Project Background

Abu Dhabi's mainland coastline is approximately 764 kilometres long and its waters include around 215 islands (additional c.1,671 km of coastline) and a diverse and rich marine environment, which includes fragile wetlands, mangroves and an internationally important dugong population. These marine areas will become increasingly important contributors towards the diversification of Abu Dhabi's economy, as they will help to attract greater numbers of tourists.

Why are Abu Dhabi's coastal and marine resources so important?

The long-term economic viability of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi is inextricably tied to its land and coastal and marine resources. In particular, the Arabian Gulf, its coastlines, and its islands have long been a major part of the Emirate's source of sustenance, providing the resources, ecosystems and recreational opportunities, necessary to sustain its people and make possible the unprecedented development that has marked the Emirate's emergence as a world economic power. Whether on the coast or inland, all life in the Emirate is fundamentally connected to the maritime domain.

More recently, through the discovery of abundant oil and gas reserves, the maritime domain has provided natural resources of strategic importance, which have fuelled the Emirate's rapid development and emergence as a world economic power. Its waters link Abu Dhabi to the global market, and provide abundant recreational and increasing tourism opportunities for the Emirate’s citizens, residents and visitors. The desalination plants that meet much of the Emirate’s water needs and the majority of power stations are located along Abu Dhabi’s coastal zone, and future nuclear plants are also earmarked for coastal locations in Al Gharbia.

Continued economic success, stability and quality of life in the Emirate is therefore, intrinsically connected to creating a sustainable maritime domain.

What is Abu Dhabi’s Maritime Strategy?

In 2009, a comprehensive Maritime Strategy for the Emirate of Abu Dhabi was endorsed by His Highness General Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces.

The long-term vision for the Maritime Strategy is for a ‘safe, secure and sustainable maritime domain for Abu Dhabi’. The Strategy addresses a number of issues, including transport, safety, security, emergency planning, sustainable development, and environmental protection, and recognises the need for effective integrated governance, systems and processes. The Strategy establishes a shared vision for the future and provides maritime stakeholders with a unified strategic direction to guide the development of new and enhanced maritime-related programmes.

To achieve the goals of the Maritime Strategy, the Abu Dhabi Maritime Strategic Plan 2012-2016 is the first in a series that was prepared on a five year cycle.

What is the UPC’s role in developing the Abu Dhabi Maritime Strategic Plan?

A main priority derived from the key goals of the Abu Dhabi Maritime Strategic Plan is to Develop a spatial planning framework for sustainable marine and coastal development. The UPC has been directed by the Office of the Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces to lead the implementation of this key initiative of the endorsed Maritime Strategy, 2009.

As such, the UPC is now preparing the Abu Dhabi Coastal and Marine Framework Plan (ADCMFP), known as ‘Plan Maritime 2030’. Plan Maritime 2030 is intended to action and complement the objectives

What is Plan Maritime 2030?

Plan Maritime 2030 will be a framework document providing strategic planning guidance and direction. It will distil all pertinent maritime, coastal and marine planning related matters through a stringent process of review and analysis into a single spatial plan. It will contain objectives, principles, policies, geographic plans and schemes and associated commentaries.

Land use framework planning has been outlined in Plan Capital 2030, Plan Al Gharbia 2030 and Al Ain 2030 to respond to Abu Dhabi and its diverse population’s growing needs. They deal primarily with urban planning, zoning and development of land and where relevant have regard to coastal and marine context. Similarly, the development of Plan Maritime 2030 will capture and codify the Emirate’s intent for the maritime, marine and coastal environments, designate their current and future uses, note those areas where development may occur and where sensitive areas must be protected, and provide for clear, deliberate change over time. It will also inform the preparation of related policies and procedures.

The focus is on the waterways and land/water interface; however the land-side uses where there is a land/water nexus are an important part of the plan to enable the production of a fully integrated and holistic planning document. Land use based planning is occurring with direction from the Plan Abu Dhabi 2030 and Plan Al Gharbia 2030 Structure Plans, as administered by the UPC. The Plan Maritime 2030 must be commensurate with these overarching land use plans.

The Plan Maritime 2030 will ensure protection of the natural ecosystems of the marine and coastal environment and recognise and enhance the significant and valued habitat and species. It will also help plan for biodiversity, cumulative impacts, adaptation to climate change and sea level rise.

The components of the Plan include spatial mapping of use and human activities for:

- Urban growth;
- National and Emirate-wide security;
- Resource use and conservation;
- Marine transport;
- Industrial, ports and other water dependent uses;
- Recreation and tourism;
- Heritage; and
- Infrastructure.

How will Plan Maritime 2030 be developed?

Plan Maritime 2030 is being developed in coordination with a host of Government agency stakeholders to ensure the Plan integrates with the Maritime Strategy. A stakeholder engagement programme is also a key part of the process.

The UPC will follow international standards and the ‘Plan 2030’ process that was successfully used to develop all of the urban and regional structure framework plans currently in use.

Why is Plan Maritime 2030 needed?

The waters and coastal areas are many things to UAE Nationals and visitors – working waterways, ports, transport routes, desirable places to live, places of great beauty and a focus for recreation and cultural appreciation. Application of Plan Maritime 2030 will highlight this importance and guide future sustainable use within a safe, secure, vibrant and diverse environment to enhance quality of life of UAE Nationals and visitors.
What will be the positive outcomes of Plan Maritime 2030?

Through the development of Plan Maritime 2030, it is anticipated that;

- The creation of plans and policies within it will inform future governance policies, regulations and management;
- The protection of the Emirate and its natural, social and cultural wealth will be carefully monitored and implemented;
- Abu Dhabi will be looked to as a benchmark to be met for integrated sustainability planning and the sensitive management and development of natural resources and energy.

What areas will Plan Maritime 2030 cover?

Plan Maritime 2030 will cover all waterways and coastal areas within Abu Dhabi Emirate’s boundaries; furthermore, it will focus on seven key areas (also referred to as “Zoom-in” Areas):

1. The relatively undeveloped western basin that includes the Al Yasat Marine Protected Area. The principal settlement in this area is Al Sila’a.
2. The area between the Al Yasat and Marawah Marine Protected Areas centred on the principal settlement of Ruwais and including Sir Bani Yas Island and Dalma Island.
3. The relatively undeveloped Khor Al Bazam, including all of the Marawah Marine Protected Area and the principal settlement of Mirfa.
4. The barrier islands, peninsulas and lagoons extending from Abu Al Abyad Island northeast to Abu Dhabi.
5. Abu Dhabi Metropolitan Area.
6. Khalifa Port Industrial Zone northeast to the Dubai border.
7. Remaining waters of Arabian Gulf within Abu Dhabi Emirate out to the Agreed Boundary Line.
What are the aims of the process for creating Plan Maritime 2030?

The process aims to reconcile different policies that affect the coastal zone and establish a framework that facilitates the integration of the interests and responsibilities of all those involved in the development, planning, management and use of the coastal areas. Plan Maritime 2030 delivers a plan-led framework for development of coastal areas.

Plan Maritime 2030 is intended to be the mechanism to ensure the Emirate of Abu Dhabi’s internal waterways, mainland/island coastlines and waters of the Arabian Gulf maintain a balanced and diverse array of maritime activity within a sensitively and responsibly managed planning framework for the marine and maritime environment.

What are the objectives of Plan Maritime 2030?

The overarching objective is to develop a framework for a consolidated, simplified and updated regulatory framework for planning within coastal and marine areas.

Plan Maritime 2030 will provide the guidance necessary to inform the sustainable development of public and private investments and initiatives within Abu Dhabi’s marine and coastal zone, and ensure equitable access to it, whilst harnessing the opportunities its diverse ecosystems and sheltered waters are creating for recreational and eco-tourism activities. It will recognise the waters and coasts as an outstanding resource and asset that should be sustained for future generations.

What are the next steps?

Over the coming months, Plan Maritime 2030 will be developed in full coordination with fellow Maritime Strategy stakeholders and other stakeholders and it is anticipated to be completed in 2014.