



REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON

ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND NGO

AFFAIRS

ON

THE PERFORMANCE AUDIT OF THE MANAGEMENT OF

COASTAL AND MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

September 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Acknowledgement.....	3
2. Executive Summary	4
3. Introduction	6
4. Mandate of the Committee	7
5. Objectives of the Review	7
4. Key Findings from the Performance Audit.....	8
4.1 Lack of Clear Methodology to Measure Progress Made in Conserving 10% of Coastal and Marine Protected Areas	8
4.2 Policy Incoherence	8
4.3 Weak Monitoring and Institutional and Staff Capacity	8
4.4 Ineffective Financing Mechanisms.....	8
4.5 Management Gaps.....	9
4.6 Increasing Illegal Activities	9
5. Committee Observations.....	10
6. Committee Recommendations	10
7. Conclusion	11
Members of the Committee.....	12
Subject Matter Specialist (SMS).....	12
Support Staff.....	12
Witnesses.....	12

1. Acknowledgement

The Select Committee on Environment, Sustainable Development and NGO Affairs expresses its profound appreciation to the Office of the Speaker and the Office of the Clerk of the National Assembly for their unwavering technical and logistical support throughout the sessions. Their guidance, coordination, and administrative assistance greatly facilitated the smooth conduct of the Committee's deliberations and engagements.

The Committee accords special recognition to the National Audit Office for its comprehensive audit investigation and technical presentation. The audit findings provided an invaluable foundation for the Select Committee's legislative scrutiny and oversight.

Formal appreciation is extended to the Senior management and the technical officers representing the key institutions for their cooperation and submission of key institutional data during the parliamentary consideration of the Performance Audit Report on the Management of Coastal and Marine Protected Areas; **Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Natural Resources (MECCNAR); Department of Parks and Wildlife Management (DPWLM); National Environment Agency (NEA) and Gambia Maritime Administration (GMA).**

The Committee also conveys its gratitude to the Subject Matter Specialist (SMS) for providing expert advisory services, the Director of Committees and Committee Clerks for their efficiency and administrative support throughout the session.

Finally, the Committee commends the collective effort of the Committee Leadership and Honorable Members for their commitment to exercising parliamentary oversight in defense of national environmental governance.



.....
HON. YAYA GASSAMA
CHAIRPERSON

2. Executive Summary

The Select Committee on Environment, Sustainable Development and NGO Affairs reviewed the Performance Audit Report on the Management of Coastal and Marine Protected Areas to assess how effectively national policies, institutional structures, and financial allocations safeguard the country's marine ecosystems. This evaluation is critical not only for biodiversity, food security, and climate resilience, but also for evaluating progress toward Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14.5, which mandates the conservation of at least 10 percent of coastal and marine environments.

The review reveals that despite established conservation targets and institutional mandates, significant policy, operational, and financial deficits continue to compromise protected area management. While official records claim a 9.25 percent conservation achievement, this figure lacks transparent methodology or scientific backing. Without a standardized national reporting framework, it remains difficult to verify progress, track ecological changes over time, or ensure alignment with international sustainability standards.

A major driver of these conservation failures is institutional fragmentation. Conflicting mandates among the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Natural Resources, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Lands, and the Ministry of Agriculture have created significant administrative friction. Coupled with the absence of a comprehensive national land-use policy, this lack of coordination has enabled illegal encroachments and incompatible infrastructure such as dry ports and fuel stations to develop within protected boundaries.

Compounding these policy gaps are severe capacity and financial constraints. The primary governing department lacks a functional monitoring and evaluation system, leaving park rangers under-equipped without basic protective gear, surveillance tools, or field logistics. Financially, the Biodiversity Trust Fund remains underutilized, donor funding via the Global Environment Facility (GEF) lacks strong accountability mechanisms, and only four of the sixteen designated sites generate revenue through gate fees. Furthermore, half of all protected

areas completely lack approved management plans, while the remaining sites struggle with execution due to chronic underfunding.

These systemic vulnerabilities contribute to ongoing illegal fishing, poaching, mangrove destruction, and pollution. Addressing these threats requires moving beyond mere spatial designation. The Select Committee emphasizes that effective marine conservation demands a standardized measurement framework, a coherent land-use policy, fully operationalized trust funds, approved site-management plans, and structured academic partnerships with institutions like the University of The Gambia. Ultimately, long-term environmental protection depends on combining rigorous law enforcement with active community-based management to foster local ownership and ensure sustainable ecological stewardship.

3. Introduction

This report presents the findings, observations and recommendations of the Select Committee on Environment, Sustainable Development and NGO Affairs following its consideration of the Performance Audit Report on the Management of Coastal and Marine Protected Areas. The review was undertaken as part of the Committee's oversight responsibility to assess the effectiveness of the institutional, policy, financial and operational arrangements established for the protection and sustainable management of the country's coastal and marine ecosystems. In particular, the Committee examined the extent to which existing arrangements support the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14.5, which calls for the conservation of at least 10 percent of coastal and marine areas.

The Committee recognizes that coastal and marine protected areas are important national assets that contribute to biodiversity conservation, food security, climate resilience and sustainable economic development. Their effective management therefore requires coordinated institutional action, adequate financial and human resources, effective monitoring and enforcement, clear management plans, and meaningful engagement with communities and other stakeholders. The Performance Audit Report provides an important basis for assessing whether these elements are functioning effectively and whether public resources and institutional arrangements are producing the intended conservation outcomes.

In considering the audit findings, the Committee paid particular attention to the reported 9.25 percent conservation achievement for marine areas and the absence of a standardized national methodology for measuring and reporting progress. The Committee also considered concerns relating to fragmented institutional mandates, encroachment into protected areas, weak monitoring and enforcement capacity, inadequate staffing and operational resources, ineffective financing mechanisms, gaps in the preparation and implementation of management plans, and the continuing occurrence of illegal fishing, pollution, poaching and mangrove destruction. These issues have implications not only for environmental protection but

also for the accountability, sustainability and effectiveness of public interventions in the sector.

The report accordingly sets out the Committee's assessment of the principal issues identified through the audit and proposes measures aimed at strengthening governance, accountability, monitoring, financing, institutional capacity and community participation. The Committee emphasizes the need for sustained implementation and oversight so that the country's coastal and marine protected areas are managed effectively and conserved for present and future generations.

4. Mandate of the Committee

The Select Committee on Environment derives its mandate from the Standing Orders of the National Assembly to examine matters relating to environmental protection, biodiversity conservation, climate change, and sustainable natural resource management. In this regard, the Committee considered the Performance Audit Report in order to evaluate the adequacy of policies, institutional arrangements, and resource allocation for the management of Coastal and Marine Protected Areas.

5. Objectives of the Review

The review aimed to:

1. Examine the key findings of the performance audit.
2. Assess the effectiveness of current management systems for coastal and marine protected areas.
3. Identify institutional, financial, and policy gaps affecting conservation efforts.
4. Provide recommendations to improve governance and accountability in environmental management.

4. Key Findings from the Performance Audit

4.1 Lack of Clear Methodology to Measure Progress Made in Conserving 10% of Coastal and Marine Protected Areas

The reported 9.25 percent conservation achievement for marine areas lacks supporting scientific data and a transparent methodology.

There is currently no standardized national framework for measuring and reporting progress toward SDG 14.5 targets.

4.2 Policy Incoherence

Conflicting mandates exist between the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Natural Resources (MECCNAR), the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Lands, and the Ministry of Agriculture.

The absence of a comprehensive national land-use policy has contributed to encroachments within protected areas, including the development of fuel stations and dry port infrastructure.

4.3 Weak Monitoring and Institutional and Staff Capacity

The Department responsible for protected areas lacks a functional monitoring and evaluation system.

Park rangers often lack basic operational resources, including uniforms, protective gear, and adequate professional qualifications.

Budget allocations are largely directed toward recurrent expenditures rather than field equipment and operational support.

There is a significant shortage of qualified staff in protected areas management.

4.4 Ineffective Financing Mechanisms

The Biodiversity Trust Fund exists but remains largely underutilized.

Only 4 out of 16 protected sites generate gate fee revenue, and there is limited engagement with private sector partners.

Accountability concerns exist regarding the management and utilization of donor funds, including those from the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

4.5 Management Gaps

Half of the coastal and marine protected areas (8 out of 16) do not have approved management plans.

Even in cases where management plans exist, implementation remains weak due to insufficient funding and manpower.

4.6 Increasing Illegal Activities

Illegal fishing, pollution, poaching, and mangrove destruction continue to threaten protected ecosystems.

Weak enforcement capacity and inadequate community engagement have contributed to environmental degradation.

5. Committee Observations

The Committee notes with concern that the institutional framework for managing coastal and marine protected areas remains fragmented and under-resourced. The lack of a standardized monitoring framework makes it difficult to accurately measure conservation progress. Furthermore, limited funding, inadequate staffing, and weak enforcement mechanisms undermine the effectiveness of existing policies and conservation initiatives.

6. Committee Recommendations

The Committee recommends that:

5. The Government should establish a standardized national methodology for measuring marine conservation coverage and reporting on SDG 14.5.
6. A comprehensive national land-use policy should be developed to prevent encroachment into protected areas.
7. The Ministry should strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems to track ecological and operational performance of protected areas.
8. Budget allocations should prioritize operational capacity, including ranger equipment, surveillance systems, and field logistics.
9. The Biodiversity Trust Fund should be fully operationalized with transparent governance and accountability mechanisms.
10. All protected areas should develop and implement management plans with adequate staffing and financial support.
11. The Ministry should collaborate with the University of The Gambia to develop relevant curricula and increase local training opportunities.
12. Stronger enforcement mechanisms and community-based conservation initiatives should be introduced to reduce illegal activities.

7. Conclusion

The protection of coastal and marine ecosystems is essential for biodiversity conservation, food security, climate resilience, and sustainable economic development. The Committee therefore urges the Government to address the policy, institutional, and financial gaps identified in this report and to strengthen oversight mechanisms to ensure that protected areas are effectively managed for the benefit of present and future generations.

APPENDIX

Members of the Committee

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Hon. Yaya Gassama | — Chairperson |
| 2. Hon. Essa Conteh | — Vice- Chairperson |
| 3. Hon. Kebba K. Barrow | — Member |
| 4. Hon. Amadou Camara | — Member |
| 5. Hon. Saikou Bah | — Member |
| 6. Hon. Kebba Lang Fofana | — Member |
| 7. Hon. Lamin Ceesay | — Member |
| 8. Hon. Nfamara Sabally | — Member |
| 9. Hon. Madi MK Ceesay | — Member |
| 10. Hon. Bakary Kora | — Member |
| 11. Hon. Haruna Barry | — Member |
| 12. Hon. Gibbi Mballow | — Member |

Subject Matter Specialist (SMS)

1. Aminata LR Ngum

Support Staff

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| 1. Marabi S. Hydera | — Director of Committees |
| 2. Mamadou A.M Bah | — Senior Assistant Committee Clerk |
| 3. Isatou Sonko | — Committee Clerk |
| 4. Almamie Mankajang | — Director, National Audit Office (NAO) |
| 5. Saikou Danso | — Audit Manager – NAO |
| 6. Madi Sabally | — Senior Associate Auditor |
| 7. Adama Keita | — Assistant Audit Manager |

Witnesses

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Babucarr Jallow | — Deputy P.S. Technical (MECCNAR) |
| 2. Momodou L. Kassama | — Director, DPWLM |
| 3. Njagga Touray | — Deputy Executive Director – NEA |
| 4. Lamin Komma | — PM-CME, NEA |

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| 5. Alieu Ndow | — Senior Internal Auditor – NEA |
| 6. Abdoulie Sanyang | — Program Officer – NEA |
| 7. Wandipa Saidy kah | — DMEG, GMA |
| 8. Jainaba Sonko | — Assistant Marine Trainee – GMA |