



PHAROS4MPAS

SAFEGUARDING MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE GROWING MEDITERRANEAN BLUE ECONOMY: TOUR BOAT SECTOR

**POLICY
BRIEF**
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TOUR BOAT SECTOR AND MEDITERRANEAN MPAs:

A LONG HISTORY OF WORKING TOGETHER WITH MPAs IN THE MED

Visitation of marine protected areas (MPAs) by tour boats is common for a majority of Mediterranean sites, with a variable number of tour boats and visitors depending on the size, geographical position and available tourist attractions. Percentage of visitation by tour boats in relation to other types of nautical tourism varies according to each MPA: in some

protected area this is the only type of visitation and in some represents a rather small percentage.

Tour boat day trips are generally offered locally, starting already within or close by an area of interest, in this case an MPA. **Small-medium boats**, generally less than 25 metres in length, are used, with a capacity ranging from 150 to 250 persons for the biggest. These vessels run trips that last up to 9 hours and tend to visit locations with particular natural or culture importance. Some MPAs have specialised tour boats present in their area, e.g. turtle spotting, whale watching. Live-aboard vessels are also present, usually as one stop in their itinerary, their presence is low, and in some MPAs they are absent. New forms of boat tourism have been noted recently in MPAs, these include water taxi services, hop on/hop off tours, party boats and mega yachts.

Close cooperation of MPAs with competent authorities, strong political will, stakeholder's engagement and awareness rising are crucial for an efficient control of this type of maritime activity and the management of its pressures. Experiences and potential management solutions in general can be transferred from one MPA to another, but in the majority of cases they have to be adapted to local circumstances since every MPA is quite unique in terms of biodiversity features, geographical position and size, legal framework and local culture.



VIEW OF THE PALM ISLAND NATURE RESERVE
FROM THE DECK OF A TOUR BOAT, LEBANON

© V. NOON



TURTLE SPOTTING TOUR BOATS
IN NATIONAL MARINE PARK ZAKYNTHOS, GREECE

© NMPZ

TOUR BOAT SECTOR: KEY IMPACTS ON THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT

Tour boats share several impacts with other vessel types considered in nautical tourism, but emissions and discharges, when present, are much less impactful when it comes to smaller passengers' vessels. Nevertheless, if **small sailing vessels** (sailing dinghies, sailboards, **motorless small yachts**) appear to cause little or no environmental impact, larger sailing vessels with auxiliary engines, or motorboats

with outboard or inboard motors have been implicated in several types of **environmental degradation**.

The specificity of **this tourism segment** relies on the fact that the boats want to reach the most remote and pristine areas within the MPAs and also to get as close as possible to, if not in touch with, sensitive habitats and species. This characteristic defines the peculiarity of the interactions generated by this sector and the type of impacts it can cause on MPAs.

The main environmental impacts from this type of visitation are related to solid waste and wastewaters discharge, noise emission and species/habitats disturbance and degradation. Tour boats directly affect MPAs during their operational activities, when crossing and stopping in the protected area. Each different type of activity implies a different degree and type of impact. For example, when visitors are allowed to disembark, impact can be generated on the coastal habitats due to trampling; when scuba-diving and/or snorkelling is permitted, the resulting disturbance can involve the whole **water column**; in



TOUR BOAT MORSKI GALEB
ZADAR, CROATIA

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areas where anchoring is allowed, impacts also include marine bottom habitats. Crowding, a typical aspect of this type of tourism (particularly for daily trips), determines the increased occurrence and magnitude of these impacts.

At a larger scale, impacts can also happen due to the presence of ports and mooring/docking points from/to where boats start and arrive (outside or inside the MPA). Moreover, the existence of this type of touristic offer stimulates the development of reception facilities (hotels, campsites, restaurants, etc.) and related transport infrastructures, exerting influence on the overall area, (e.g. soils consumption to fulfil the need for facilities and infrastructures, traffic, energy and water/food consumption, waste generation, wastewater discharge, emissions, noise, etc.).

In the past few decades, there has been substantial growth in coastal ecotourism, as tourists have demanded access to wildlife, in as non-destructive a fashion as possible. Whale and dolphin watching, coastal estuarine/lagoon bird watching and glass-bottom boat excursions are all increasingly common. Managed properly, much of this form of tourism is either inoffensive or has potentially beneficial effects exemplified by the preservation of large tracts of coastal wetlands for bird watching. The problems, in turn, stem from excessively heavy demand and overcrowding.

KEY IMPACTS OF TOUR BOATS ON MPAs

Waste: Tour boats mainly have the practice of taking solid waste back to the port of origin or leaving it at waste disposal areas in MPAs. They contribute to the amount of solid waste in the sea mainly through occasionally littering from vessels, by individual passengers who throw litter overboard, leave it at inappropriate sites in the MPA or by accidental littering from vessels due to wind and the boat rocking in bad weather.

Hazardous emissions: Tour boats visiting MPAs may have impact through bilge waters discharge. MPAs still fail to recognise this as a significant threat.

Gaseous emissions: MPAs do not recognise gaseous emissions from tour boats as a significant threat, except in regards to the visitors' olfactory experience in some cases.

Wastewaters: MPAs recognise discharge of wastewaters from tour boats as a threat to the protected area. In addition, visitors from these boats use local restaurants or MPA infrastructure toilets (visitor centres, info points etc.) which in many cases discharge directly into the sea or through porous septic tanks, and therefore indirectly contribute to the wastewater problem

Physical disturbance and collisions: Physical disturbance and collisions are recognised as a significant threat in MPAs that host species sensitive to interactions with boats and humans in general, such as monk seals, cetaceans and sea turtles. Physical disturbance from tour boats and/or visitors from tour boats is also related to degradation of sea bottom habitats by anchoring and degradation of particular habitats by the volume of visitors present at a certain space and time (swimming, snorkelling, walking on sand dunes, digging nests etc.).

Noise: MPAs recognise noise and underwater noise as a potential threat but have very limited information on the noise levels, distribution and main sources, especially for underwater noise. Some researches indicate that also cumulative impact of large number of small boats should not be underestimated. Tour boats may also produce significant amount of "terrestrial" noise, this is mainly through megaphones and loud speakers (visits, parties, etc.)

Light: Tour boats do not provide accommodation so tourists visit MPAs during the day and return to the port during the night. Tour boats therefore do not contribute significantly to light pollution. Live aboard vessels sometimes stay in the MPAs over night, but the number of these boats and visits is still considered very low in MPAs.



TOUR BOAT IN THE LA MADDALENA NATIONAL PARK, ITALY

© SARDEGNA TURISMO

PUBLIC AUTHORITIES: KEY ROLES

Public authorities can have a key role in preventing and minimizing impact from tour boats on MPAs. Their action is complementary to the one of MPA managers: public authorities can ensure means of enforcement for regulation and practices identified at MPA level. MPAs are rarely the competent authority to regulate or control majority of tour boat related impacts. This is usually under the competence of the port authority, maritime police or other public bodies to control, for example the definition and control of navigation rules. Cooperation between public authorities and MPA managers on monitoring and surveillance, as well as on awareness raising, is therefore fundamental.



TOUR BOAT LE PACHA LIVING MONASTIR
TO VISIT THE KURIAT ISLANDS, TUNISIA



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RECOMMENDATIONS TO PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

Authorities at national level:

- provide efficient national and site-specific legal framework for regulating environmental impacts related to tour boat visits to MPAs, ensuring that means for their enforcement are well secured
- strengthen the legislation regarding waste water discharges from tour boats
- develop the capacity of competent authorities (e.g. managing bodies, port authorities, inspections, maritime police) for efficient surveillance and control of maritime activities in MPAs
- encourage cooperation and joined surveillance of MPA management staff and competent authorities
- support monitoring of environmental impacts related to tour boats in MPAs
- encourage quality stakeholder consultation processes in MPAs management.
- provide incentives for environmentally friendly business, technical solutions and processes.

Marine spatial planning (MSP) authorities:

- when developing local spatial plans, make use of zoning to ensure areas with no access or limited access, applicable also to tour boats.

Authorities at national level responsible for regional coordination:

- develop a regional background study on tour boat activities and interactions with marine and coastal ecosystems and MPAs, to be used as a basis to develop a regional policy for the sector.

Authorities at national and sub-national/local levels:

- promote the development of brands for sustainable tour boat activities.

Authorities at sub-national/local level:

- ensure and strengthen surveillance and controls on tour boats in all the area of competence (regulations concerning e.g. navigation, environment, wildlife) in collaboration with MPA managers and rangers
- ensure fines for those not following environmentally related laws and regulations strict enough to discourage such behavior
- engage in dialogue with MPAs to understand their needs on the matter of environmental controls in relation with tour boat activities, where MPAs are not competent (e.g. waste and wastewater management)
- engage in partnership with MPAs to create infrastructures to minimize environmental impacts from tour boats (e.g. moorings, pontoons, sewage systems)
- promote partnership with business sector in minimizing environmental impacts and raising awareness
- establish and implement monitoring systems for the number of tour boat visitors and their impacts on the MPAs biological, environmental and socio-economic features.



The PHAROS4MPAs project explores how Mediterranean MPAs are affected by activities in the growing Blue Economy, and provides a set of practical recommendations for regional stakeholders on how the environmental impacts of key sectors can be prevented or minimized. Encouraging international collaboration across MPA networks and cooperation between state, industry and other actors, PHAROS4MPAs aims to enhance MPA management effectiveness and improve the conservation of marine ecosystems across the whole of the Mediterranean.



Further details, see full report at <https://pharos4mpas.interreg-med.eu>

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FRONT COVER: Fran tour boat, Veli Losinj, Croatia
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BACK COVER: Krsko tour boat passengers watching Bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) from a distance, Veli Losinj, Croatia
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