

Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) Role Play Unit



Learning Outcomes

- Demonstrate a critical understanding of the key principles, frameworks, and tools underpinning marine spatial planning (MSP), including the ecosystem approach and social-ecological systems thinking.
- Analyse and interpret the interactions, trade-offs, and synergies between ecological, social, cultural, and economic objectives in a multi-use marine environment.
- Apply MSP concepts and processes to design spatial management strategies that address real-world policy objectives and sectoral challenges.
- Negotiate and communicate effectively in a multi-stakeholder context, showing the ability to represent stakeholder interests, identify areas of compromise, and build consensus on shared marine plans.
- Demonstrate professional skills in collaboration, strategic thinking, and adaptive decision-making in response to evolving stakeholder dynamics and policy constraints.
- Critically reflect on the governance, ethical, and power dimensions of marine planning, evaluating how transparency, hidden interests, and participation influence policy outcomes.

Materials

- This unit guide contains the set-up of the role playing game, the role cards for the stakeholders, the base map and legend, the game rules and instructions for students, order of events as well as mid-game twist scenarios, prompts for debrief questions and a marking scheme based on the learning criteria.
- You will need one preparation session (assuming students have learned about MSP concepts) where you will explain the role play to the students and distribute roles (you could also do that ad-hoc). At this point, do not share the exact map with them. You can take them through part of this presentation to show them the rules and give a brief glimpse at the map, but do not let them keep the map yet.
- Students should then have time to prepare their roles and strategies before the role play starts.
- On the day of the role playing game session (ca. 90 min), you will share the map with them and the negotiations will begin (see slide 10 Game Play).
- **You will need**
 - This presentation to guide you through – and to put some slides on a screen
 - Printed: several copies of the map for stakeholders to draw on, role cards, mid-game scenarios, marking schemes to mark students
 - Pens, pencils, markers, timer

Assignment description for students before the preparation session (module handbook)

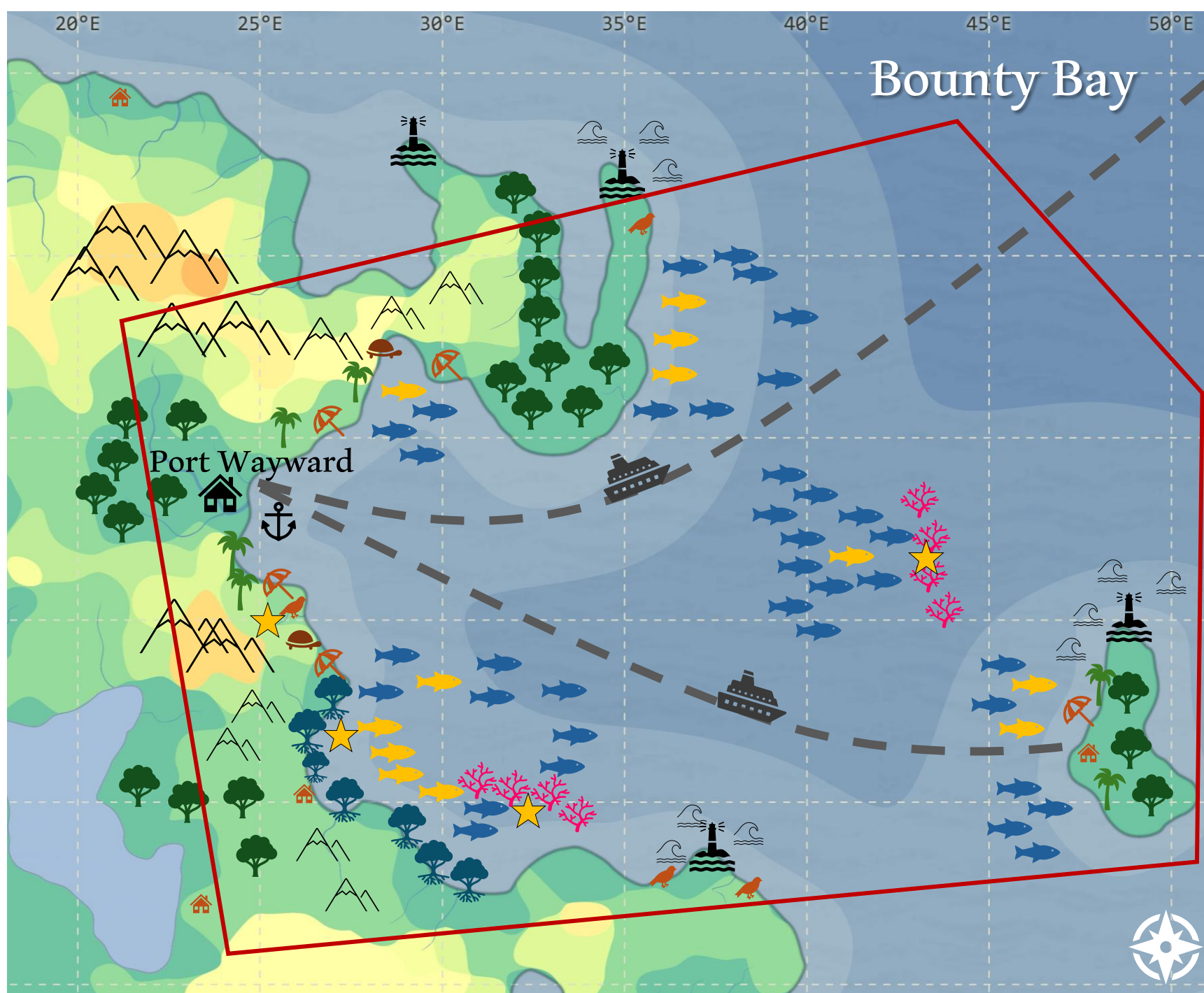
The MSP Challenge is a strategy exercise role play around a fictitious sea basin, where different maritime sectors and uses (e.g. aquaculture, tourism, etc.) coexist. Participants adopt roles as representatives of key local interests and sectors, negotiate with each other and agree in which areas these activities can be developed to fulfil their policy objectives. Students are given a stakeholder role which they will research and prepare before the assessment session. On the day of the exercise, a scenario is then played where stakeholders have to negotiate in order to reach a consensus marine spatial plan.

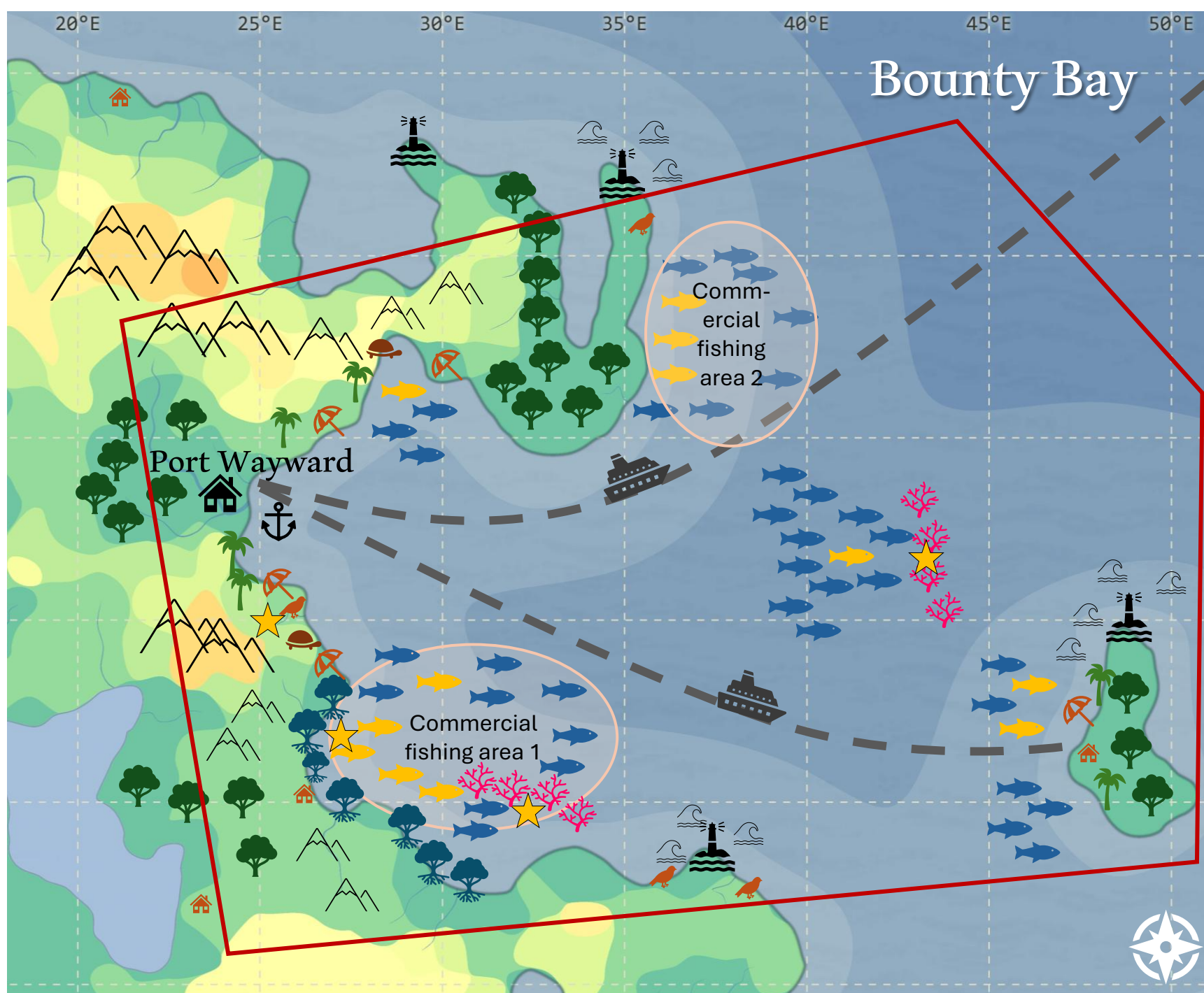
- You will be given a role as a marine or coastal stakeholder in a hypothetical marine spatial planning process
- Research your role, their group, their needs, positionality and likely response to other marine users/their propositions - make a list of what is important to you and why
- You can develop your character as you like – be creative
- Think about what your ‘opponents’ might want and say, or what they will fight you for – and how you might deal with that – add to your notes
- Think of what others’ needs and wants in the coastal and marine space are, and come up with ideas and solutions that might satisfy multiple needs – come up with a list of suggestions
- Submit: List or text on your role, your preparation
- Play your part in the role play, stating your interests and negotiating for the best possible MSP outcome
- Reflect on how it went, both in your role and as a group.

Welcome to Bounty Bay













- It's a busy bay with a port town, shipping lanes, established fishing sector, and other activities and interests like tourism, aquaculture, conservation and traditional use and cultural sites.
- Players must assume their stakeholder roles and negotiate according to their interests, attempting to find a compromise on how to organize and manage the areas in Bounty Bay.
- Everyone also has at least one secret goal that they are trying to achieve whilst not sharing this with others.













Legend

-  Main town
-  Village
-  Harbour
-  Lighthouse
-  Palms
-  Dense tropical forest
-  Mangroves
-  Southern petrel (protected species) nesting site
-  Emerald turtle (protected species) breeding beach
-  Rich fish habitat
-  Goldling fish (red listed species) habitat
-  Recreation area, pristine beach

-  Site of traditional cultural importance and use
-  Dangerous currents/waves
-  Fixed shipping lanes
-  Mountains
-  Reef habitat
-  Planning jurisdiction limit

Non-negotiable facts



Existing shipping lanes can't be moved, and a buffer space needs to be held clear. Ships impact nearby zones.



Port Wayward is the established town and population centre. Its port is crucial for most seagoing activities and supplies.



Mangrove habitats have fragile partial protection status due to their storm defense abilities and as nursery grounds for juvenile fish. Need decisions on extent and co-management.

Questions to negotiate

- Where should aquaculture go (if at all)?
- Should there be a formal conservation/protected zone? Where?
- How will fishing grounds be safeguarded, shared, or moved?
- What rights or zones should the Indigenous/traditional community group have?
- How to ensure tourism access and clean waters?
- **What does the final zoning map look like (5–6 distinct zones)?** You can establish exclusive rights zones, shared zones, multiple use zones and **create rules and limits for uses and users.**



Game Play (ca. 90 min)

Stage	Time	Activity
Preparation	Before the meeting	Stakeholders prepare their roles, ideal outcomes, likely opposing stakeholders' strategies and responses.
Briefing	5-10 min	Planner explains MSP, rules of game, process and non-negotiables around Bounty Bay.
Initial Proposals	15 min	Stakeholders each mark or state their primary interest zones on map and the conditions they prefer. Planner moderates.
Optional "Secret Trade Round"	10 min	Stakeholders have the option to meet others privately, to discuss common interests and form alliances. Planner observes.
Negotiation & Trade-Offs	20 min	Stakeholders discuss conflicts, suggest compromises and trade-offs, i.e. shared zones. Planner helps with compromises.
Optional Scenario Twist	5 min	Planner may introduce a twist scenario that changes the outcome.
Consensus Attempt	15 min	Group agrees or partially agrees on a final plan with zones and rules.
Debrief	15 min	Reflection on negotiation, trade-offs and lessons learned.

Role cards

6 students



Local Authority & Marine Planner

Public role and interests

- Runs the meeting and ensures balanced input.
- Must keep the plan realistic and politically defensible.
- Balances ecological, cultural, and economic needs.
- Can introduce a scenario twist mid-game.
- Mediates between conflicting interests; neutral but under pressure to deliver consensus.
- When facts are debated, the planner is the judge – you can make up facts, scenarios and limitations (how much things would cost, how endangered a species is, how feasible ideas would be, etc.)

Secret goal – Do not share this but negotiate with this in mind!

- Ensure the plan produces visible economic activity for investment (for re-election & funding).
- Avoid public backlash — no single stakeholder should “lose out completely.”

Aquaculture Company

Public role and interests

- Seeks to establish nearshore aquaculture sites sustainably, ideally sheltered zone near port
- Not near polluted rivers, needs good water and social acceptance.
- Prioritises profitability and growth, but open to compromise if operations can expand.

Secret goal – Do not share this but negotiate with this in mind!

- Secure exclusive use rights for at least one prime nearshore site (not a shared-use zone).
- Keep environmental regulations minimal or voluntary.

Commercial Fisheries Association

Public role and interests

- Represents fishers who need continued access to key productive grounds.
- Opposes spatial restrictions that reduce income or access.
- Opposes permanent closures but can accept seasonal limits.
- May support conservation if fish stocks improve.

Secret goal – Do not share this but negotiate with this in mind!

- Prevent any new “no-take” zones in their most productive area.
- Get government compensation or infrastructure (i.e. fuel subsidy) if restrictions happen.

Tourism Association

Public role and interests

- Seeks clean, and visually attractive coastlines and safe waters for visitors and recreation.
- Opposes visual/industrial impacts near beaches.
- Could promote eco- and cultural tourism partnerships.

Secret goal – Do not share this but negotiate with this in mind!

- Block any aquaculture visible from main beaches.
- Secure an exclusive “eco-tourism” concession in part of the cultural or reef zone.

Indigenous/ Traditional Community Leader

Public role and interests

- Advocates for cultural and spiritual connections to the coast; values traditional fishing, mangroves, and sacred sites.
- Protects traditional fishing grounds, sacred mangroves, and reef areas.
- Supports co-management and cultural zones.
- May accept development if respectful and beneficial to community.

Secret goal – Do not share this but negotiate with this in mind!

- Gain formal recognition or written commitment to co-manage a specific area.
- Stop any project (aquaculture, tourism, commercial fishing) near sacred mangroves.

Environmental NGO

Public role and interests

- Advocates for biodiversity protection and ecosystem-based MSP.
- Supports zoning that safeguards habitats, reefs, mangroves, and traditional fisheries.
- Prefers “no-take” zones or low-impact use areas; open to compromise if strong safeguards exist.

Secret goal – Do not share this but negotiate with this in mind!

- Achieve at least one legally binding no-take/no-activity conservation zone.
- Push the planner to include legal environmental limits in aquaculture and fishing zones.

Preparation Session

- Study your stakeholder's role
- Do research and take notes – what would they Want, what would your opponents want, how to respond, consensus suggestions, alliances
- What zones and rules for zones would be acceptable/unacceptable to you? Where – any criteria?
- Run a practice round on practice map to see what needs tweaking

More stakeholders for more roles

- Separate Local Authority and Marine Planner/Facilitator
 - Offshore Wind Developer
 - Community members
 - Science Community
 - Surfers/Divers
 - Shipping company
 - National Government
 - Non-human stakeholders
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- You can also have groups of students represent sectors and work together to create a strategy before the meeting.

Variations

- **Mid-game twist:** After initial proposals, planner introduces a twist, i.e. new endangered species found, acute storm damage
- **Add a “Secret Trade”**
Round: after initial proposals, allow 5 minutes for private side meetings & alliances (planner can observe but not intervene).
- **Endgame Reveal:** at debrief, each person reveals their secret goal and whether they achieved it — great for discussion about transparency and power.





Mid-game twist

- Just this week, the endangered Golden Hoofed Seahorse has been newly discovered along the shores of Bounty Bay and in some of the reef areas.
- Its habitat needs to be protected from human activities.
- Planner decides where exactly to place these.

Mid-game twist

- There has been a large oil spill from one of the tankers that left Bounty Bay.
- The oil carpet is stretching across a shipping lane, toward the shore and endangering some of the sensitive habitats.
- Planner decides where exactly to place this spill.





Debrief prompts

- How did this exercise go for you/your stakeholder?
- What trade-offs were made?
- Which interests are most strongly represented in the final map?
- What was the process like?
- Was the consensus realistic?

After revealing secret goals:

- How did hidden agendas shape negotiation outcomes?
- Did some players anticipate others' secrets?
- How does this reflect real-world MSP or policy-making?
- Any reflections on the process and the outcome?

Marking scheme

Criteria	Description	Points total: 30
Application of MSP Concepts & Context	Demonstrates understanding of key MSP principles (ecosystem approach, social-ecological systems) and process. Can apply these to spatial decisions.	10
Stakeholder Understanding & Strategic Preparation	Shows solid understanding of own sector's interests, constraints, and interdependencies with others. Prepares effectively, anticipates others' needs and develops realistic trade-offs and strategies.	10
Negotiation, Collaboration & Communication, Reflection	Actively participates in discussion, protects own interests while showing flexibility. Identifies conflicts and synergies. Works constructively with others to balance economic, social, ecological priorities. Proposes feasible, creative solutions. Adapts to new information and changing scenarios. Communicates persuasively and respectfully, presenting arguments and compromises clearly. Reflects thoughtfully about the process, both individually and as a group process.	10