial Analysis, and Environmental Mapping

A full list of scholar titles can be found in the Annex.



What is "Ghost Gear"?

'Ghost Gear' or Abandoned, Lost or otherwise Discarded Fishing Gear is uncontrolled, damaged fishing gear that is lost in our oceans, and is harmful not only to the environment but to Sri Lanka's fisheries.

DID YOU KNOW?

On average, one Multiday boat loses **65kg of fishing gear per year!**

In total, it is estimated that **almost 2,150,000kg of ghost gear** is lost to Sri Lanka's marine ecosystem every year...

**HAVE YOU NOTICED A DECREASE IN CATCH?
THIS MIGHT BE ONE REASON.**



SCAN THIS QR CODE
FOR MORE RESOURCES



Workstreams and Conclusion

A comprehensive breakdown of the work delivered under all OCPP workstreams in Sri Lanka can be found in the delivery summary hosted on the OCPP online repository.

[Ocean Country Partnership Programme - Sri Lanka](#)

In addition, OCPP has developed policy papers for the following work areas, which summarise the current policy context, delivery and impact, policy options/ recommendations and an indicative roadmap for delivery for policy change.

- Marine Protected Areas
- Seagrass
- Water Quality
- Marine Litter
- Solid Waste Management
- Marine Pollution Emergency Response
- Climate Change

Conclusion

The Ocean Country Partnership Programme has delivered substantial outcome-level change across Sri Lanka's marine and coastal governance landscape. Its interventions have helped embed best-practice management frameworks, create new national datasets, build scientific and institutional capacity, reduce pollution risks, and strengthen biodiversity conservation. These achievements contribute directly to Sri Lanka's international obligations, enhance national resilience to climate and environmental pressures, and support more sustainable and equitable use of marine resources.

By bridging institutional gaps, improving the scientific foundation for policy, and fostering long-term partnerships, OCPP has left a durable and widely recognised legacy. The programme's work provides a strong platform for continued environmental governance reforms, future investment in marine conservation, and progress toward Sri Lanka's ambitions for a sustainable ocean economy.



Annex 1 – full stakeholder list

Government

Ministry/ Department	Role
<i>Ministry of Environment</i>	Key policy counterpart for marine pollution, biodiversity, climate change, plastics, public awareness campaigns, and reporting against international environmental commitments
<i>Ministry of Foreign Affairs</i>	Supported international coordination and diplomatic engagement across OCPP delivery, including alignment with UK–Sri Lanka cooperation and regional initiatives.
<i>Ministry of Finance</i>	Engaged at strategic level to enable alignment of OCPP activities with national development priorities and public finance processes.
<i>Ministry of Education, Science and Technology</i>	Partnered on climate change education, teacher training, and integration of marine and climate literacy into national education programmes.
<i>Ministry of Tourism</i>	Engaged indirectly through MPA, biodiversity and marine litter initiatives to support sustainable tourism and protection of coastal assets.
<i>Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Land and Irrigation</i>	Engaged through aquaculture health, animal production, land-based pollution interfaces and food security-related environmental management.
<i>Ministry of Trade, Commerce, Food Security and Co-operative Development</i>	Supported indirectly through waste characterisation, plastics evidence generation, and food security-linked marine pollution interventions.
<i>Ministry of Fisheries, Aquatic and Ocean Resources</i>	Primary policy counterpart for fisheries, aquaculture, compliance and enforcement, ALDFG, IUU fishing, VMS strengthening and sustainable seafood delivery.
<i>Central Environment Authority (CEA)</i>	Worked with OCPP on plastics policy implementation, public awareness campaigns, climate education materials, GIS training, and pollution monitoring.
<i>Coast Conservation and Coastal Resource Management Department</i>	Engaged in MPA mapping, spatial analysis, and marine spatial planning discussions linked to coastal governance.
<i>Department for Animal Production & Health (DAP&H)</i>	Partnered on aquatic animal disease diagnostics, necropsy training, biosecurity and aquaculture health capacity building.
<i>Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DFAR)</i>	Received technical support on IUU fishing, VMS review, compliance frameworks, enforcement training and monitoring systems.
<i>Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC)</i>	Key partner for MPAs, METT-4 assessments, species conservation, strandings response, WDPA/GD-PAME updates and biodiversity reporting. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>MPAs Division:</i> Worked on MPA effectiveness assessments, mapping, best practice toolkits and outreach products. <i>Veterinary Division:</i> Supported through necropsy training and emergency response for protected marine species.

<i>Industrial Technology Institute (ITI)</i>	Supported laboratory analysis, water quality monitoring, underwater noise capacity, GIS training and pollution response preparedness.
<i>Marine Environment Protection Authority (MEPA)</i>	Primary partner for marine pollution, oil spill preparedness, plume mapping, litter interventions, risk assessments and contingency planning.
<i>National Aquaculture Development Authority (NAQDA)</i>	Engaged on shrimp and mud crab health, aquaculture diagnostics, farmer engagement and capacity building.
<i>National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency (NARA)</i>	Scientific partner across marine litter, water quality, litter booms, aquaculture research, underwater noise, GIS and emergency response.
<i>Sri Lanka Coastguard</i>	Partnered on emergency response training, spill preparedness, GIS capacity, compliance and maritime pollution response.
<i>South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP)</i>	Worked with OCPP on regional marine pollution response symposiums, train-the-trainer programmes and contingency planning.

Academia / Research Institutions

Organisation	Role
<i>University of Kelaniya</i>	Supported through microplastics research, ATR-FTIR analysis, postgraduate scholarships, training and peer-reviewed publications.
<i>University of Peradeniya</i>	Major academic partner on aquaculture disease diagnostics, shrimp and mud crab research, necropsy training and MPhil studentships. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science:</i> Central to aquatic animal health, diagnostics and emergency response training.
<i>University of Wayamba</i>	Hosted national Micro-FTIR equipment and training, mangrove research and long-term monitoring capacity.
<i>Veterinary Research Institute</i>	Engaged on aquatic animal health diagnostics, necropsy training and disease preparedness.

NGOs / Civil Society / International Organisations

Organisation	Role
<i>Blue Resources Trust (BRT)</i>	Delivered MPA METT-4 assessments, seagrass ground-truthing, species work and mangrove research support.
<i>British Council</i>	Partnered on climate education delivery through the EDGE network and national outreach.
<i>Centre for Environmental and Population Activities (CEPA)</i>	Supported ALDFG workshops, awareness campaigns and policy engagement.
<i>Environmental Foundation Limited (EFL)</i>	Delivered national MPA mapping, gap analysis and stakeholder workshops.
<i>International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)</i>	Partnered on ALDFG policy engagement and protected area management effectiveness capacity building.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>ALDFG Programme</i>: Supported regional and national knowledge exchange on lost fishing gear.
<i>National Cleaner Production Centre (NCPC)</i>	Led national waste system characterisation, data collection and framework development.
<i>Oceanswell</i>	Key delivery partner for species conservation, citizen science, underwater noise work and community engagement.
<i>Spider Conservation</i>	Engaged on biodiversity awareness and conservation outreach.
<i>Sustainable Clean Lanka</i>	Delivered beach litter monitoring, marine litter education and volunteer engagement.
<i>The Pearl Protectors</i>	Engaged on coastal conservation awareness and community-level protection activities.
<i>United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)</i>	Aligned OCPP activities with broader marine, biodiversity and planning initiatives.
<i>Wildlife and Nature Protection Society of Sri Lanka (WNPS)</i>	Partnered on mangrove restoration research and strengthening scientific outputs.

Private Sector

Organisation	Role
<i>DMS Electronics</i>	Provided technical equipment supporting monitoring and data collection.
<i>InboundHype</i>	Delivered communications, outreach materials, digital platforms, toolkits, reports and public awareness campaigns.
<i>Information Technology Management Services (ITMS)</i>	Supported IT and digital systems linked to environmental monitoring and data management.
<i>Lanka Upcycles</i>	Worked with OCPP to build fishing-gear recycling networks using ALDFG data and fisher engagement.
<i>MAS Holdings</i>	Engaged through corporate sustainability platforms linked to pollution reduction.
<i>MAS Foundation</i>	Key partner for deployment of ocean strainers and river-based litter interception
<i>Zindhu Marine</i>	Engaged for fisheries and marine sector operational insights.

Annex 2: Sri Lanka ACU Student Research Titles

1. Investigation of Bacterial and Viral Pathogens in Wild-Sourced Giant Black Tiger Shrimp (*Penaeus monodon*) and Mud Crabs (*Scylla* spp.) in Sri Lanka
2. Efficacy of two herbal extracts (*Alpinia galanga* and *Vitex agnus-castus*) in controlling co-infection of *Enterocytozoan hepatopenaei* and *Vibrio* spp. in cultured *Litopenaeus vannamei*
3. Pathogens of *Panaeus monodon* post-larvae causing mortality outbreaks during hatchery and early grow out production in the North-Western province of Sri Lanka
4. Assessment of selected heavy metals and microplastics in relation to water quality parameters: a study in Badulu Oya and Uma Oya sub catchments in Mahaweli river, Sri Lanka
5. Negombo Estuary, Sri Lanka: A Study of Abandoned Boats and their Implications
6. Assessing the population status of sharks and rays in Sri Lanka using Productivity and Susceptibility Analysis (PSA) and species composition in selected landing sites
7. Microplastic contamination in water, sediment and selected biota in Anavilundawa Ramsar Sanctuary and its landward and seaward surroundings
8. Investigation of a semiautomated spatial analyses for saltmarsh mapping and characterization in Sri Lanka
9. Assessment of Microplastic Contamination in relation to Water Quality in Upper Catchment of the Mahaweli river basin: A study in the Kothmale and Hatton sub basins.
10. Investigation of Pathogens Affecting the Health and Development of Larval Stages of *Litopenaeus vannamei* from Hatcheries in the Northwestern Province of Sri Lanka
11. Investigation of Local Transmission Routes of *Enterocytozoon hepatopenaei* (EHP) in *Litopenaeus vannamei* Cultured in the Northwestern Province of Sri Lanka.
12. Evaluation of the Effectiveness of *Enterocytozoon hepatopenaei* (EHP) Prevention and Control measures under local culture conditions in *Litopenaeus vannamei*
13. Abundance of plastic debris and selected physico-chemical properties of water and sediments in Anawilundawa mangrove restoration site and its periphery