

# MPA NEWS



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## Covering one-fifth of world's MPA area: Highlights from live chat on World Heritage marine sites, with Fanny Douvere

The UNESCO World Heritage Marine Programme was created in 2005 to protect unique marine areas under the World Heritage Convention. Today, the 47 coastal and marine World Heritage sites are recognized for their outstanding beauty, exceptional biodiversity, or unique ecological, biological, or geological processes. In cooperation with a variety of partners, the Programme is developing ways to support site managers with their conservation challenges, while advancing the application of the World Heritage Convention to protecting the planet's most valuable and unique marine places.

In an interactive, text-based chat on OpenChannels.org in September 2015, Fanny Douvere, coordinator of the World Heritage Marine Programme, answered questions from a global audience. The full chat transcript is at <https://www.openchannels.org/node/9263>. Highlights are below.

**Question:** Are there ways that the World Heritage Marine Programme can leverage its international position to assist the MPA field in general, beyond just helping World Heritage sites?

**Fanny Douvere:** World Heritage (WH) marine sites cover about one-fifth by area of all MPAs on the planet. Given their status, WH sites are in a unique position to actively change the management of a significant percentage of the existing global MPA coverage, and thus directly make a compelling contribution to multiple International Biodiversity targets (i.e., the 2010 Aichi Biodiversity Targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity, among others).

**Question:** Do you have priorities for the types of new marine World Heritage sites you'd like to see added?

**Douvere:** Hmm, I certainly have my personal wish list. :) But only States Parties to the World Heritage Convention can nominate sites for inclusion on the World Heritage List. The evaluation of whether a natural site has Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) or not is done by experts from IUCN. IUCN is named in the Convention and provides advice to the World Heritage Committee on natural World Heritage properties. A recommendation is made to the World Heritage Committee, which has the final word on inscription. It typically takes five to seven years for a site to achieve the designation.

**Question:** Could you explain how marine World Heritage sites are assessed and evaluated? And should nearby oil/gas production affect the evaluation?

**Douvere:** These are two really important questions. First, how do we evaluate/assess sites? We provide essential support – based on scientific data and analysis – to the World Heritage Committee and national governments, in cooperation with IUCN, so they can monitor and evaluate the state of conservation in World Heritage marine sites. The Committee uses our annual State of Conservation Reports as the basis for its decisions. Governments use our reports to guide their conservation work on the ground. Government agencies, communities, NGOs, and businesses that are working on conservation in the sites use this data and the Committee's decisions to advance their work. The oversight of the state of conservation of sites is central to our work at World Heritage. Regarding oil and gas, the World Heritage Committee has an agreed policy that oil and gas exploration and exploitation is incompatible with World Heritage status.

**Question:** Is your programme considering a policy for protecting migratory and navigational pathways between MPAs?

**Douvere:** Under the auspices of the World Heritage Marine Programme, the Wadden Sea [in northern Europe] and Banc d'Arguin National Park [in West Africa] World Heritage sites signed an official twinning agreement to protect the millions of migratory bird species they share in February 2014. These sites are the two major stopover points on the East Atlantic Migratory Flyway.

**Question:** Is there a role for World Heritage in discussions regarding high seas MPAs?

**Douvere:** Today the World Heritage Convention doesn't apply to areas beyond national jurisdiction, which cover about half of our planet. The 2011 Independent Evaluation by the UNESCO External Auditor on the implementation of the global strategy for the Credible, Balanced and Representative World Heritage List recommended that States Parties to the Convention should explore the issue. IUCN and the World Heritage Centre are currently preparing a report in response to this recommendation.

**Question:** How many marine sites are currently on the World Heritage List in Danger, and how are you working with those countries to get their sites off the list?

**Douvere:** When sites are not well-managed, the World Heritage Committee has the option to inscribe sites on the List of World Heritage in Danger or even delist a site when the outstanding universal values are lost irrevocably. We currently have three marine sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List in Danger: Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System (Belize), East Rennell (Solomon Islands), and Everglades National Park (United States of America). We designed a desired state of conservation together with the Belize Government earlier this year, which was approved by the Prime Minister in Belize. We are now attracting sufficient funding to implement the three-year action that is agreed with the Belizean government. We did the same for Everglades National Park where all partners agree that the site has a long road to recovery. The Marine Programme is currently preparing a mission to East Rennell to assist the government of Solomon Islands and the local communities to prepare an action plan to ensure the site's protection and subsequent reintegration on the World Heritage List.

**For more information:**

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