

# MPA NEWS



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## Global targets call for effective MPAs. But how do we best achieve effectiveness? Practitioners respond

The concept of effectiveness comes up often in the MPA field:

- [Aichi Target 11](#) calls for 10% of nations' waters to be *ineffectively* managed MPAs or other *effective* area-based conservation measures by 2020
- The [IUCN Green List](#) recognizes protected areas that meet its standards for effectiveness
- High-profile studies (like [this](#) and [this](#)) have identified factors that correlate with MPA effectiveness, while noting that few MPAs possess all these factors

The most basic gauge of MPA effectiveness is pretty simple: Is a site achieving its stated goals or not? But even if we assume that most MPA goals, if met, would produce positive outcomes, it still begs the question of how practitioners should best plan and manage MPAs to meet their goals.

That's a big question. *How do we get MPAs to achieve what we want them to achieve?* Answering it could end up incorporating every management challenge there is, from site selection to governance to monitoring and everything in between.

For this reason, "effective" may be the most critical word in global MPA targets. In fact it may be as hard, or harder, to meet than the targets' numerical coverage goals.

With this in mind – and inspired by the recent ICES Journal of Marine Science feature on MPA effectiveness (see box, "Debating the effectiveness of MPAs") – we reached out to MPA practitioners with a question:

### What is the biggest challenge that the global MPA community faces in achieving effectiveness?

Then we asked for their thoughts on meeting that challenge. Their responses are below.

This article is not expected or intended to solve the challenges of MPA effectiveness, as those are likely to remain for as long as MPAs are a management tool. But it provides some useful perspectives on where the main challenges lie.

## Biggest challenge is the culture and commitment of management organizations

By Marc Hockings

Marc is an emeritus professor in the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences at The University of Queensland, and vice-chair (Science and Management) for IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas. He is also managing editor of *PARKS: The International Journal of Protected Areas and Conservation* Email: [m.hockings@uq.edu.au](mailto:m.hockings@uq.edu.au)

I think the biggest challenge is one of culture and commitment. *Byculture*, I mean having an approach to management – within the organization responsible for managing the MPA – that is open to reflection, and that embraces honest assessment of performance as a basis for improvement. Such assessment can be either self-assessment or from outside. This culture needs to extend throughout the organization from the senior leadership to the field managers. It also needs an environment where it is "safe" to recognize shortcomings, understanding that this recognition is the first step towards improvement. This can be difficult in a political and cultural environment that sees such an admission as failure and as something to be avoided at all costs.

*By commitment*, I mean the determination to make this approach of reflective evaluation a central core of management. In doing so, the necessary attention is given to monitoring in order to provide the evidence base for evaluating effectiveness. Then that assessment must be integrated into planning, decision-making, and resource allocation.

The challenge initially needs to be led from the top. The clear and public commitment of the Chief Executive of the managing organization is critical to building the culture of the organization. Secondly, focus on what is doable! When starting a program of management effectiveness evaluation, there can be a temptation to monitor and assess everything – but such programs often collapse under their own weight.

## Missing piece is often knowledge of pressures

By Janica Borg

Janica is a marine conservation officer with WWF Finland, and has a background working with the Baltic Sea MPA network at HELCOM, the regional seas convention for the Baltic Sea. She is currently conducting a study on MPA efficiency in the Baltic Sea region. Email: [janica.borg@wwf.fi](mailto:janica.borg@wwf.fi)

*MPA efficiency* – the focus of a pilot study I'm conducting at WWF on MPAs in the Baltic Sea region – looks at whether the correct regulations are in place within an MPA. (In this context, *MPA effectiveness* is a broader term that also includes aspects such as a site's age, legal status, and financing. I use *efficiency* to talk about a narrower concept that addresses three building blocks – MPA protection aims, regulations, and pressures.) The correct regulations for an MPA depend on what the site aims to protect, but also on the local pressures acting on the MPA. For example, an MPA protecting a bottom-dwelling fish species and its habitats in an area with intensive leisure boating should have regulations on anchoring and other bottom-disturbing human activities.

Usually the biggest challenge is the lack of detailed knowledge of the existing pressures. Logically, the features the MPA aims to protect are known already when the MPA is established. However, many MPAs have been established without thorough knowledge about the existing pressures in the area. This includes not only pressures within the MPA but also pressures outside its borders, which can hamper the protection efforts inside the MPA. In addition, past pressures – for which the source already has been eliminated – can still have a large effect on the ecosystem. This is the case in many areas of the Baltic Sea, where nutrient flow from land runoff has been significantly reduced, but the circulation of the nutrients already accumulated in the marine system still causes eutrophication many years later.

## Political will is a rare and precious commodity

By Angelique Songco

Angelique is manager of Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site in the Philippines. In September 2017, the MPA was [awarded Platinum Status in the Global Ocean Refuge System](#), coordinated by the Marine Conservation Institute. Email: [tmo@tubbatahareefs.org](mailto:tmo@tubbatahareefs.org)

The biggest challenge in our part of the world is getting decision-makers, policy-makers, and government leaders on board enough for them to positively influence the outcomes of MPA management efforts. Political will is a precious commodity, made even more so by its rarity. With political will, the funds to manage one's MPA are assured, and the support needed to try out new solutions is in place.

As practitioners we need to seriously consider ways of inspiring support from the people who hold the purse strings and the influence to make a difference. Often they are not interested – or they are too distracted – to learn more about the value of our sites. New ways of reaching out, and getting our message across to people who are alien to our cause, need to be found.

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## Most difficult challenge is coordination among institutions

By Sandra Bessudo

Sandra is a marine biologist and founder of the Malpelo Foundation, which manages the Malpelo Fauna and Flora Sanctuary of Colombia. She also previously served as Environment Minister for Colombia. Email: sbessudo@fundacionmalpelo.org

For me the most difficult challenge that MPAs face is coordination among the different institutions and actors. This is not only the case for a particular marine area but also between different networks of MPAs – allowing the connectivity of ecosystems and species, especially when the species are migratory.

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## For marine conservation to be effective, MPAs must have societal and community support

By Nathan J. Bennett

Nathan is a postdoctoral fellow with the OceanCanada Partnership in the Institute for Resources, Environment and Sustainability at the University of British Columbia, and an affiliate researcher of the Center for Ocean Solutions at Stanford University. He recently was the lead author on a paper titled "[An appeal for a code of conduct for marine conservation](#)". Website: <http://nathanbennett.ca>; Email: [nathan.bennett@ubc.ca](mailto:nathan.bennett@ubc.ca)

One of the biggest challenges faced by the global MPA community is social license. By this I mean that for marine conservation efforts to be successful and effective, they need to have societal and community support prior to implementation and during ongoing management.

Broad societal support and advocacy for MPAs is needed to drive political will and motivate governments to adequately support marine protected area management. [Research has shown](#) that adequate long-term financial support is necessary for effective MPA management.

Also, when the needs, rights, and voices of local people are not taken into account during the creation and ongoing management of MPAs, this can lead to local opposition and backlash. Otherwise for coastal communities, small-scale fishers, and small island developing states (SIDS) that already face an array of pressures, MPAs can be perceived as yet another injustice in a sea of injustices.

There are two actions that can help to increase social license for MPAs. First, ongoing investment in efforts to educate the public and local communities about MPAs is needed. The public needs to understand the answers to such basic questions as: What are marine protected areas? What are their potential benefits and drawbacks? How do MPAs fit in with other marine management and conservation actions and approaches? Politicians and policy makers also need to have a clear rationale for creating MPAs.

Second, to overcome opposition and engender local support, the human dimensions of the different contexts where conservation occurs need to be taken into account. This needs to occur during the planning of MPA networks, in the set-up of governance structures, and when management decisions are made. But local people should not be included in a token manner. Engagement needs to be thorough and genuine. Employing the [conservation social sciences](#) is one rigorous and transparent way that economic, social, cultural, and political considerations can be included in planning and management for small coastal MPAs and [even large-scale MPAs](#). The actions of marine conservation organizations might also be guided by a [code of conduct](#) to ensure fair, just, and accountable marine conservation actions.

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## Debating the effectiveness of MPAs

An August 2017 [special feature in the ICES Journal of Marine Science](#) provides a series of debates on the effectiveness of MPAs in achieving ecological and societal objectives. With viewpoints from practitioners and researchers, the debates start with each author defining the term *effectiveness* then discussing the degree to which they feel MPAs have generally achieved it. The special feature is free of charge to view: click on the link above then click "PDF".

If you would like to comment on the debates, MPA News has [set up a discussion page here](#). We have already received a few posts, including one stressing the link between site effectiveness and effective enforcement, and one comparing how effectiveness is addressed in terrestrial vs. marine protected areas.

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## Join the WCPA-Marine task force on management effectiveness

Any readers who are particularly interested in MPA effectiveness should consider joining the World Commission on Protected Areas [task force on the Green List and MPA management effectiveness](#). The task force aims to ensure that MPAs are embedded in the development of IUCN's [Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas](#) and that MPAs are helped and encouraged to meet the Aichi Target 11 requirement for effective management.

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## Other effective area-based conservation measures

The phrase *other effective area-based conservation measures* (OECMs) in Aichi Target 11 has been a [focus of attention and questions](#) from when the target was agreed upon in 2010. What exactly do "other effective" measures include, and how will they impact how countries tally their progress toward the coverage target?

A special [IUCN task force](#) on OECMs has been working to define the term, and anticipates finalizing guidance on it in 2018. In the meantime, the task force has published [a journal article that outlines its progress so far](#), including examples of areas likely to qualify or not. The article is available for free.

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## Conservation effectiveness

Conservation efforts focus too much on activities that are politically pragmatic – like designating MPAs in places with few threats in order to meet percentage-based targets – instead of on whether conservation efforts are actually making a positive difference for the environment, according to a new study. "Measuring conservation progress in km<sup>2</sup> is equivalent to measuring progress in health care by the number of patients treated, even though most of the treated people were healthy (because they were cheaper to treat) and most of the people needing treatment went without," states the paper. It also notes that few studies have tested the link between protected area management effectiveness and real conservation impact.

The paper "From displacement activities to evidence-informed decisions in conservation" is [available for free here](#). Bob Pressey of James Cook University is the lead author.

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## Prior MPA News coverage of MPA effectiveness

MPA News has covered the topic of effectiveness from multiple angles over the years:

[New study finds MPA effectiveness is greatest where there is adequate staff and funding](#) (April 2017)

[A brief examination of "other effective area-based conservation measures" and what they mean for MPAs](#) (June 2015)

[Paper Parks Re-Examined: Building a Future for "MPAs-in-Waiting"](#) (January 2012)

[What Should Be Done When MPAs Do Not Meet Their Goals?: Poll Reveals Range of Views](#) (December 2007)

[Special Feature: Measurement of Management Effectiveness: The Next Major Stage in MPAs?](#) (May 2006)

[Measuring MPA Effectiveness: New Guidebook Provides Framework and Cases](#) (May 2004)

[Paper Parks: Why They Happen, and What Can Be Done to Change Them](#) (June 2001)

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