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# Human Pressure on a Protected Area

## A monitoring program for the Islet of Vila Franca do Campo

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### Abstract

The Islet of Vila Franca (São Miguel, Azores) has been used ever since the beginning of the settlement in the archipelago for several purposes, from vineyard planting to a summer bathing site for locals and visitors. It has been also the object of scientific research in several areas, e.g. biodiversity studies, ecology, geology and vulcanology. In 2008 it was reclassified as a protected area for the management of species and habitats. The area remains has a bathing site with a restricted number of 150 tourists per day. No evaluations on the health of the ecosystem have been made after this imposition, being necessary to investigate the environmental quality of the Area.

In the present study, a series of survey methodologies encompassing a characterization of the land portion, the intertidal, the subtidal and an evaluation of the human pressure are being conducted in the protected area. Results will lead to the establishment of a proposal of a monitoring plan that will provide the regional government with reliable data for sound decisions

The MPA contains a terrestrial environment, comprising the entire islet, and a marine environment that encircles the islet in an area of 5 ha, to a maximum depth of 30 m. The islet shelters various species and biological communities and encompasses a diversity of habitats such as: soft sediments, flat bedrock, cliffs, rhodolith aggregations and tunnels in the subtidal; bedrock in the intertidal; and terraces in the terrestrial environment.

Considering its uniqueness, the regional government considered it a Natural Reserve (Decreto Legislativo Regional n.º 3/83/A, de 3 de Março, Decreto Legislativo Regional n.º 22/2004/A, de 3 de Junho). Latter, it was assigned as an MPA (IUCN n.º IV category, Decreto Legislativo Regional n.º 19/2008/A, de 8 de Julho).

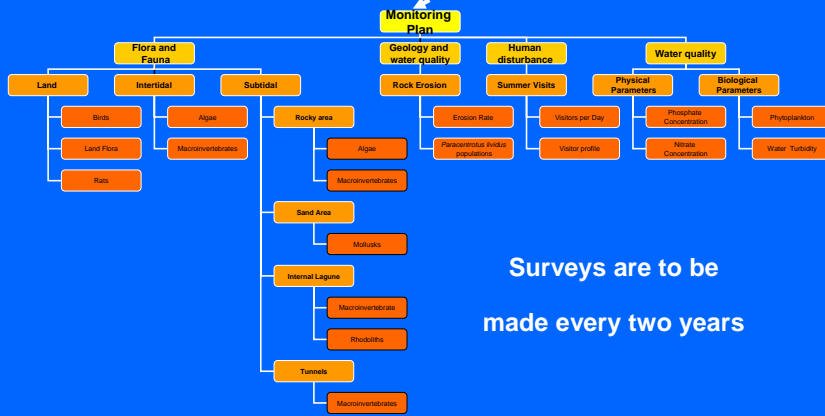
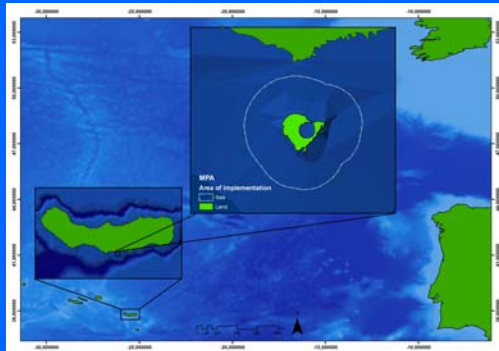


The MPA is used has a bathing site for tourists and locals with a maximum carrying capacity of 150 person. However, according to local newspapers, this capacity is frequently exceeded during summer months.

It is not allowed to do any type of collections in the MPA. However, many evidences indicate people keep fishing there, e.g. Troll lines and cages left underwater; hand-limpet collection in the shores of the islet.

The in vigour legislation states the obligation to produce a management and a monitoring plan for all MPAs in the Azores. This particular MPA has the advantage of having much scientific work done over the last 30 years, mainly regarding algae, invertebrates and birds (cf. Martins, 1976, 1995; Bullock et al., 1990; Hawkins et al., 1990; Neves et al., 2003). This work has resulted in important information that has proved to be extremely valuable for the preparation of a proposal of a monitoring plan.

In the present study, available data on biological communities, organisms, as well as on the scientific effort and sampling strategies for each work, was compiled and organized. Additional data was gathered from visits to the MPA. Key communities and species were identified. Based on the whole amount of information, a Monitoring plan and the MPA GIS were produced.



Surveys are to be made every two years



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